

# TRANSCULTURAL MEDIA NARRATIVES

## CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

EDUARDO CAMILO  
KARIMA BOUZIANE  
[EDS]



**LABCOM**  
COMUNICAÇÃO  
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## Foreword

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In today's globalized world, the media holds significant power in shaping the dissemination of information, ideas, and cultural narratives across diverse societies. This interaction between the media and culture fosters cross-cultural communication, allowing people from various backgrounds to connect, share viewpoints, and engage in meaningful conversations irrespective of geographical barriers. Understanding the impact of the media landscape on cross-cultural communication is crucial for promoting inclusivity, enhancing intercultural understanding, and bridging cultural gaps.

Hence, the objective of this book is to examine the complex relationship between the media context and cross-cultural communication, shedding light on its diverse facets, opportunities, and challenges. By exploring this intersection, the book endeavors to offer valuable perspectives to scholars, researchers, practitioners, and students engaged in this field. Through a comprehensive examination that includes a range of perspectives, theories, and practical approaches, the book seeks to provide a holistic understanding of the crucial role of media in shaping cross-cultural communication. Additionally, it addresses the broader implications for societal cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and global understanding.

In order to achieve this objective, the book systematically explores various aspects of cross-cultural communication and media representation, organized as follows:

**Part One: Cross-cultural Perspectives:** This section tackles indigenous methodologies and intercultural communication perspectives. It begins by examining the Sinclair Wetlands in New Zealand's Otago region, revealing deep connections between land and its human inhabitants through Māori narrations and counter-mapping techniques. This exploration provides a profound understanding of how indigenous knowledge systems and environmental stewardship are intertwined, highlighting the symbiotic relationship between the Māori people and their natural surroundings. The focus then shifts to political cartoons in Europe, emphasizing the refugee crisis and its implications for European cultural identity. Through these cartoons, the section illustrates how visual satire reflects and critiques societal attitudes towards refugees, exposing underlying cultural tensions and political narratives. These cartoons serve as a medium for public discourse, offering a unique lens through which to view and understand the complex socio-political landscape of Europe. Lastly, this section explores the visual remixes of Efe de Froy in Mexico, showcasing how urban art critiques societal issues and cultural stagnation. This analysis offers insights into the challenges faced by Mexican society and the role of art in addressing and provoking thought about these issues. Efe de Froy's work not only critiques but also engages the public in conversations about societal change and cultural renewal, demonstrating the transformative power of urban art.

**Part Two: Language, Culture, and Identity:** This section tackles elements of language, culture, and identity within cinema and literature. It starts by analyzing Telangana accents in Telugu movies, demonstrating how linguistic choices shape cultural identities and audience perceptions. This analysis reveals the power of dialect and accent in constructing social identities and influencing audience engagement, showing how regional accents in films can both reflect and shape cultural narratives. The focus then shifts to the decolonization of coffee culture in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, highlighting how



local cafes foster authentic flavors and cultural expression. This case study illustrates the intersection of global and local influences in shaping a unique cultural identity, emphasizing the importance of preserving local traditions amidst globalization. The cafes in Yogyakarta not only serve coffee but also act as cultural hubs that promote local heritage and social interaction. Lastly, the section explores the implications of cross-cultural communication in the digital age, emphasizing the need for cultural sensitivity and accuracy in translation practices. The section underscores the role of translators in bridging cultural divides and facilitating global conversations in the context of new media.

**Part Three: New Media and Communication:** This section investigates the evolving field of new media and its impact on communication dynamics. It begins with an examination of the effectiveness of “femvertising” on consumer attitudes towards brands, illustrated through a case study in Portugal. This analysis explores how feminist advertising strategies influence brand perception and consumer behavior, highlighting the potential of advertising to drive social change and promote gender equality. The focus then shifts to the media framing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, highlighting the role of Western news outlets in shaping public opinion. This discussion underscores the power of media narratives in influencing international perspectives and political discourse, demonstrating how media framing can shape public understanding of complex geopolitical issues. Lastly, the section addresses the ethical considerations of AI in media production and interpretation, advocating for human-centric AI systems. It emphasizes the importance of ethical frameworks in ensuring that AI technologies enhance rather than undermine human communication and media practices. The discussion includes considerations of bias, transparency, and accountability in AI applications, calling for a collaborative approach to AI development that prioritizes human values.

**Part Four: Media and Society in Morocco:** This section explores media representations and societal discourses in Morocco, covering topics such as healthcare reforms, immigration, and social media activism. It begins

with an analysis of discourses surrounding healthcare reforms through state media and online immigrant voices, highlighting the interplay between global influences and local implementation. This examination reveals the complexities of policy communication and public perception in a globalized context, showing how media narratives can both inform and influence public opinion on critical social issues. The focus then shifts to the visual framing of Sub-Saharan immigrants in Moroccan online press, aiming to foster cross-cultural understanding and challenge stereotypes. This analysis demonstrates the role of media in shaping societal attitudes towards immigration, highlighting the power of visual media to influence public perceptions and promote social cohesion. Lastly, the section explores Facebook's role in shaping public discourse, particularly during significant events like the Arab Spring and the COVID-19 pandemic. This discussion highlights the influence of social media activism on public opinion and political engagement in Moroccan society, emphasizing the transformative power of digital platforms in contemporary social movements. The section, then, illustrates how social media can act as a catalyst for change, providing a platform for marginalized voices and facilitating grassroots mobilization.

Part I

# CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES





## MAPPING MĀORI WETLANDS WITHIN CROSS-CULTURAL STORYTELLING

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**Abstract:** Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau or Sinclair Wetlands, sited in the Otago region near Dunedin in Aotearoa New Zealand, is here presented. The methodology described is the Indigenous one, in particular (a) the use of pūrākau (ancient Māori narrations) for the understanding of the land and its relationships with its human inhabitants and (b) the Kā Huru Manu (Ngāi Tahu Atlas), the counter-map of Aotearoa New Zealand's South Island. These tools are used to reconstruct part of the area's genealogy in its historical, cultural, spiritual, and environmental dimensions. Stories and names reveal meanings and functionalities embedded in corresponding ideas of nature lived by the tangata (people) of this whenua (land). This map biography serves as an example for showing the cross-cultural context in which the bi-nationalism of Aotearoa New Zealand has developed and the possible misunderstandings of the reciprocal ideas of nature. For non-Māori, the Indigenous te taiao (natural world) risks being reduced to (i) a landscape, namely a passive background, or (ii) a separated dimension to protect, where humans do not have a proper place to stay. Indeed, the inclusivity of the Indigenous approach to nature results ineffective for non-Māori if not sensibly explained through, for instance, pūrākau and names, which give the spiritual depth. Following

the analysis of (a) and (b), it arises how *kaitiakitaka* (stewardship) is applied, understanding nature as the possible relationships between environment and people within different cultural perspectives.

**Keywords:** Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau / Sinclair Wetlands; Ngāi Tahu Cultural Atlas; Pūrākau; Ideas of Nature; Aotearoa New Zealand's Interculturality.

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Only the particulars and the details of the particulars  
turn an inert story into something worth being read.

Vladimir Nabokov

Aotearoa New Zealand is a *whenua* (land)<sup>2</sup> to whom Māori have belonged long before<sup>3</sup> colonisation violently introduced the perspective of considering it an individual property. In this part of the world, 'ownership' is a thorny *cross-cultural* topic which forged the *whakapapa* (genealogy, stratification) of this *whenua*. Indeed, not only are *belonging to* and *possessing* a *whenua* two distinctive cultural perspectives (see, for instance, Te Rito, 2007) but also different approaches to living *on, in, within* and *with* nature. If we consider *nature* as 'the possible relationships between environment and *tāngata* (people)<sup>4</sup>, we can read in each *whenua* the signs of the time and generations before and after us. The language of a *whenua* is diverse

1. This text gives voice to my experience and perspective concerning some aspects of Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau or Sinclair Wetlands Project. However, I could not have anything to say without the collaboration with some people. Thus, I want to express my gratitude in particular to Te Nukuroa o Matamata, Kare Tipa, UniFlats Otago, Emma Powell as well her students, and, last but not least, Paulette Tamati-Elliffe for giving me the opportunity to research what these Wetlands have to narrate. Moreover, thanks to Kāi Tahu ki Otago, Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, Neville Peat and Otago Regional Council, Lloyd Homer and GNS Science / Te Pū Ao, Benchill, and Kahuroa for letting me show pieces of this wonderful *whenua*.

2. Due to the topic and the context of the present text, Māori terms are generally preferred to the non-Indigenous ones. The former are not reported in italics because Te Reo Māori (Māori language) is not to be considered a foreign language in Aotearoa New Zealand. Additionally, the local (western) Kāi Tahu pronunciation is adopted, and Te Reo as well as English terms at their first appearance in the main text are followed by an English or Te Reo translation, respectively.

3. Archaeologists agree "that the earliest securely dated sites in Aotearoa are mid-fourteenth century and that there was a major settlement event shortly after 1300 AD" (Walter & Reilly, 2021, 69).

4. Conscious that the current debate about nature is extremely complex (see, for instance, Sarkar, 2012, 13–37), the suggested basic 'idea of nature' should be enough to understand the present interpretation.

concerning its epochs and people, so it is possible to be witnesses – and perhaps co-protagonists – of multiple narrations of its history. Being able to understand these stories means learning how to hear these languages from our own perspective. This *nomadic* positioning (see, in particular, Deleuze & Guattari, 1987 and Gardner, 1989) within ‘relativity’ means being always in relationship to something different from us and, times and again, going back to such a fundamental connection (see Pasetto, 2023). This is the aim of the following mapping.

In particular, Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau or Sinclair Wetlands, sited in the Otago region near Dunedin in Te Waipounamu (Aotearoa New Zealand’s South Island), is here presented applying the Indigenous approach. According to the latter, the perspective is the first person one narrated through personal experiences. However, the point of view described corresponds to the one of a Tauīwi, namely a non-Māori from outside Aotearoa New Zealand, whose report tries to represent Kāi Tahu’s taoka (treasures) with the deserved dignity. Consequently, this analysis results in a cross-cultural dialogue between the author’s personal experience in situ and information mainly coming from (a) pūrākau, that is ancient Māori narrations, and (b) the Kā Huru Manu (Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, 2023), the *Ngāi Tahu Atlas*, the counter-map<sup>5</sup> of Aotearoa New Zealand’s South Island. Instead of reporting exclusively place names, (b) is thought of as a ‘cultural map’, which allows the exploration of more than 1,000 original Māori denominations of Te Waipounamu within their association with Kāi Tahu history, the current main iwi (tribe) of Te Waipounamu. This Indigenous approach implies the utilisation of information coming from various sources, visioned, selected, and recognised scientifically<sup>6</sup> by Kāi Tahu as being representative of their whakapapa: from speeches with Māori, reported by Pākehā (non-Māori from Aotearoa

5. Other authors name these maps differently (see Chapin et al., 2005, 622–623).

6. In an oral civilisation like the Māori one, even a kūmara (sweet potato), for instance, is useful to verify the past (Roberts, 2013). Indeed, thanks to its whakapapa, archaeology could follow its travelling around Oceania and find a historical way to prove the ancient narrative on Hawaiki, and by doing it, a new way to approach science (Roberts et al., 2004; Roberts, 2013). Indigenous epistemology brings in itself a sort of scientific revolution: not only are considered abstract theories, but also various types of sources like poetry, songs, practices, and so on cooperate mutually to understand the same questions (Mika, 2011).

New Zealand) over time, to old maps, documents, laws, waiata (songs) and pūrākau (a), to name some. These references are the principal sources used by the author to describe this whenua. Regarding (a), a clarification is needed: from a non-Indigenous perspective, pūrākau could be translated as ‘legends’; however, it is necessary to remember that (a) do not have a mythological faraway dimension for current Māori. Indeed, (a) are revitalised by becoming a living meaning in Māori’s everyday life. In this sense and considering that Indigenous civilisations are principally oral cultures, pūrākau are essential for the reconstruction of a historical, cultural, but environmental and spiritual Māori perspective especially (see, for instance, Whaanga & Wehi, 2016, and Watene, forthcoming).

The information collected thanks to (a) and (b) explain the whakapapa of the names belonging to the Ōtākou (Otago) Wetlands over time and cross-cultural encounters in a sort of travel along the whenua. In particular, (2.1) presents the *territory* through the ‘semantics and meaning’ of this terminology by outlining a map of this whenua. Thanks to its proper names, not only does the territory correspond to its geographical dimension but also to its historical, cultural, and spiritual ones. In (2.2), *territoriality* emerges in the ‘use and purpose’ of this terminology. Indeed, the functionality of the relationship between tāngata and whenua appears within cross-cultural dynamics during the complex whakapapa of Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau or Sinclair Wetlands. The latter is described in the map biography (3), dedicated to the ‘ideas of nature’ which underlie the different kaitiakitaka (stewardship) applied. The conclusion (4) is an interpretative reflection of the author on cross-cultural aspects within the bi-national relationship between non-Māori (especially Taiwi) and Māori (Kāi Tahu in particular) concerning Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau or Sinclair Wetlands and the ‘ideas of nature’ which emerge from the different kinds of relationships between its tāngata and whenua.

## 2. Cultural Ethnocartographical Semantic of Ōtākou Wetlands: A Travel Along the Whenua

Following the method suggested by Fikret Berkes in his *Sacred Ecology* (2012, 53–54), “traditional ecological knowledge” is researched by applying (2.1) “ethnoscience” or a ‘taxonomy from the inside’ and (2.2) “human ecology” or the understanding of human and non-human (living, non-living, and supernatural) natural processes. Berkes identifies the first necessary step in the ‘linguistic check’ “to make sure ... the correct names and their acceptable variations” (Berkes, 2012, 54) within an ‘ethnographic semantic’ (see Berkes, 2012, 55, among others). This ‘cultural inside approach’ makes “use of the categories operative within those cultures themselves to gain access into *their* cognitive universes” (Berkes, 2012, 55; emphasis added). The performativity of a concept is shown by the *use* of the *word* (or words) related to it: “Once the referential meaning has been established, a whole world of other cultural meanings is accessible” (Hunn, 1993, 20). Not only can we individuate (2.1) the *used* Māori names of the wetland area but also indicate (2.2) the underlying *functional* meanings for the cultural understanding of their inhabitants. Thus, we can speak of an ‘ethnoscience of topography’ (see Berkes, 2012, 62) which offers the possibility to access the cultural and spiritual dimensions of a *territory*, the wetlands, as a basic layer of *territoriality* or the Indigenous land use and occupancy (see Peluso, 1995, 402).

### 2.1. Ōtākou Wetlands Territorial Taxonomy

On *Te Ara*, the *Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, Te Nohoaka o Tukiauaou or Sinclair Wetlands (Sinclair, 2023) area is reported as follows: “The 300-hectare Sinclair wetlands are a complex of ponds, channels and open water. A sanctuary for wetland species, this area has been described as the most important privately owned wetland in New Zealand” (McKinnon, 2023). This whenua is situated in the “2000ha wetland connecting lakes Waihola [Waihora] and Waipori [Waipōuri] on the Taieri [Taiari] Plain, 40 kilometres south of Dunedin [Ōtepoti]” (QEII-NT, 2023). These wetlands are lying in the Ōtākou region (see *Fig.1*):

Ōtākou is the channel that runs down the eastern (southern) side of the Otago Harbour from the mouth to Harwood Point ... Today the name Ōtākou specifically refers to the small Kāi Tahu kāika [village], situated on Otago Peninsula near the harbour's entrance. When the British Weller Brothers' settlement was established on the Peninsula it became known to the whalers as Ōtākou, which was then later adopted by the wider region as 'Otago' (Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, 2023; see also Beattie, 1931a).

The major centre in Ōtākou is Ōtepoti, also known as the city of Dunedin, located on the southeast coast of Te Waipounamu.

The upper part of Otago Harbour, opposite Dunedin, had the Maori name of Ote-potu, or Ote-poutu, meaning 'the place of the steep points', or 'where the points of land come together' [The Octagon (see also Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, 2023)] ... There were a large number of Maori settlements in former days, where Dunedin now stands, therefore no general name was given to it. One ... was O-te-poti, meaning 'beyond which you cannot go', implying you cannot go any farther in a canoe by water; or it may mean 'the place of the angle.' It was occupied by the Ngai-ta-pahi hapu [clan]. The Otepoti Settlement ... may be accepted as the Maori name for Dunedin (Roberts, 1909).

Indeed, near the Octagon flows water – nowadays covered and canalised in pipes – until the current harbour. In the past, this was the place where boats arrived. However, the meaning of Ōtepoti must be found in the word poti or 'basket for cooked food' due to the abundance of kai (food) for all the iwi around (see Tipa, 2023).

With respect to Ōtepoti, the wetlands are at the southern end of the Taiari Plains, which are characterised coming from their northern side after Ōtepoti, by the Mosgiel Plain, formed by the sediments of the Whakaehu (Silver Stream). Herries Beattie (1931b) notes that

The Maori had no general name for the plain ... but called each portion after its most outstanding feature such as Wakaehu [sic.] for the northern portion, Owhiro [Ōwhiro] for the eastern, Waiholo for the southern, and so on, these being respectively the names for the Silverstream, for Scrogg’s Creek, and for the well-known lake.



Figure 1 (left). Part of the Ōtakou Region. Note. The map indicates some relevant Kāi Tahu names (added following Kā Huru Manu information) in the coastal part of the Ōtakou region. In yellow: region, cities and plain; in purple: mauka (mountains); in blue: awa (rivers) and roto (lakes); in green: Māori ancient tracks. Moreover, wetlands (Te Nohoaka o Tukiaua / Sinclair Wetlands) are reported in red despite no mention in the Atlas.

Figure 2 (right). Taniwha. Note. Example of a taniwha (named Ureia) carved following the North Island’s style.

According to its Indigenous whakapapa, this area was formed by the fury of a taniwha (monstrous guardian) (see Fig.2) called Matamata, who “is credited with making a hollow near where Mosgill is, and the Maoris called this hollow Te-Konika-o-te-matamata (the crawling of Matamata)” (Beattie, 1931b). Matamata’s descendants, like the chief Hoani Karetai of Ōtākou, belong to Kāti Māmoe iwi. The latter narrated a pūrākau, reported by Thomas Pybus (Potiki, 2011, 4–5), about Matamata’s current settlement in the Ōtākou region, which is the story of his wandering until the place where he still remains, as well as the agreement between him and his master.

Indeed, it starts with the lost contact between Matamata and the spirit of the famous chief of Kāti Māmoe, Te Rakitauneke (see Tamati-Elliffe, 2022), to whom he was the guardian. According to his role, he began to search for him. This unbalanced relationship with his master left his formidable power without a guide. Thus, his unrestrained passage produced phenomenal consequences, like the excavation of the Ōtākou Harbour (see Fig.3), the characteristic wild oxbow shape of the Taiari Awa (river) (see Fig.4), and the present Mosgiel Plain, where he then solidified in two tops (Pukemakamaka and Turimakamaka) (see Fig.5). From this position, Matamata steadily supervises his people, the descendants of Kāti Māmoe



Figure 3 (left). Otago Harbour. / Figure 4 (center). Taiari Plain. / Figure 5 (right). Matamata Solidified.

Despite this Kāi Tahu origin, “Arthur J. Burns, great-nephew of the Scottish poet Robert Burns, named his home Mosgiel or Mossgiel, after the Mossgiel farm in Ayrshire owned by the poet” (New Zealand History, 2023); his father, the nephew of Robert Burns, was born in the Scottish farm and was one of the first European settlers who colonised Ōtepoti in the middle of 1800 (see DNZB, 2023), while Arthur Burns is remembered principally for opening the second wollen mill, namely the Mosgiel Woollen Mill (Te Ara, 2023).

Following the wai (water) of the wetlands, the Whakaehu reaches the Taiari Awa in the middle of the plain. Regarding the pronunciation of *Taiari*, William H. S. Roberts (1909; see also 1913a) writes as follows:

The proper way to spell the district known as Taiari (pulp) is Tai-ari, which some people translate, ‘to smash or pound up.’ Long custom has caused the general spelling ‘Taiari’ to be accepted as correct, but ... Cameron ... says



Taiari is correct, and means ‘the shining river.’ It may be a contraction of tai (sea) and aria (to appear, or to resemble). Others say Taiari was named from a peculiarity in the flow of its tides on the eleventh day of the moon. [Others] ... spell it Taiari. The Taiari Plain is an extensive, rich alluvial flat 18 miles long, and averaging over five miles in breadth, well watered. Part of it is subject to floods from the river, whiel [sic.] is tided for many miles.

Precisely this way of the wai between Whakaehu and Taiari Awa was the East end of the Waihola, “called the Old Maori Track”, which Beattie (1931c) describes as further inland ... than the present road, and there was no need for persons to detour into what is now Dunedin, for they could proceed via Halfway Bush and the Silver-stream on to the Taiari. Here the Maori track kept on much the same line as the present Main South road, crossed the Taiari [and] skirted Waihola (sometimes these waterways were traversed by canoes or bushrafts).

The Waihora Roto (lake) lies at the southern end of the Taiari Plain, where the Taiari Awa turned down East to go to the sea. At this point, also the Waipōuri (awa as well as roto), the Kerepuru (Bull Creek) and the Taiari Track “from Henley to the Strath-Taiari ... used principally in the weka or woodhen season” (Beattie, 1931c), converge. As the name Waihora suggests (see Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, 2023), this area is a wetland:

Waihora is the correct spelling for Lake Waihola [“as there is no ‘l’ in the Maori alphabet” Roberts (1913b, 40)], which is part of the wider wetland complex connected to the Taiari River. Waihora is a geographical descriptive term that literally means ‘water spread out’.

Although the lake is not to be confused with Te Waihora, the Lake Ellesmere in the Waitaha (Canterbury) region, Roberts (1909; see also 1913a) reports that “About the year 1825 a Ngai-tahu chief named Taki-anau, from Tau mutu, Lake Waihora, Canterbury, with several companions, settled at Taka-ahi-tau”, a kaika in “The swamp near Henley” called “Taki-tui (to follow the tui bird)”.

This swamp is now the wetland called Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau. It consists of “The channel from Waihola to Waipouri” named “Whaka-rau-puka” (Beattie, 1930), or “water of a tribe” from “the River and Lake Waipori” (Roberts, 1913b, 40). The channel includes “the western side of Lake Waipouri”, into which “runs the creek Te-wai-a-hinemiro, called after a Waitaha girl of gentle birth ... and at its foot was a famous eeling camp of the Maories” (Beattie, 1930), the Lonely Island, and Whakaraupuka (Ram Island; see Sinclair, 2023). Concerning the latter, Roberts (1909; see also 1913a) narrates as follows:

In 1899 there was no trace of the ancient pa [fortified village] at Wai-hora-puka (the tree *Meryta sinclairii*, where the water spread out), which, I think, should be Waihora-puke (puke a hill), as it was an island hillock at the junction of the Waihora and Waipori Lakes. It is now known as Ram Island.

On the South-East, the wetlands are watched by Matamata, solidified in the Pukemakamaka and Turimakamaka or the peaks of Saddle Hill (see Potiki, 2011, 4–5) – according to James Cook’s (re)nomination dating from 1769 – as well as, on the North-East, by Mauka Atua (Maungatua), an atua (spiritual ancestor) passenger on the Ārai-te-uru waka that crashed on the Otago coastline near Matakaea (Shag Point). After the waka [canoe] capsized, many of the passengers went ashore to explore the land, but needed to be back on board before daylight. Many did not make it back, including Mauka Atua, and instead transformed into many of the well-known landmarks of Te Waipounamu (Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, 2023).

Concerning the meaning of this mountain’s name, Roberts (1913a) notes the following information:

A mountain 2985ft high at West Taiari is Maunga Atua (the hill of the gods). Some Maoris say it should be Mauka Atua, k being the southern pronunciation of ng. Mr Taylor White thinks the third ‘a’ should be omitted – Maungatua, which would mean a mountain with a ridged top. It is now generally spelt that way.

## 2.2. Functional Territoriality in Ōtākou Wetlands

As Meryem Atik and Simon Swaffield (2017, 455) demonstrate, “toponymy – the analysis of place names – can be undertaken as a contribution to landscape characterisation”. By characterising a place, it appears the desire to distinguish between landscape aspects recognised in their differences and particularities; this leads consequently to the necessity of naming. The nomenclature reported in relationship to Ōtākou wetlands signals variations in time as different “denotations” corresponding to changes in “connotative meanings” (see Atik & Swaffield, 2017). Indeed, different types of meaning are embedded in place names, where denotative meaning refers to the feature or location that is literally marked by the name ... Connotative meaning delivers figurative attributions or associations through special reference words, such as an event, person, or some other phenomenon from which the name derives its cultural significance (Atik & Swaffield, 2017, 456).

Therefore, the meanings of names “identify unrevealed meanings in the landscape” (Atik & Swaffield, 2017, 456), showing the values applied by their community in the occupation of a space. The information collected in name meanings regards, for instance, forms, colours, geomorphology, soils, hydrogeology, plants, animals, events, important people, community lifestyles, and symbolic associations (see Atik & Swaffield, 2017, 456).

The wetlands fall perfectly in the typic Ōtākou toponymic nomenclature, where 32,8% and 26,1% of the place names refer to peaks in general or waterways, respectively (see Atik & Swaffield, 2017, 460 and 463), and the majority of English and Māori etymology corresponds to human activities and biophysical characteristic, respectively (see Atik & Swaffield, 2017, 462). The reference of Māori names to the habitats reflects their importance as Mahika Kai [food gathering places], as places where food is produced or procured ... essential for livelihood of people and natural processes. This also provides knowledge on the past nature of the landscape, and can be used as an indicator of landscape change (Atik & Swaffield, 2017, 465).

Indeed, the Ōtākou wetlands, by being also navigated thanks to mōkihi (rafts made of bundles of raupō, or *Typha orientalis*), were important ara tawhito (traditional travel routes), providing direct access to the rich inland mahinga kai resources (see Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, 2023): birds and tuna (eels), in particular, but also wooden. Moreover, Māori names often reveal practical knowledge, like Taiari and Waihora, which underline the characteristic of the area to be a wetland. The original meanings and knowledge embedded in Māori names have been often hidden and forgotten by Western naming – for instance, Saddle Hill instead of Makamaka, which means “a shrub ... or to throw about” – bad spelling – Taieri instead of Taiari – and ‘conglomerate names’ – for example, Titri instead of Ti (cabbage) tree – (see Roberts, 1909).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the acknowledgement of the relevance of *names* in their whakapapa is the recognition of mātauraka Māori (Māori wisdom). Therefore, the restoration of Māori names is currently crucial for decolonising (see, for example, Smith, 2012, 387–388) such a politically bicultural – and culturally multicultural – society (see Fleras & Spoonley, 1999, 247). The legitimate use of Māori names is analysed here from a Tauwiwi perspective, where the focus is then the perception of names by non-Māori – Tauwiwi, especially non-Indigenous, and Pākehā – through the present-day Māori transmission within the cross-cultural communication of Aotearoa New Zealand. Following Roberts’ (1909) analysis, which understandably includes the bad spelling into the categories of name variations, the totality of the nomenclature here collected appears under the non-Māori register in the everyday accessibility, that is through online research, road maps and direction signs, as well as common talks. Consequently, the messages these names offer nowadays are referred to European settlers’ needs to orient in this territory. The cases of Ōtākou and Taiari Plain reveal that it was easier to use a generalisation of Māori names, applied originally for only a portion of territory, instead of learning all other names too. Furthermore, the symbolic association with European places (74,5 % of English names, see Atik & Swaffield, 2017, 462) – for instance, Dunedin and Mosgil – was

apt to support the “efforts to establish a home in a new territory” (Atik & Swaffield, 2017, 465). Through English names, the relationship between people and Ōtākou wetland is expressed more psychologically than symbiotically, almost abstracting from the bond with the *concrete* territory. If place names in our language perform as orienting maps for using the landscape as a natural and cultural resource, the identity of Ōtākou wetlands is constantly “freezing” in the ‘visual writing of Western mapping’ (Peluso, 1995, 400), which remains the main tool of orientation.

Certainly, it can be argued that my Tauwiwi perspective is biased in such research, which is then made through non-indigenous<sup>7</sup> media. Indeed, Nancy Peluso (1995, 387) insists on the decolonising approach of “counter-maps”, which are alternative maps, where, as declared by Tā Tipene O’Regan in 2012 (Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, 2023), “Our aim is not to freeze our heritage as if it were a museum artefact. It must be nurtured in such a way that it continues to live, breathe and grow”. This is the mapping approach of (b) Kā Huru Manu (Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, 2023). This *Atlas* restores the information of names’ whakapapa and makes “this traditional knowledge accessible to our whānau (families) and the wider public” (Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, 2023). However, it seems an entry ‘constrained’ to *intellectual* cultural aspects of the current Kāi Tahu: this instrument can be found online with the exclusive purpose of historical – including past, present, and future – knowledge. It means it is not thought to be used in everyday life as a *practical* map for reaching any place but to know more about some of them. From a holistic indigenous view, this may be enough to reach also other kinds of applications. From a non-indigenous perspective, it remains abstract and too easy to skip, with the consequence of not using it at all, or limiting it to punctual consultations. For instance, (b) signals (see Fig.6) the “Old Maori Track” (Beattie, 1931a) as well as the Taieri Track; however, by consulting (b) as well as Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau’s official website (see

7. See Stewart (2018, 740) concerning the meaning of ‘being indigenous’ (using indigenous as an adjective and, therefore, uncapitalised) or ‘being through Indigeneity’ and living within the modality of Indigeneity (on Indigeneity see, for instance, Johnson, 2021) in comparison to ‘being an Indigenous’.

Sinclair, 2023), I was not able to find detailed place names (see Fig.6) but numerous resources for searching them (in particular, Beattie and Roberts).

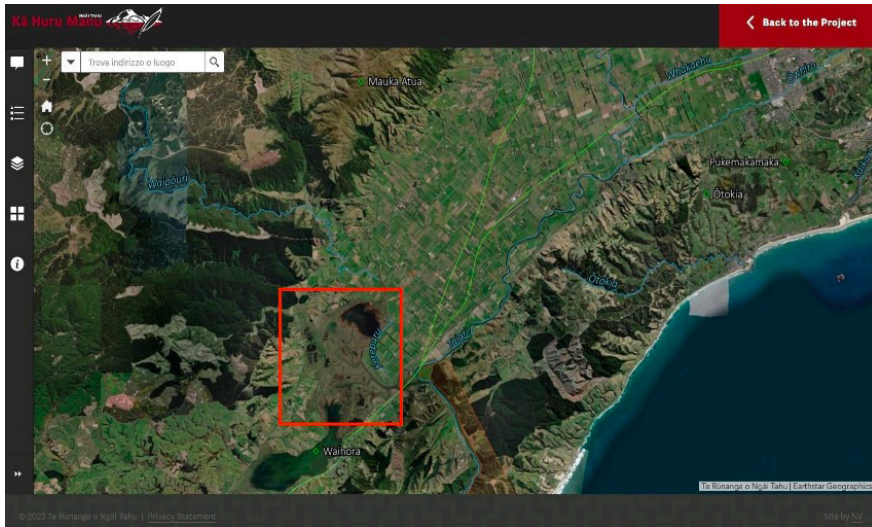


Figure 6. Taiari Plain Area’s Principal Names Reported on Kā Huru Manu. Note. The map shows the most important Kāi Tahu names in the Taiari Plain (Waihora, Waipōuri, Kerepuru, Taiari, Mauka Atua, Pukemakamaka, Whakaehu, and Ōwhiro). Moreover, the green lines individuate the ancient tracks. No special indication is present for Te Nohoaka o Tukiaua / Sinclair Wetlands (red square added).

In analysing counter-mapping, Peluso (1995, 383) observes that it is “an intrinsically political act”. Therefore, it must be read for what it contains but foremost for “what is *not* on it” (Peluso, 1995, 386). By “re-representing claims to resources and formalizing them *in the terms of the state* as formal property rights”, Peluso (1995, 388; emphasis added) asserts the following:

Whereas abstract space on a map represents merely state claims to power rather than a state capacity to enforce its claims, local people’s actual control may be enhanced by *exclusion* from the map. When the degree of state surveillance increases, e.g., because of an increased value of resources or because of a reduction in resources located elsewhere, local people’s *inclusion* on the map is more desirable.

Not being represented *on a counter-map* could mean that the state is not claiming particular governance on a certain territory. In this way, the customary rights are not objects of conflict issues and are free to self-determination. However, each process of mapping is structurally forcing “the reinterpretation of customary rights to resources *territorially*” (Peluso, 1995, 388), where the focus is any longer on the products of the land but on the land itself. The risk of letting people disappear in the recognition of their customary rights is high when the ‘concept of land’ is reduced to the ‘concept of Nature’, according to which people’s influences are invisible (see Peluso, 1995, 403).

Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau or Sinclair Wetlands are not mentioned in (b) either specifically or generally as Ōtākou wetland. This non-representation can be understood, on the one hand, (1) as an independent strategy related to the principle of ‘protecting the self-determination of customary rights’, according to which the territoriality of this territory is safeguarded. In this case, the territoriality of Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau must be searched directly in resources management plans because it represents “resource claims which cannot be territorialized” (see Peluso, 1995, 402). On the other hand, (2) the area can be regarded as a natural and not a cultural zone. Clearly, this option comes from the binary logic, which forces *Nature* (N) and *culture* (C) into two separate categories by representing non-humans and people, respectively (see, for instance, Dwyer, 1994, 93). From a non-Indigenous perspective, there is the risk of limiting the use of the *Atlas* for punctual consultations (C), which can easily lead to not using it at all and maintaining, in everyday practice, the English names. In this way, the land is perceived as mere Nature that has nothing to say (N), finally avoiding any possibility of communication.

Moreover, (3) there is also the possibility that the (b) has been thought of as an alternative tool to use not exclusively but *inclusively* with the support of other sources of information (see Chapin et al., 2005). It remains (4) the concern that it can represent a tool of “epistemological assimilation ... in a long chain of attempts by Western societies to subsume or destroy indigenous cultures” (Chapin et al., 2005, 628). The reasons for the current absence

of Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau in the *Atlas* could also be attributed to (5) the high costs of such an innovative and broader project, which is made thanks to expensive technologies (see Chapin et al., 2005) and is extended in information and efforts way more than the online visual maps. Additionally, (6) the prioritisation of empowering other areas, like Manuhaea, more in need of legal recognition (Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, 2023), puts Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau necessarily in a practical secondarily relevance, which may change in the future, confirming the political role and fluid character of this Kāi Tahu's counter-map.

In any case, the landscape appears – for the eyes which are trained to note – not as “a visual scenic background, but an active scene of practice” (Olwig, 2007, 587), constantly changing in the fluidity of the “organisational relationship between people and land” (Swaffield, 2005, 5), where the occupational activities of its people create and transform it into a “cultural landscape” (see Rowntree & Conkey, 1980). The whakapapa of land and people is shared in a “map biography” (Chapin et al., 2005, 624).

### **3. The map biography of Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau or Sinclair Wetlands**

The ‘map biography’ shows “the relations of human communities to nature”, whose narrative thematisation corresponds to one definition of “development ethics” asserted by Denis Goulet (1995, 2). In the analysis of Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau or Sinclair Wetlands project, we can observe the shift in time of this relationship between the local Māori iwi and their whenua as well as between Pākehā and their properties. Three moments of kaitiakitaka (stewardship) can be identified in their different social, capital, political, and economic values: (I) the period before 1844, the year of the Ōtākou purchase (see, for instance, The Ngāi Tahu Report, 1991, 281), (II) the period after 1844, during the colonist settlements, and (III) the period after 1998, the year of the Kāi Tahu Settlement Act (1998). In the narration of these periods, their main protagonists underly discontinuities and continuities typical of the whakapapa discourse: (I) Matamata and Kāti Māmoe, (II) Western



settlers and Horrie Sinclair, and (III) Tukiauau and Kāi Tahu. For each of them, different ideas of nature emerge.

In Matamata's pūrākau<sup>8</sup> (Potiki, 2011, 4–5), nature is understood as (I) a part of the whanau. The narration of the fundamental bound of Kāti Māmoe with their atua, literally materialised in the whenua, shows the mana (power) of the place. Matamata is a tupuna (ancestor), like a great-great-great...-grandparent. As a taniwha, he is a kaitiaki (custodian, guardian) of a certain environment and the people who are part of it. Therefore, Matamata's wild search, which reshaped the whenua, happened because he could not hear the voice of his master due to the silent absence of his iwi in their kaitiakitaka. The latter implies the accord of mutual custody, which is broken if the iwi does not respect and take responsibility for the care of the whenua to whom belongs. This attitude would undermine the mana whenua (authority from the land) of the tangata whenua (people of the land). Thus, Matamata, whose role is to empower the progress of his people, must advise the problems in his way of communication, that is by wriggling, twisting, digging, and raising. Matamata's reaction to the missing relationship appears like a scream in the void. In this way, his descendants are called to whanaukataka (to remain in and maintain the relationship) and honour their commitment of utu (reciprocity) within manaakitaka or looking after the whenua where Matamata has been. This responsibility to the shared interests is the aroha (love, care, and responsibility) of a proper kaitiakitaka. The agreement of kaitiakitaka is not applied to avoid or eliminate a problem but to face and solve it. This spiritual meaning has guided the cultural and social values of the wetlands in the Ōtākou region, which correspond for the tangata whenua to a guardian politics or a careful way of caring for its capital, namely its resources. In this way, the wetlands were a mahika kai, giving them a crucial economic value – in particular, according to the etymological meaning of *economy* as 'household management'. The toponymy of the Ōtākou wetlands reveals traditional customary harvesting practices like hunting

8. Pūrākau about taniwha are considered taoka in Māori culture. This crucial value is underlined, for instance, by Watene (2023), who insists on taniwha's distinctive focus on relationality and its consequences for interculturality.

weka (*Gallirallus australis*) and tūi (*Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*), as well as collecting wood (see Roberts, 1913a and Beattie, 1931b). These Māori techniques reveal the structural coordination of Kāti Māmoe with nature by considering also its intrinsic value. Precisely the balance between survival necessity and the laborious practice of collecting the resources allowed them to follow the natural time of recovery and regeneration. By considering the mauri (life force) of everything – from human to non-human living (animals and plants) and non-living things – this kind of kaitiakitaka appears respectful of nature’s specific characteristics with whom they were in a relationship. It is very similar to when we enjoy our house, our grandpa’s company and delicacy, as well as at the same time understand his periodic necessity to rest and not destroy the objects we are using, like plates and tables, inconsiderately.

During the non-Māori ownership<sup>9</sup>, nature is lived as (II) a passive landscape for (a) resources and (b) recreation. The land was bought to ensure (a) farmland settlements for British migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, between 1861 and 1965, the discovery of (a) gold involved massive digging (see Davis, 1973, viii), which produced the deposit of materials in the waters of wetlands, polluting the water system, permanently (see Davis, 1973, 128). In 1909, Roberts reported the Whakaraupuka in the middle of the wetlands, as “owned by Mr Lee Smith”. At this time, the Government enacted several laws (see, for instance, Land Drainage Act, 1904 and successive, as well as Taiari Land Drainage Act, 1907 and successive) to drain wetlands (roto, awa, and streams) and anthropise the Taiari Awa. The aim was to make the land ‘healthy’ (Baker, 2017) and suitable for pastoral farming, destroying and degrading natural habitats (see Tamati-Elliffe, 2022) like Tatawai Roto (The Ngāi Tahu Ancillary Claims Report, 1995, 2015–2016). From the 1950s, “the pumps had stopped, and the area had begun reverting to its natural state as a wetland” (Baker, 2017), and in 1960, Horrie Sinclair bought the place.

9. It is not possible here to adequately report the circumstances of the Ōtākou Wetlands sale (see, for instance, The Ngāi Tahu Report, 1991) after Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975, 2022, 31–33), signed in 1840. However, it must be remembered that the selling and the missed creation of the promised Māori reserves were unfair, as recognised even by the Crown itself (see Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act, 1998, 33–36).

He was “a duck hunter” (Davis, 1982) who valued his Ōtākou wetlands as (b) a recreative place. His sport was shooting ducks in nature – avoiding the protected ones – using motor-less boats and his duck call, as Davis (1982) recalls in the sports magazine *Vault*. He saw hunters as the best conservationists because “it is in their interests to preserve the habitat of the game they hunt” (Baker, 2017). In 1984, Sinclair donated the land to Ducks Unlimited New Zealand. One of the gift conditions was to build (b) an education centre and accommodation (Baker, 2017). In 1986, the Crown declared this place under the forever granted protection of QEII National Trust (QEII-NT) against the property titles (see Sinclair, 2023). The place protection was made by replanting, trapping (pest animals such as possums, rabbits, and rats), controlling weeds (pest plants), and prohibiting harvest, clearing, and development (see QEII-NT, 2023). The values underlying this approach are the historical, aesthetic, and recreational ones. According to them, tracks, infrastructure, and amenities have been built for hunting and other recreational activities.

Thanks to the Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act (1998), the Ōtākou wetlands returned to its people, the Kāi Tahu, in 1998. The current way of living the environment is focused on nature as (III) *whakapapa* or an intergenerational stratification of *mana* (authority, power). For instance, Kāi Tahu decided to dedicate this heritage place to Tukiauau, a Kāti Māmoe chief of the 18th century. The history narrates that Tukiauau came originally from Pariwhakatau in the Kai-kōura (“to eat cryfish”; Beattie, 1920, 75) region but, “After a fierce battle against the Ngai-Tahu, at Pakihi” (McFarlane, 1939, 23), took refuge in a *nohoaka* on Whakaraupuka for some years (see Tamati-Elliffe, 2022). Tukiauau’s son, Korokī-whiti, fell in love with Haki-te-kura, daughter of a Kāti Māmoe neighbour chief named Tu-wiri-roa, and they had numerous offspring. One day, Tukiauau was informed to be pursued by Te Ruahikihiki for killing his father, a Kāi Tahu chief (see Toitū, 2023). Therefore, Tukiauau and his hapū left on *waka*. As they passed below the cliff edge where Haki-te-kura was standing, she tried to jump into the water to reach the *waka* but died on the rocks below (see McFarlane, 1939, 24).

The place was then known as the “Maori leap” (McFarlane, 1939, 23) or Te Rereka o Hakitekura (leap of Hakitekura) (see Roberts, 1913a). Haki-te-kura’s father wanted to destroy the man who was the cause of his daughter’s death and followed Tukiauau until Rakiura (Stewart Island), where Tukiauau’s hapū was killed entirely (see McFarlane, 1939, 24). According to Atik and Swaffield (2017, 462), the choice to give Ōtākou wetlands a new name – a first name, followed by the second non-Māori, which seals the partnership – in symbolic association with Kāti Māmoe appears more similar to an English place etymology (44%) than a Māori one (4,3%), which instead prefers biophysical landscape characteristics (10,3%). However, the reference to important persons has an average value within the category of ‘symbolic associations’. The traditional name Te Rereka o Hakitekura attests to it and confirms the coherency of Kāi Tahu with Māori past. Besides, by linking Ōtākou wetlands to Tukiauau, not only do Kāi Tahu restore the past of this place, but also their mana (authority). The Ōtākou wetlands’, Kāti Māmoe’s and Kāi Tahu’s past suffering find a renewed balance in this name connection, restoring mana, understood as authority as well as power for each of them. In particular, Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau or Sinclair Wetlands project is working to enforce mana through restoring kaitiakitaka, understood as guardianship, care, and wise management through “the protection of mauri or life-giving essence of an ecosystem from desecration” (Kāi Tahu, 2005, 27). Therefore, not only does exercising kaitiakitaka over the resources of whenua and wai mean managing the physical resources but also maintaining a relationship to the spiritual dimension (Kāi Tahu, 2005, 28). These decisions seem to indicate an idea of nature strongly related to whakapapa, especially considered in its temporal dimension of past, present and future generations (see Tamati-Elliffe, 2022). Indeed, the back cover (see Fig.7) of the Kāi Tahu ki Otago Natural Resource Management Plan (2005) points out the philosophy embedded in it. The kaitiakitaka is represented through its protagonists. In the more external frame, the one which includes all others, Papatūānuku (earth mother), Takaroa (atua of the sea), Tāne Mahuta (atua of forests, birds, and humankind), wai, and pito (umbilical cord) are

presented. The latter symbolises the connection between Papatūānuku and Tāne Mahuta, namely between whenua and tangata. Between the external and the internal frame, which represents the partnership between Kāi Tahu ki Otago and the Otago Regional Council, Kāi Tahu ancestors have their place, understood as the base of any relationship. The management of natural resources is thought of within the internal frame of the partnership.

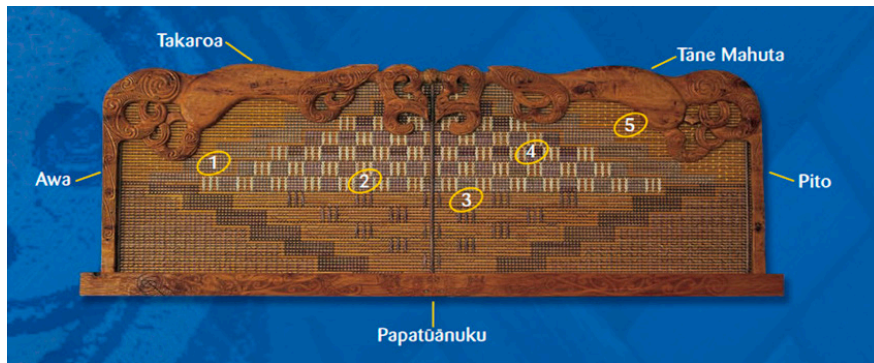


Figure 7 (left). *Plan Philosophy as Depicted by the Taoka 'Kaitiakitaka'*. Note. External frame: Papatūānuku, Awa, Takaroa, Tāne Mahuta, Pito; n°1: Poutama (stairway); n°2: Roimata Toroa (albatross); n°3: Waewae Pakura (footprints of Pukeko); n°4: Mumu/Tapawhā (forest); n°5: Purapura Whetū (stars).

Nevertheless, in the wetlands project, there is not always explicit mention of the spiritual frame on which the rejuvenating of wildlife, birds, and vegetation and ensuring the intergenerational tikanga (practical lore) of mahika kai are based (see Tamati-Elliffe, 2022). The official website (see Sinclair, 2023), for instance, briefly mentions Tukiauau, Sinclair's ownership, the QEII-NT, and Kāi Tahu as the current owner in the history section. For the rest, the information is focused on the description of the plants, birdlife, and other wetland creatures present. On this website, there are, to date (September 2023), no words also about Te Nukuroa o Matamata, the current trust in charge of the management – no longer the QEII-NT – chosen by Te Rūnanga o Ōtākou (2023). The name of the trust refers explicitly to the guardian Matamata, and the logo (see Fig.8) to the taniwha, Tukiauau (the

crescent moon shape as his revenge-house was built), mauka and their forests, as well as the water system of wetlands (roto, awa, etc.). Nevertheless, these symbols are present on Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau (see Fig.8) but are explained exclusively on Te Rūnanga o Ōtākou’s website (2023).



Figure 8 (right). *Te Nukuroa o Matamata logo at Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau / Sinclair Wetlands.*

#### **4. The Cross-Cultural Faces of Nature in Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau or Sinclair Wetlands Project**

In 2023, I volunteered for Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau or Sinclair Wetlands in two different experiences, both organised by the University of Otago. The first time, I was with a group of international students, and we planted several native trees during a sunny day; the second time, the group was part of the course about Te Waipounapu tangata whenua (see Tipa, 2023), and we visited the area during a rainy day and heard about history, pūrākau, and the recovering of mahika kai (in particular, tī, tuna, and ducks). On the one hand, I supported Kāi Tahu practically in their conservation ethic; on the other hand, Kāi Tahu shared their cultural heritage taoka with me. The reasons for such different approaches could be various, from the fortuitousness (perhaps determined by the weather conditions) to the aware protection of mātauraka taoka through differentiated educational strategies. As a Taiwi, the experience of this whenua exclusively in its ‘naturalistic

aspects' perpetuates the risk pointed out by Mere Roberts et al. (1995, 15), that is to convert the "Māori conservation ethic in western terms", according to which the romanticism of the concept of 'Nature' tends to *exclude* humans from the realm of Papa through a binary logic of nature-humans (see also Dwyer, 1994). However, as a Tauīwi, my focus of interest is on the *risk* of falsification of Kāi Tahu culture within the transition between Western structures to indigenous ones – where *falsification* means the understanding of an indigenous culture by non-Indigenous in a way perceived as a non-representative by Indigenous<sup>10</sup>. Coherently to tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) principle, Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau or Sinclair Wetlands project is made *by* Māori *for* Māori, intergenerationally connected in time (past, present and future generations). According to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, it is made *with* Māori and non-Māori through a bi-national partnership (see Fleras & Spoonley, 1999, 247). Thus, as a Tauīwi, my call of responsibility corresponds to pointing out *where* and *how* I can misunderstand the Kāi Tahu culture by reducing it, once again, to inappropriate interpretations coming from my Western categories. In contradiction to the principles of Te Tiriti – see, in particular, the second article (Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975, 2022, 31&33) – such reductive interpretations could lead non-Māori partnerships to tokenism. This risk underlines the necessity of serious awareness by non-Māori to not abstract Māori culture from the context of its meaning; not only does it mean to be aware of the existence of knowledge beyond the one immediately accessed, but also to be constantly active in researching for more information and deeper understanding.

This analysis gives us the possibility of a “conscientização” (conscientialisation)<sup>11</sup> regarding some of these risks, in particular, (1) the non-use of Māori

10. In cross-cultural contexts between Indigenous and non-Indigenous, there is plenty of historical evidence of tokenism – “the practice of making only a symbolic effort to be inclusive to members of minority groups” (Eketone & Walker, 2015) – orientalism or ‘othering’ (see Said, 1979), and occidentalism or “universalising” (Girei, 2017) by the so-called Western culture. The aspect of orientalism particularly relevant for the present analysis is the phenomenon of ‘appreciation’ of selected characteristics of Indigenous societies reduced to ‘exoticism’. In this way, the desire and sensuality of ‘the other’ are superficial and do not guide to an appropriate encounter while abstracted and not real.

11. Myra Bergman Ramos, the Portuguese-to-English translator of Paulo Freire (2005, 35; emphasis added), defines this concept in a note as follows: “The term conscientização refers to learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality”. I think it is times and again necessary to remember this approach is addressed “To the oppressed, / and to those who suffer with them / and fight at their side”, as Freire’s dedication points out (Freire, 2005, 5).

names or their utilisation as mere “denotations” without corresponding to “connotative meanings” (see Atik & Swaffield, 2017) and (2) the reduction of the *environment* to the understanding of *landscape*, “a visual scenic background” instead of “an active scene of practice” (Olwig, 2007, 587). On the one hand, it appears clear the understandable priority of Kāi Tahu efforts to maintain, revitalise and actualise their tikanga, long hindered by colonisation before and westernisation of the management frames now: “The fundamental test to this duty is ‘Can we still recognise this place?’ Loss of wāhi tūpuna [sites of significance to iwi] means loss of cultural narratives and mana whenua identity” (Tamati-Elliffe, 2022). In particular, the mahika kai has been limited by the conservationist approach of the QEII-NT (2023) and *Resource Management Act* (1991), which was not focused on the relationship between tāngata and whenua but only on maintaining whenua as a highly valuable background of restrained human recreation. On the other, the offer of environmental practices (like planting, counting birds, etc.) without an explicit reference also to the spiritual dimension of Kāi Tahu’s kaitiakitaka for balancing the shared mana can be understood by non-Māori as a missed opportunity to learn alternative approaches for doing things and to convert “power to a higher ethic” (Goulet, 1995, 25). The analysis of pūrākau, names, and practices has shown their crucial role in the association with places for the cultural encounter with the holistic richness of mātauraka Māori. Indeed, Māori names narrate stories about the vital relationship between whenua and its tangata. In order to survive, the latter need to read, understand, and reply to the behaviour of the whenua where they live in a dance of coexistence within a natural community. In this sense – and not with the aim of forcing Kāi Tahu to a ‘supposed stereotyped Māori authenticity’ (see Chow, 1993) – Māori intergenerational memories are necessary for the understanding of Kāi Tahu’s current perspective and embedded values by non-Māori, who are, therefore, called to inform and learn further about.

Indeed, the loss of connection between Māori and whenua degraded the Indigenous mātauraka, which has been revitalised intergenerationally



through Māori history, language, traditions, and narratives. Coherently, also the health of the connection between Kāi Tahu and non-Māori could be individuated by the level of understanding concerning the Māori history, language, traditions, and narratives. Indeed, “When a kahikatea [*Dacrycarpus dacrydioides*] stands alone, it is food for the wind; when kahikatea grow together, the people stand united” (Sunde, 2022, 28’). This whakatauaākī (proverb) symbolises the strength of unity: one tree alone is easier to blow down, especially if its roots are not deep – as the non-Māori’s roots ‘recently’ in Aotearoa New Zealand – but the trees together – as the partnership between Māori and non-Māori – can bind their roots, creating a solid system for resisting falls.

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## Iconography

Figure 1. Kā Huru Manu (n.d.). Retrieved October 23, 2023, <https://kahurumanu.co.nz/atlas>. Copyright by Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu.

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Figure 4. Neville Peat (2005). *Taiari Scroll Plain*.

Figure 5. Benchill (2009). *Saddle Hill* (detail), [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saddle\\_Hill,\\_Dunedin,\\_NZ.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saddle_Hill,_Dunedin,_NZ.JPG). CC-BY-NC.

Figure 6. Kā Huru Manu (n.d.). Retrieved October 23, 2023, <https://kahurumanu.co.nz/atlas>. Copyright by Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu.

Figure 7. Kāi Tahu Ki Otago (2005). Plan Philosophy as Depicted by the Taoka 'Kaitiakitaka' [back cover]. In *Kāi Tahu Ki Otago Natural Resources Management Plan 2005*, <https://www.waitaki.govt.nz/files/assets/public/v/1/files/our-services/planning-and-resource-consents/kai-kahu-ki-otago-natural-resources-management-plan-2005.pdf>.

Figure 8. Pasetto Sara (2023). *Te Nukuroa o Matamata logo at Te Nohoaka o Tukiauu / Sinclair Wetlands*.

# EXPLORING IMAGES OF AN INTERCULTURAL EUROPE: A SEMANTIC APPROACH TO POLITICAL CARTOONS OF THE REFUGEE CRISIS IN THE MEDIASCAPES

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**Abstract:** In an era where image is a fundamental feature of expressing thought, the visual content feeding the media becomes a matter of social semiotics as a reflection of beliefs about social relationships. In this sense, political cartoons are very rich regarding the (de)construction of meanings in the public sphere, especially because they explore ambiguous connotations through humour, parody, and caricature. Assuming that the media are active agents in shaping the social imaginary, the depiction of certain events in Europe (Brexit, refugee and migrant crisis, and terrorist attacks, among others) serves many cartoonists as a mechanism for social criticism, political questioning, and freedom of expression. While cartoons express the artist's perception of events and enunciate political statements, they also allow us to identify social representations and recognise mediated frames of collective memory and identity. The focal

point of our analysis stems from the migratory crises and their implications for the political and identity constructs of the continent. The influx of thousands of people within a short timeframe has garnered extensive media coverage. It has triggered, intensified or exacerbated the debate on European cultural identity, juxtaposing contrasting visions: on the one hand, the value of cultural diversity and human dignity and the making of intercultural societies and, on the other, discourses emphasising ontological insecurity portraying cultural difference as a threat and migrants as unfit for cultural integration. Since 2014, the influx of refugees fleeing the Syrian civil war and other conflicts in the Middle East and Africa has propelled the European Union into the so-called “refugee crisis”. This multi-layered phenomenon has polarised opinions and paved the way for the portrayal of the refugee as a “stranger” and “other”. Therefore, we seek to analyse this crisis in media, specifically through the lenses of cartoonists, to understand, from a semantic perspective, the implications and influence of these symbolic representations in the narrative of European memory and identity. Furthermore, we seek to explore how these representations contribute to the processes of estrangement, rejection or hospitality, both within European and national political spheres and within the public domain. Our analytical corpus encompasses images collected in mass and social media, namely those posted on Facebook between 2015 and 2019. We assumed cartoons as anchors or “metaphorical scenarios” within public discourse and conducted a multimodal analysis, focusing on their textual and visual features. By examining their meaningful references, we sought to analyse the representations of the European Union’s institutional response to the migratory crisis and the multiple conceptions or uses of the migrant/refugee categories to grasp hermeneutically the semantics of this eventful historical and media phenomenon. The findings suggest that the EU’s commitment to solidarity has been called into question and show that the cartoonists challenge the political and social consensus about the humanist values that European societies claim to embody as a core of their identity.

**Keywords:** Refugee’s migration crisis; media cartoons; European memory; intercultural communication; semantics.



## 1. Introduction

Migration is both an interesting and informative phenomenon for understanding the dynamics between identity and alterity, particularly as it catalyses the emergence of novel perception frameworks, constructs of belonging and representations of the other. In the construction of identities, there is an inherent tendency to exclude what is perceived as foreign or negative for the sake of the legitimacy of our convictions and actions.

The influx of thousands of people in a short timeframe has garnered extensive media coverage and has triggered, intensified or exacerbated the debate on European cultural identity, juxtaposing contrasting visions. On the one hand, the value of cultural diversity and human dignity and the making of intercultural societies and, on the other, discourses that emphasise ontological insecurity, portraying cultural difference as a threat and migrants as unfit for cultural integration.

The mass influx of refugees fleeing the Syrian civil war and other conflicts in the Middle East and Africa between 2015 and 2016 to seek asylum in Europe has propelled the European Union into the so-called “refugee crisis”, a multi-layered event that has polarised opinions and paved the way for the portrayal of the refugee as a “stranger” and “other”. Concurrently, it has triggered another crisis in pan-European politics. Throughout Europe, and especially in the most prominent EU countries, we witnessed divergent interpretations of the unfolding of this critical event in the political, public and media discourses (refer particularly to Triandafyllidou, 2018).

This migratory episode – despite the political response at the EU level has been precarious and guided by internal divisions and frictions in the distribution of responsibilities – was riddled with negative attitudes towards the opening of borders and the inclusion of foreign communities. There was a growing degree of hostility and reservations towards immigrants and arriving asylum seekers. Furthermore, they were easy targets of stigmatisation in political and media discourses and practices, which contributed “to a shift in public moods, imaginaries, or political preferences” (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018, p. 2).

Against this backdrop, this chapter aims to identify representations of Europe concerning scenarios of estrangement, rejection, or hospitality by interpreting political cartoons. It aims to offer a deeper insight into how cartoonists have depicted this migratory event in Europe, with a specific focus on refugee situations. Our study adopts a semiotics approach, exploring meaningful representations circulated in mediascapes to outline and understand a discursive framework of an intercultural Europe at the height of this humanitarian crisis.

## **2. Methodology**

In this study, we do not perceive Europe as an essentialist entity but as an ambiguously layered category (Jenkins, 2008), a discursive construction and a product of distinct overlapping discourses (Stråth & Wodak, 2009). Therefore, we delve into the European hegemonic discourse concerning social and historical events and contingent experiences that are selected and foregrounded by political, media or public discourse resonances at given moments. Thus, these events are interpreted or reflected from several viewpoints by specific social agents (e.g., politicians, journalists, artists, academics, and informed citizens) in their many settings and through their symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1982). Obviously, there are probably conflicting processes in which we participate and to which we are subject in constructing and communicating identity narratives and meanings, as well as situations that mobilise people for value contention in the public sphere (Tilly, 2002).

The “refugee crisis” phenomenon serves as a crucial case study for critically examining the several discourse constructions and representations surrounding migration and Europe. Not only because it was the primary stage for welcoming refugees but also because it was the main protagonist of the migratory crisis narrative. So, in this work, we adopt this event as a narrative and interpretative framework (Goffman, 1974) of the European political experience. In essence, it provides a frame to capture perceptions,

opinions, positions, and evaluations of the Europeans' thoughts and feelings regarding their historical project and political action of the European Union in response to the 2015 migratory event.

Specifically, we have chosen to delve into this contingent and precarious juncture in the Europeanisation endeavour, focusing on the cartoonists' perspective by interpreting their pictorial repertoire. We regard them as particular social agents actively involved in the construction, communication, and dissemination of the European symbolic discourse in the media public space. They play an active role in depicting dominant discourses around migrations in Europe and exploring ambiguous connotations through humour, parody, and caricature, as well as enunciating political statements of the public discourse. Furthermore, their artistic creations also allow us to identify social representations and recognise mediatised frames of collective memory and identity within Europe.

Political cartoons are often seen as a simple yet effective way of communicating social and cultural changes in a society and thus have the social function of provoking a reaction in the public, namely through humour (Bergson, 1991). However, our intention in using cartoons in this work is not so much linked to their social function, but rather to "the possibility of designating the real by means of signs" (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 255), to use them as a symbolic tool to put the discourse on Europe into action. In this sense, cartoons are understood here as the foundation of the object, a mediation, a vehicle, "the 'medium' in which and through which the subject places itself and the world shows itself" (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 251). Therefore, they function as signs and, at the same time, represent syntagmatic figures or semantic units that, sequentially and combinatorically, make up a discursive text. In a word, they suggest a rhetoric (Barthes, 1977, pp. 32-51) about a transmediatic Europe in general, and about the refugee crisis in particular.

The analysis below uses images sourced by two autonomous processes. First, during the event, we collected cartoons from various sources including mass and social media platforms, namely those circulating on our

Facebook news feed<sup>1</sup> between 2015 and 2019. Second, we systematically collected on *The Cartoon Movement* website, using specific keywords such as *refugee*, *refugee crisis*, *migration in Europe*. The empirical corpus was constructed based on the following criteria: to collect cartoons representing the European Union at different times and in relation to the media phenomenon of the 2015 refugee crisis. The aim was to analyse the circulation of hegemonic visual narratives about this migratory crisis in the media landscapes and to show how the European Union project was being portrayed in its cultural and political dimensions.

In total, 41 cartoons were collected and clustered by thematic dimension, then organised by topics for analysis:

- the panic and the dilemma of refugee migration
- migration policy: the political response of EU
- the welcoming of the refugees
- migrations and borders: the narrative of fortress Europe.

We addressed the cartoons as discursive anchors or “metaphor scenarios” (Musolff, 2006) within the European public sphere. We approached the discourse of political cartoons by applying a multimodal analysis, focusing on their textual and visual features. From their meaningful references, we analysed the representations of the European Union’s institutional response to the migratory crisis and the multiple conceptions or uses of the migrant/refugee categories to grasp hermeneutically the semantics of this eventful historical and media phenomenon. Moreover, the cartoons have been used here both as a process and product of our argumentation. In other words, the meanings suggested by the images collected were interpreted, compared, and discussed through an iterative and reflexive process

1. Europe has always been the central object of our research work, and because we have a sociological sensitivity and curiosity about European issues, we follow the pages of political organisations and alternative journalism websites that focus on European issues; in this sense, the Facebook algorithm facilitated the collection.

within which we established conceptual connections with the theoretical and ideological background.

### **3. Representations of Europe during the 2015 Refugee Crisis: an interpretation from political cartoons**

#### **3.1. The panic and the dilemma of refugee migration**

In the spring of 2015, more than 600 people drowned in the Mediterranean Sea – south of Italy, near the island of Lampedusa – due to an overcrowded and unseaworthy boat that sank. This tragic accident, compounded by the ongoing loss of life, which amounted to over 3,550 people that year alone, significantly marked the onset of a crisis narrative – the refugee crisis – linked to the movement of people from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq trying to reach Europe (Spindler, 2015).

That is precisely the scenario depicted in the cartoon in Figure 1. A boat filled with people is shipwrecked near the coast of mainland Europe. The luminous lighthouse in the top left-hand corner of the image suggests that Europe was the intended destination, where these people were looking for a safe harbour. The illustration portrays the aftermath of the boat's wreckage, with people scattered in the rough waters, some lying or floating and others (fewer in number) shouting and waving in an attempt to attract the attention of an individual, presumably a European citizen. However, the onlooker appears paralysed by panic as he witnesses the unfolding tragedy.

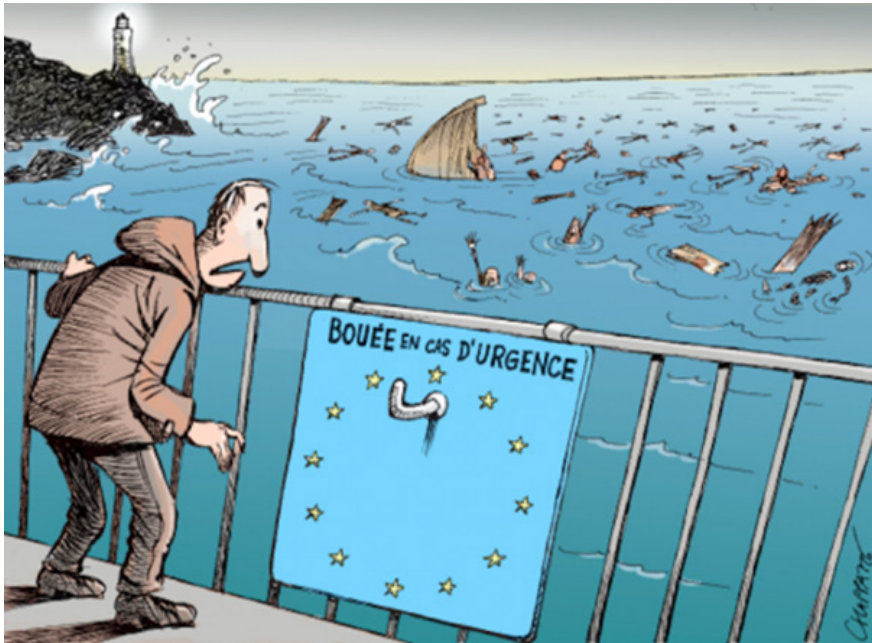


Figure 1. Refugees crisis in the Mediterranean – the EU’s lifebuoy, author: Patrick Chappatté. Source: *Voxeurop*, 2015, April 21, <https://bit.ly/3l7K0wd>

Indeed, it is also noteworthy that the sign indicating where the presumed migratory response buoy should have been is affixed to a railing separating the European individual from the shipwreck. This positioning seems to symbolise a distancing from the incident, suggesting that the response to the alarming situation in the Mediterranean Sea or immigration at large lay in marking a clear border between Europeans and those seeking entry. That notion is reinforced by the depiction of the European individual in the foreground and the portrayal of the refugees as distant and miniature figures.

The panic evident on the face of the individual in Figure 1 can have two interpretations. On the one hand, it suggests a more institutional or structural reading. Here, the individual’s panic reflects a sense of powerlessness in the face of the European Union’s institutions’ inability to implement an effective migration policy at the community level. In this regard, the image underscores the absence of a lifebuoy, which should be used in an emergency and

provided by the EU institutions to aid survivors attempting to reach the coast. However, the cartoonist highlights that EU countries lack the preparedness or robust measures to effectively respond to a humanitarian crisis like the one that unfolded in 2015. On the other hand, it can be viewed through the lens of otherness: the individual's expression reflects a natural aversion towards migrants. In other words, the cartoonist highlights ontological insecurity, suggesting that the influx of these "others" might be perceived as a threat and that immigrants are unsuitable to integrate into our culture.

This instance could be an example of "moral panic" (Cohen, 1972/2002) incited by the influx of over a million refugees during the referenced period. While the concept of moral panic may warrant debate, and its application requires careful consideration, it aids in comprehending the irrational fear and the disproportion between the risk and the reaction [overreaction] to a phenomenon significantly exacerbated by media coverage. In particular, distinctions based on race, ethnicity, religion, social values, and economic status were employed to delineate symbolic boundaries concerning incoming individuals, presuming a moral judgment regarding who merits salvation and who does not or who is perceived to pose a threat to the European social and cultural order. The dissemination of this panic was notably widespread and swift, largely facilitated by digital media channels (Walsh, 2020), which accentuated the perceived threat and urgency for Europeans to shield themselves from what was depicted as an "invasion" by potential "parasites" of the welfare state, "aggressors", and even "terrorists" (Zielińska & Pasamonik, 2022).

Using the Bergson's theory of humour, we suggest that the cartoonist depicts the tragic situation by implementing the "principle of insensitivity" as a function or mechanism of criticism. According to Bergson, this mechanism appeals to pure intelligence and requires the "momentary anaesthesia of the heart" imposed by non-empathic distance, a form of desensitisation and disinterest (Bergson, 1991, pp. 15-16). The artist therefore used irony to create tension and provoke a reaction, bringing to the foreground a situation of

paralysed social action – Henri Bergson speaks of rigidity. In other words, the lack of movement in the representation highlights the excruciating inability and incapacity of those in the frame to demonstrate more effectively the ridiculousness of the situation.

### 3.2. Migration policy: the EU's political response

With the increasing number of people arriving on European shores, leaders of member states could no longer overlook the EU's role in welcoming them and had to collaborate to devise a political strategy for the migratory situation. The backdrop against which this influx of migrants occurs is that of a profound humanitarian crisis unfolding on Europe's doorstep. Refusing asylum to these individuals would constitute a breach of international law (as enshrined in the 1951 Geneva Convention, which upholds the protection of refugees). Moreover, it would represent an unprecedented and cynical rejection of the fundamental values embedded in the EU's Treaties: the dignity of human beings, the defence of human rights, the guarantee of the rule of law, and the promotion of peace.



Figure 2. How Europe Treats Your Refugees, author: Luc Vernimmen. Source: *The Cartoon Movement*, 2016, September 20, <https://bit.ly/33YWoGA>



Figure 2 depicts European leaders gathered around a conference table, each appearing alarmed and attempting to “fend off” the threat posed by a fragile boat that could capsize with the crash of a small wave. While the Mediterranean waters, troubled by conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, lead to the shipwreck of thousands attempting the crossing, on the continent, it is the discordant and disjointed policies of European leaders regarding migration that create turmoil and endanger both the populations in forced migration and the Union’s reputation itself.

On contrary to Figure 1, the cartoon in Figure 2 brings movement to the political situation. It highlights the challenges European leaders face in reaching a consensus to address the migration crisis effectively. Once again, the frantic response of EU political leaders to the influx of refugees is denounced, echoing the difficulties in defining and implementing common policies to accommodate a large number of arrivals. This issue risks exacerbating divisions within public opinion<sup>2</sup> regarding “open door” policies, which is often exploited by extremist political groups portraying the situation as an existential threat to Europe, an “invasion” by individuals with incompatible cultural backgrounds, or as an opportunity for terrorists to infiltrate European borders.

The panic or anguish that the European leaders demonstrate in the illustration may be linked to ambivalent and confuse feelings that Zygmunt Bauman (1995/2007, p. 186) has labelled *proteophobia*, referring to a malaise of situations in which we feel lost, confused, without means to deal with strangers – in short, a feeling of inadequacy arising from the lack of rules to help manage and organise the social space of modern states. Today, we may not forget that these states are increasingly multi-ethnic due to intense contemporary migrations.

In the image depicted in Figure 3, the cartoonist offers a different perspective, focusing on an isolated incident within the broader context of the crisis.

2. A recent study indicates that “migration policy/European political response” were the most debated aspects in some European press (De Cock, et al., 2022, pp. 45-46) during the refugee crisis.

Instead of a group of European leaders convening in a meeting, the cartoon portrays a single individual. This individual, dressed in a suit and likely representing a leader of a member state, sits atop a lifeguard chair by the shore. A large sun hat, symbolising EU institutions, casts a shadow over him. Using a speaker, he shouts, “Go back!”, to an approaching boatload of people, visibly frightened by the threat of inclement weather.



Figure 3. Lifeguard, author: Patrick Chappatté. Source: *Voxeurop*, 2015, May 04, <https://voxeurop.eu/pt-pt/socorro-europeu/>

The man in the suit remains peacefully seated, showing no signs of alarm at the precarious and distressing situation unfolding before him. According to the inscription on the back of his chair – “life-guard” – his job should involve actively responding to the problem by launching the buoy that is conspicuously tied to his side, and thus save human lives. That is not what happens, but his action is not entirely passive, as he takes the position of shouting mercilessly at the distressed people approaching him to back off.

While the scenario depicted in Figure 2 evokes a sense of strangeness and threat in response to the arriving refugees, the cartoon in Figure 3 distinctly highlights that the cartoonist resumes the theme of migration policy by portraying an isolated stance of rejection towards foreigners in EU countries. This differs from the previous situations where panic, surprise, and impotence are evident, as seen in the absence of a lifebuoy in Figure 1 and the lack of cohesion among leaders in Figure 2 to manage or welcome the influx of people arriving in European territory.

When the volume of asylum seekers reached an unprecedented scale along the Balkan route in the summer of 2015, the phenomenon hit a turning point (Spindler, 2015, paras. 5, 6, and 7). Countries in Central-Eastern Europe, particularly those with far-right political inclinations, such as Poland, Croatia, and Slovenia, began implementing protectionist measures to restrict the entry of foreigners. In Hungary, Viktor Orbán ordered the construction of a fence along the border with Serbia on September 15, 2015, refusing any solidarity with European partners and making clear his policy of total rejection of refugees and immigrants. Meanwhile, Austria and Sweden continued, as they had from the beginning, to welcome refugees. Belgium and the United Kingdom rejected them, while Germany, under the leadership of Angela Merkel, took a firm stance by opening its doors to immigrants and refugees. This attitude was criticised in her own country but was later viewed favourably on a European scale.

This discriminatory situation has imposed constraints on the European Union's protection model, as the racist and xenophobic attitudes of some member states have undermined its pro-refugee stance. Indeed, faced with an unwelcome migratory threat, certain countries have intensified cross-border controls and fueled feelings of uncertainty and division at the EU level rather than offering safe and equitable alternatives for populations undergoing forced migration, as obligated by the treaties they have signed. In essence, the leaders of the European Union have engaged in *adiaphorisation* (Bauman, 1995/2007, p. 155), treating the migration and refugee crisis as an indifferent category of moral evaluation. In other words, during a

humanitarian emergency when rapid action and EU-wide consensus were required, some member states partially renounced the political and doctrinal principles enshrined in their treaties.

### 3.3. Welcoming the Refugees

The progression of events resulted in a reception marked by significant controversy and characterised by opposing and hostile positions, as depicted in Figure 4. This cartoon illustrates how the leaders of member states handled the process of welcoming and integrating the foreign population.

At the centre of the image, we observe a passive family, their faces displaying feelings of fear or nervousness, contrasting sharply with the rowdy and aggressive demeanour of the European leaders surrounding them, each identified by their respective flags.



Figure 4. Refugees in the EU, author: Marian Kamensky. Source: *The Cartoon Movement*, 2016, September 20, <https://bit.ly/33YWoGA>

At the heart of the political debate were the refugee families who had been lucky enough to reach European lands alive and safe. However, their arrival did not guarantee immediate protection and solidarity from the state. That implies a form of symbolic/nationalist violence in hospitality policies, suggesting that measures to ensure the safety and dignity of refugees were seen as unsustainable and were implemented unilaterally, driven by national interests or values.

The cartoon in Figure 4 highlights the portrayal of a fragmented Europe, illustrating the challenges faced by European Union members in reaching a unified plan of action regarding provisions and support for refugees. Instead of cooperating, they are depicted as competing with each other, showcasing conflicting policies and practices. The target of criticism in this depiction is the crisis of governance, revealing the shortcomings and failures of European policy during a humanitarian emergency. Nevertheless, while the cartoon captures the negotiation process among EU members, it only implicitly conveys the fears and warnings about the consequences of their approach (Kitsiou & Papadopoulou, 2021, p. 162)

Beyond any scepticism or pessimism regarding the European Union's efficacy on this matter, what this specific case underscored was primarily a genetic feature of European solidarity: a phenomenon inherently marked by cleavages along North-South and West-East divides between "those who identify as Europeans" and "not yet European" (Spohn, 2005). Additionally, cultural differences within and between nations contribute to discourses of rejection, particularly in contexts of sudden migratory movements, re-surfing nationalisms, historical grievances, and lingering attitudes with colonial and fascist undertones. However, it is noteworthy that despite the refusal of certain countries to welcome foreign populations, there have been European states and political leaders willing to shoulder the moral responsibility of opening their borders to those seeking refuge.

#### 4. Migrations and Borders: The Narrative of Fortress Europe

This narrative would be incomplete if we failed to address another, far more distressing reality, one that constitutes a cruel and shameful blemish among the myriad detrimental consequences of European policy – the segregation of immigrants in refugee camps.

A qualitative study of the Greek-Cypriot press during the refugee crisis exposes media narratives portraying Europe as inhumane, fragmented, and complicit in perpetuating suffering. These narratives primarily critique the elites but also extend to ordinary Europeans. Despite the emotional intensity stemming from the proximity to the phenomenon, these opinions also convey political messages, highlighting Europe's failure to meet fundamental expectations in safeguarding refugees. They underscore that the EU's actions contradict the foundations of the European political project, notably its commitment to human rights and the value of solidarity and point to the decline and failure of its multicultural policy (Avraamidou et al. 2019).



Figure 5. EU and Migrants: Souvenir from the EU, author: Enrico Bertuccioli. Source: *The Cartoon Movement*, 2016, May 10, <https://cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/eu-and-migrants-souvenir-ffom-eu>



Figure 5, like many others in the broader corpus of this study, depicts the EU through the metaphor of the fortress. This concept has been at the centre of the political debate between proponents of measures to restrict the influx of migrants and advocates of open borders, both for demographic reasons (an ageing population and labour shortages) and to uphold human rights for all. Cartoonists use this metaphor extensively, incorporating elements such as walls or reinforced doors adorned with stars of the flag, or stars affixed to barbed wire against a blue background in their works. The walls and the barbed wire symbolise the policies that have facilitated the establishment of refugee camps, notably in Greece, Italy, and Turkey (stemming from agreements with the EU, which designated Turkey as a buffer zone for the Eastern Mediterranean route).

Analysing Figure 5 offers another perspective. In fact, it deviates and differs from the language game used in the cartoons analysed above. Here, the cartoonist uses as a mechanism of humour transfiguring reality into something material; in other words, “he takes an expression used figuratively into his own sense” (Bergson, 1991, p. 76). The cartoonist turns the idea of fortress Europe into something humorous by materializing it into the metaphor of a souvenir.

Hence, depicting the bricks of “fortress Europe” as a souvenir for tourists suggests that the decision to open or close its borders depends on the circumstances of those who seek entry. It is open to tourists who purchase its culture, heritage, and landscapes and to whom it is worth conveying the idea of a safe Europe, off-limits to unruly and contaminating elements. It is closed to “unwelcome” people seeking survival or a better life in European territory.

The glass dome that protects what Europe has built under the sign of the European Union seems to have a double symbolic function. On the one hand, it represents a policy of restricting incoming flows, as the bricks of fortress Europe are opaque. On the other hand, it uses the artifice of transparency by means of the glass that permits people to see, know, and desire

Europe, thereby encouraging them to imagine potential free access to EU territory. Thus, everyone can look and aspire to make a life (or protect their life) in Europe, but what lies beyond the appearance of freedom and the defence of human rights is a fortress and a barrier to outsiders.

These cartoons embody a portrayal of Europe propagated by far-right political leaders, whose fundamental ideology suggests that migration poses a civilisational threat to Europe. In addition to proposing operational policies aimed at controlling and monitoring state borders, they dominate public, political, and media discourse by delineating symbolic borders. These boundaries contribute to “the tendency to halt and renounce moral responsibility for others at the border drawn between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Bauman, 2016, p. 83). In this sense, the fortification of Europe’s borders represents the construction of the frontier beyond which “the remnants” are expelled or contained – “the people left out of our sight, concern and conscience” (Bauman, 2016, p. 90).

## **5. Concluding Remarks**

Because the refugee crisis is a complex, multidimensional, and antagonistic phenomenon, the language of the cartoon is socially advantageous: while simplifying and typifying the message (characters and scenery; line and colour), it complexifies the meaning by having multiple readings, polysemy, and antinomies. Above all, it plays with the social and political references that are collectively shared, deconstructing and critiquing them at the same time. Suspended between reality(ies) and its representation, between cognition and emotion, political cartoons can highlight the (di)visions and inconsistencies in national and European governance. Also, because they are semantically ductile, they can help people better understand the refugee crisis by presenting it in an engaging and thought-provoking way.

Most of the cartoons analysed show the dialectic of order and disorder (Balandier, 1992/1999). The representational game they play shows the drama experienced by those seeking refuge and protection and reveals the



practices of the institutions and powers involved. The language game that stands out is the “inversion” (Bergson, 1991, p. 64) between what is central and what is peripheral in the dramatic situation. A close analysis reveals that the refugees are at the centre of the conflict, as can be clearly seen in Figures 2 and 4, but it is Europe that is the object of the humorous criticism, the protagonist of the dramatic play. The figures representing it are always either in the foreground (Figure 1) or in an attitude of superiority (Figure 3), while in the analysed corpus refugees are depicted both as victims of political uncertainty or anomie within European institutions and as a perceived threat to a supposed European social order and cultural cohesion. Above all, refugees are represented in the analysed scenarios as diminutive and distant figures, or only implicitly (Figure 5). In essence, the satire targets are not the refugees themselves but the situations to which refugees are subjected.

Given this analytical framework, what is the meaning and function expressed in the cartoons analysed? From the point of view of function, the cartoonists have applied the technique of transposition/inversion, that is, they have mostly developed a counterintuitive ingenuity in their approach to situations, “transposing the natural expression of an idea into another tone” (Bergson, 1991, p. 80). Figures 2 and 4 are good examples of this, as they show that the turbulence is caused not by the refugees, but by the dysfunctionality of European leaders and their inability to reach a consensus on migration policy. In a way, they act like counterarguments to the hegemonic propaganda of the European government and the European institutions.

In terms of the meanings that emerge from the analysis, we emphasize *repetition* on the one hand, and *tension* on the other – what Bergson called “the devil of a spring”. In this type of mechanism, “there are usually two concepts present, a compressed feeling that stretches like a spring, and an idea that takes pleasure in compressing the feeling again” (Bergson, 1991, p. 53). For the most part, the language game in the cartoons is set up by repeatedly contrasting immigrants/refugees with rulers/Europeans, and by presenting scenarios that reveal an inversion and disproportion between causes (dysfunctionality of EU institutions) and effects (migration crisis).

In conclusion, the images analysed suggest a profoundly negative portrayal of Europe's political management of migratory influxes and its response to the humanitarian predicament of refugees. In addition to illustrating moments of deadlock and lack of consensus at the European level, the cartoons paint a comprehensive picture of a fragmented and polarised Europe governed by dysfunctional power dynamics. This big picture highlights Europe's failure to address both the needs of its member states amidst the crisis and the plight of refugees. In essence, the surge of refugees has sparked a phenomenon that has unsettled the Union, unveiling a crisis of legitimacy as posited by Michael Collyer and Russell King. This crisis stems from a pervasive perception that state institutions have faltered both in normative principles and operational efficacy. As such, the "refugee crisis" did not arise directly from the migratory influxes but rather from a pattern of repeated failures by the member states of the European Union to provide an effective response (Collyer & King, 2016).

Moreover, the influx of refugees exposed the European Union to antinomies between its values and principles and *realpolitik* practices. At the heart of the crisis seemed to be the core value of solidarity and respect for human rights. Through their visual narratives, cartoonists imply a fractured sense of solidarity that has permeated the actions of political stakeholders within the European Union, prompting a reflective interpretation that governmental discord stems not from the refugees themselves but is aggravated by the unilateral political decisions of EU countries. Despite refugees consistently being the focal point of contention among European leaders, the establishment of political measures to resolve their dire situation, particularly the equitable distribution of responsibility for reception among all member states, has remained peripheral, lacking a unified vision.

Overall, the cartoonists adopted non-essentialist perspectives on European identity. Their depictions portrayed Europe as a vulnerable geopolitical entity and the European Union as comprised of structurally deficient democratic institutions and internal cleavages in the leadership of the Union's destinies. The refugee crisis thus prompted Europe to grapple with its

self-representation of identity (Fotou, 2021), not only based on its moral matrix rooted in values like human rights, solidarity, and equality but also with its ghosts from the past. Through a deeper analysis, the collection of cartoons concerning Europe and the European Union shed light on latent racist and xenophobic attitudes stemming from a colonial and fascist past. These depictions reveal remnants of a colonial and Eurocentric mindset that still linger within its cosmopolitan identity, challenging Europe to address these issues to effectively confront the intercultural challenges and global risks of late modernity.

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# **POROUS BORDER: THE INTERSEMIOSIS IN EFE DE FROY'S VISUAL REMIX**

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**Abstract:** The aim of this essay is to illustrate the meaning-making process of Froy's Efe remix in three visual texts: *Sembremos maíz*, *Les Fils de l'Internet* y *Él los amaba aun así ellos se revelaron*, all three from 2018. To reach it, I will take intersemiosis from the cultural semiotic perspective of Yuri Lotman; of whom I will present the notion of the semiosphere and, semiotic border. Later, it will analyze the mentioned visual texts employing Eduardo Navas' categories: implementation, contextualization, and legitimation. These three could be synthesized with respect to the intersemiotic process: what happens outside the semiotic border, in the border space, and, inside the border. In the visual remix, the intersemiotic process points to different problems experienced in Mexican society: the transgenic corn, the presidential legacy and the cultural stagnation. Efe de Froy expresses his critical stance using urban art and the entertainment of remixes.

**Keywords:** intersemiosis; remix; recycling; Mexican art; semiosphere; Efe de Froy; transculture.

## **1. Introduction**

The visual remix can be traced back to the Dadaists, such as Hana Höch, who pioneered the hybridization of images. This approach was subsequently adopted

by pop artists, including Barbara Kruger, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg and the Parisian graffiti. Currently, cut, past and mix are becoming less exclusive to the domain of art. The appropriation of visual goods by digital post-editing is a common practice. The motivation behind this activity is not solely the amusement of mixing images, substituting, or eliminating; rather, it is the alteration of the image's meaning to acquire a new one. The remix reveals the author's interpretation of their immediate cultural reality, which may serve to reaffirm social roles (Klien-Thomas, 2021), express feminist protest (Chidgey, 2008), utilize it in public life (Sobande, 2019), renegotiate reality (Mielczarek, 2018), address health issues (Brady, 2022), to name a few.

The practice of remix in street art employs a multitude of techniques, including stencil, graffiti, plaster casts, and whitewash. The goal of street art, as described by Blek Le Rat (2017), is "to fill the emptiness of this terrible world, to cover public space with pictures that people going to work can enjoy." Hansky is a well-known urban artist who employs the visual remix. He replaces the face of Banksy's rat with the face of Tom Hanks, an American actor, from whose fusion of names derives his signature. In Mexico, the visual remix is worked by some painters and graphic artists, such as: Yescka Art, Arturo Arvizu, José Cacho, Paola Capón, Yurén Esparza, Regina Jean, and Barry Wolfryd. In addition to Efe de Froy, the visual remix represents a hallmark of his artistic production.

Efe de Froy is the signature of Froylán Padilla Aragón, a visual artist from Oaxaca, Mexico. Froy's style is often associated with pop art and tropicalism, although these categorizations are not entirely accurate. Unlike traditional pop art, which typically involves the modification, reclamation, or rehabilitation of pre-existing images, Froy's work involves the juxtaposition and recombination of two distinct images.

Tropicalism is a fusion of Latin American traits and foreign culture. In Froy's work, it is unclear whether tropicalization is an adjective or a trope. In the former, American images are adapted to a tropical setting, as

seen in *Say hello to my little friend*, 2018. In the latter, American images are replaced by Mexican ones, as seen in *El alfarero del amor*, 2018. This case moves away from tropicalization because the characters in *El alfarero del amor* are Americanized.

In any case, it would be preferable to refer to Froy's style as a transculturation of images. Transculturation produces hybrid artifacts that are created in a border space, where internal cultural material adapts, adopts, and appropriates external cultural material. This hybrid process has produced several products, including the remix. The text then asks how the process of hybridization of images occurs in Efe de Froy's remix, and why does he use it.

Efe de Froy utilizes remixes in visual texts such as *Sembremos maíz*<sup>1</sup>, *Les Fils de l'Internet*<sup>2</sup>, and *Él los amaba aun así ellos se revelaron*<sup>3</sup> from 2018 to establish an intercultural dialogue with the purpose of effecting self-recognition within Mexican culture.

The purpose of this essay is to illustrate, through the analysis of visual remixes, the process of intersemiotic meaning creation in the remix. To achieve this, the remix will be approached as the result of an intersemiotic process in which referents are recombined and their meanings are redefined. The proposed categories by Eduardo Navas, namely implementation, contextualization, and legitimization, will be explained as methodological guidelines. Efe de Froy's visual texts will then be analyzed in the light of intersemiosis and the aforementioned categories. Finally, this essay will draw conclusions.

## 2. The Remix and the intersemiosis

The remix is the result of an intersemiotic process. It takes place at the border of a semiotic space. A semiotic process is a process of signification.

1. <https://bit.ly/2UWli4w>

2. <https://bit.ly/3nVJtgO>

3. <https://bit.ly/2J7vcO4>

To understand where it comes from, it is necessary to understand the semiosphere and the border and how they are related. The semiosphere is a space in which meanings circulate and is formed by a set of interconnected structures, according to Yuri Lotman (1996). The visual semiosphere consists of structures like styles, techniques and genres, each functioning as semiotic space. The interaction between these structures gives rise to a field of meaning that is known as the semiosphere. This field is characterized by the dynamic interplay between its structures and the transactions that occur at its boundaries.

The border separates the internal and external material of the semiosphere, each of which has a different code. The border serves as a contact space between the external and the internal, allowing translation mechanisms to encode external material into the internal and enter the semiosphere. This translation is generated by descriptors, which are cultural traits that translate external concepts into internal language. The descriptors serve to maintain the similarity of the internal cultural material to the semiotic space and to change the practice using the same models that maintain the internal cultural practice. They also exist as a cultural idea of self-consciousness that is separate from the culture. At the border, the external material can be displaced according to its resonance within the semiotic space.

Remix is a process of recombination (Navas, 2017) that begins with the selection of pre-existing internal cultural references or the mixing of internal and external references. Modifications are made to internal-external material through additions, subtractions, or other strategies to describe external elements with an internal code. The remix combines fragments or modules from different referents with asymmetrical coding. The coding not only refers to their location outside the semiosphere but also to their modes and modalities. Navas explains that remixing involves the decontextualization of a module from its original context (2012, p. 111; 2018, p. 53). It should be noted that decontextualization refers to the technique of extracting a part of the whole, but this does not necessarily make the module autonomous.

Even in a remix, the module retains part of its original meaning from its previous context. It is for this reason that the term “module” is used instead of “fragment”.

The modules of the remix are held together by the tension between the asymmetry and the dialog of the material. The asymmetry, whether internal or external, refers to all the irregularities of the material. The dialogical aspect makes it possible for the alignment to be translated. The relationship between the internal and external asymmetries forms the basis of meaning (Lotman, 1996, p. 21).

For example, in *El alfarero del amor*<sup>4</sup> (Figure 5), the external material is the film *Ghost*, which is performed with the Mexican actors María Félix and Jorge Negrete within a Moore-Swayze framework. On another level of remix, the image of the lovers in the film is itself the product of one or more recombinations. In *El alfarero...* the source reference is also a recombination of the image of the lovers, which has probably been present since Eros and Psyche. In a *mise en abyme*, the connections between assemblages and modules in an intersemiotic process leads to a complex network of meanings and reinterpretations, which are always based on an already existing visual text. Irvine calls this Remix+ (2014, pp. 26, 27), where the remix is always the result of combining and recombining pre-existing references. Everything that exists can be considered a deep remix, since nothing comes from *creatio ex nihilo*.

The concept of remixing allows for cultural self-identification through selection and appropriation; according to Lotman (1996), culture creates an “outsider” who encodes the world and texts in a different way. In the example above, despite the asymmetry between: Moore and Felix; film and photo, the dialogue is maintained through the similarity of the loss of love and the tension of femininity. The reflexive remix is a type of remix that involves the reassembly of modules to create an ‘ideological encausment’

4. <https://bit.ly/3Us6OJ8>

(Navas, 2018, p.63) and self-recognition. Other remix producers manifest this consciousness by intertwining referents to express their ideas, such as Efe de Froy.

It is important to note that there are different types of remixes: extension, selection, reflection, and regeneration (Navas, 2017). This classification is based on the extent to which the remix is detached from its source references, resulting in independence. It is determined by the combination of recognizable references and the producer's unique reinterpretation of them

### **3. Observing the remix**

In his 2018 work, Navas identifies three phases in the remix process: implementation, contextualization, and legitimation (p. 195). These correspond to the intersemiotic process: what happens outside the semiotic border, in the border space, and within the border. Figure 1 (see Iconography) illustrates the relationship between these elements with a plasma membrane. The oval shape represents the descriptors that capture, translate, transform, and input external material.

**Implementation:** The producer of the remix selects and organizes the modules to be transformed. The goal is to create a new reference based on the recognition of the modules. The modules are manipulated in a way that allows the viewer to understand how the new text is being re-signified. The recognition of the modules is achieved through cultural citation and spectacular aura. Cultural citation refers to the recycling of styles, ideas, concepts, and aesthetics. The meaning of the spectacular aura is derived from its denotation. The referent that carries the module is recognizable due to its high level of exhibition in a cultural group (Navas, 2012, p.65). The implementation pairs with Lotman's cultural semiotics by bringing the selection of internal and external material closer to the semiosphere.

Contextualization refers to the process of recombining modular media or the property of modular complexity. The remix is composed of modules that were extracted from different sources and combined with others. The

recognition of the referents of the modules is crucial for the viewer to fully understand the remix text, otherwise there is a risk that it could be interpreted as a completely new text, such as people dressed as monkeys holding a man (Figure 2).

But the continuous manipulation of the material affects the primary reference, deforming the original reference, making the original reference exist only on the ideological level, or making the original reference disappear. In the first case, the text that is kept alive, as Gunkel writes, has neither an origin nor an end (2016, p.95), it is constantly in flux and is subject to modifications in its transit in the semiosphere and from border to border. In this sense, one does not speak of the destruction of the reference, but of the understanding of how the recycled material can be progressive and constructive (Navas, 2012, p.169), because through it one can understand the sources underlying the feeling, thinking and acting of a society.

In the second case, the referent ceases to exist and remains at an ideological level as a result of the modifications. This is the basis of Müller's (2010) historiographic proposal of intermediality, in which he demands to trace an image and how it has evolved throughout history through its mutations by different societies, but preserves its abstract meaning.

In the third case, the proliferation of versionism poses a threat to the integrity of the source text. The sheer number of versions may lead to the obscurity of the original source, with its various appropriations becoming the dominant force, to the extent that the text becomes a baudrillardian simulacrum of itself, in which the versions replace the source referent until it is lost. Gunkel (2016) elucidates this phenomenon from the perspective of Platonic and Deluzian thought. The first is that which pits the original against the copy and struggles to maintain a difference. The second is where there is no hierarchy between the original and the copy; rather, it seeks versionism. As stated by Gunkel (2016), "The variations, in other words, do not come from without, but express differential mechanism which belong to the essence and origin of what is repeated" (p.109). Thus, when the

referents are not recognizable, the remix loses its ability to communicate effectively. Navas refers to this as a physical and textual collapse of the intertextual space (2012, p.92). This is not an intersemiotic collapse, the loss in this case is of the relationship, not the process of signification, which continues without the source reference.

Contextualization refers to the recombination of external and internal material, descriptors, and relationships that enable a dialogue within the border space.

Legitimation is also a factor. Legitimation refers to the negotiation between the producer and the culture in which the remix is introduced. It is the ideological aspect of the assembly of referents and is related to cultural self-recognition.

#### **4. The intersemiosis in visual texts**

##### **4.1. *Él los amaba aun así ellos se revelaron (He loved them, yet they revealed)* (Figure 2)**

Implementation. The module of the still image from the movie *Planet of the Apes* (1968) is used as the source referent. The face of George Tylor has been replaced by that of Francisco Toledo, a Mexican painter. Additionally, monkey paintings have been added to the background wall and a tattoo has been added to Tylor's chest.

The selection is based on the spectacular aura of the model outcast leader personified by Charlton Heston. The image depicts Tylor, who has been captured by apes and subsequently stands as a defender of humanity in the film. Above the image is the face of Francisco Toledo, a painter, sculptor, and engraver from Oaxaca who founded the Patronato ProDefensa del Patrimonio Cultural y Natural del Estado de Oaxaca (ProOax).

Contextualization. The visual modality of the photogram enters the border and moves spatially from video to remix. Toledo's face is embedded along with the monkeys in the source reference, shifting temporally in a



regression. The monkeys and Tylor's function as the fighter of his lineage are the dialogic elements in this remix.

The remix employs a regression that uses the allegory of the title to show a contradiction of principles within the semiosphere. We will start by discussing the descriptors that relate to the intersemiotic process. Toledo's role shifts from that of an active man to a subjugated one, and his creation becomes his executioners. This change of perspective is illustrated through the monkeys that serve as descriptors. The monkeys bring the external source referent closer to the internal source referent of the monkeys painted by Toledo. In the artist's work, monkeys symbolize the untamed culture of Oaxaca, which is closely tied to the artist's land and heritage. Toledo's commitment to preserving indigenous culture is evident in his art. As he stated, I realized that I had to help that world that was disappearing, like the language, the clothing, and the customs are vanishing throughout Mexico "personal translation"<sup>5</sup> (González, 2017). Toledo's mission to protect "México profundo", as described by Bonfil Batalla, is seen as rebellious. The remix title plays with the Spanish word "revelar" that means "to show up" and rebelar, that means "to fight against". So, the monkeys that Toledo idolized are now show up as his captors, they fight now against his father. This word play can be interpreted in two ways: either the people of deep Oaxaca have taken control of Toledo to the point where he only represents them in his work, or this culture has rebelled against being confined to its traditional version. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), Oaxaca has experienced a shift in its demographics, with 49% of its localities being urban and 51% being rural (2020, p. 21). This indicates a significant increase in urban development, which was previously dominated by rural areas. Additionally, INEGI reported that Oaxaca is the fourth state with the highest migration flow to the United States of America (p. 40). This suggests that the annual return of migrants has an impact on the culture of the place, leading to changes in language, clothing, customs, and other aspects.

5. "Fue cuando entendí que había que ayudar a que ese mundo que se estaba yendo perdurara un poco más, como la lengua, la ropa, las costumbres, que están desapareciendo en todo México".

The reference to monkeys as captors is linked to the title of this derivative remix, which maintains intertextuality with the trilogy of the saga it represents. The frame belongs to the first installment of *Planet of the Apes*, while the title refers to *Escape from the Planet of the Apes* and *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes*. In these films, Armando raises the ape Caesar as his son, who later leads the fight against humans. The frame is not detached from its context as a module of the film franchise. The remix is an allegory in which Toledo represents the dedication to keep Oaxacan roots alive through Tylor's body.

Legitimization. The monkeys depicted on the walls of the remix appear to come to life in the captor monkeys, transforming from a cave painting into a real, living culture that stands up against its creator. The wall of the cave represents the art of Toledo where confined Oaxaca. In his cave painting, in his world art, painters as Efe de Froy get out of the painting like the apes, to recover another Mexico, not the mythical but the media-based one. Artist, producers similar to Efe de Froy, use North American and European productions as references with a spectacular aura. Through them, they present a different reality that contradicts the one Toledo defended. Instead, they negate it by looking towards the center of the Republic, with which Oaxaca has historically been in conflict, and outwards in search of models.

The visual remix allows for self-discovery, but it also highlights the failure of trying to resist cultural change. For Toledo, culture was not a commodity that he profited from in his work. Instead, he found it to be the leitmotif of his work as an artist. His production reflects a criticism of violence and the disappeared, while also creating opportunities for young people in Oaxaca. It is possible that those who have benefited from Toledo's work will not continue with his artistic style and will seek inspiration from external sources. The traditional culture, once deified, can subvert the ideals of its benefactor.

#### **4.2. *Le Fils de l'Internet* (Figure 3)**

Implementation. This artwork is a remix of René Magritte's painting *Le Fils de l'homme* (1964) and features the face of Enrique Peña Nieto, former

President of Mexico (2012-2018). The green apple in the original painting has been replaced with a red spot, and new elements have been added, including an airplane in the upper right quadrant and the Mexican presidential sash on the tie.

Magritte's painting *Le fils de l'homme* is well-known among fans of 20th century art. Peña has been a prominent figure in Mexican politics for the past decade, with his presidency heavily relying on the marketing of his image and the use of governmental advertisements such as "Mover a México". The red spot came from a meme of the president's attempt to make a heart with his hands at the level of his face, during Mexico's independence ceremony in 2018. This meme is highly recognizable.

Contextualization. Magritte's painting enters the border while maintaining its visual modality. Peña's meme is temporally displaced in relation to the painting. There is asymmetry between the two texts due to the modifications and references; meanwhile, the crossover is originated by the position in which they meet. The adaptation of Magritte's painting resizes Peña's mockery.

The visual elements used as descriptors are the clothing, face, stain, and the addition of the sash and airplane. The traditional black and white attire, once common in the past, is now worn by public officials. The subject's identity is represented by the recognizable stain on their face. The inclusion of the presidential sash reinforces Peña's identity. Froy utilizes the presentation/representation technique, typically used by Magritte, to the Mexican visual semiosphere by subverting the message of the original image.

The airplane presents Peña in two moments. Firstly, leaving Mexico at the end of his term, the gray background suggests that a storm is brewing in the nation's life. Secondly, the airplane remembers a statement made by the president on a plane, where he incorrectly estimated the time left before landing for a visit to Oaxaca, "one minute left, no, less, five"<sup>6</sup>. The remix

6. "falta un minuto, no, menos, cinco".

includes all of the errors made by Peña during his six-year term, from the first to the last. The use of the referent source serves to visually represent a presidential term marked by mistakes, missteps, and political scandals that led to widespread public distrust. These include the Monex case, the Higa Group, the White House scandal, the Panama Papers, the master swindle, and many others. Mexico finds itself in a complex situation, with corruption, embezzlement, and impunity serving as the backdrop for the remix.

Legitimization. The title of the referent's allegory places the remix in one of its versions. Peña has been considered the result of an image fabricated and sustained by the media. He was labeled as an attractive and popular man, but without a defined political discourse (Miroff and Booth, 2012), which is appropriate for a society accustomed to soap operas that make them laugh and cry (Aguayo, 2015, p. 33). The government's advertising campaign failed to revive Peña's image and popularity.

The reference to Magritte's painting is subverted, with Peña taking center stage. He is portrayed as the internet's darling, with a large following, but his flaws are hard to ignore. His image is ubiquitous across multiple platforms, but it does not change the disaster Mexican reality.

#### **4.3. *Sembremos maíz (Let's sow corn)* (Figure 4)**

Implementation. The remix is situated outside a traditional restaurant in Oaxaca. The external material consists of a screenshot from the video that made Nusret Gökçe famous. The internal material is a photograph of a Mexican revolutionary leader, Emiliano Zapata. Zapata's face is superimposed, and a variety of corn kernels replacing the grains of salt.

Both references have a spectacular aura. The video of the reference source has been viewed over 10 million times (Molinero, 2018), which is why Nurset, and his restaurants gained fame. The screenshot of the video became a meme with the nickname of the chef, "Salt Bea". Froy's remix adds to the list of the chef's meme versions.

Emiliano Zapata was one of the leaders of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1919). He has been obscured by time and is revered for his role in the peasant struggle. He is also known for being associated with the pro-indigenous movement against globalization, the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation). Zapata's image has not been altered. In fact, Froy was one of the first to reinvigorate it through a combination with the meme of Salt Bae, for which he received negative criticism (Cruz, 2018). But in 2019, Fabián Chaírez provoked outrage by depicting Zapata in a feminine manner and wearing sneakers.

Contextualization. The remix is created by intersecting space-time displacement. Gökçe's image is moved from the digital realm to a street in Oaxaca, while Zapata is moved from the early 20th century to the 21st century. The process of semiotization originates from visual modality descriptors and added elements. Gökçe has a dark complexion and is wearing white clothing. He also has hair on his upper lip. These physical characteristics are associated with the revolutionary aura. The substitution of salt for corn kernels is a symbol of the struggle against transgenic corn. This substitution reactivates the internal material of the agrarian struggle, which is represented by Zapata and aims to preserve the diversity of corn. The struggle for the Mexican countryside persists and is given new meaning through Gökçe's use of the national context.

The visual exchange and recombination provide an understanding of a syllogism that forms the basis of this remix. If salt is to meat what corn is to Mexico, then Gökçe is to Salt Bae what Zapata is to corn (in a general sense). Once inside the border, Zapata's image dominates the source reference in which it is incorporated and claims autonomy, making it a reflexive remix. The autonomy is implied, as the caption at the bottom of the remix reads "#SinMaizNoHayPais". This is a nod that connects the digital world of X (formerly Twitter) with the physical world of the street and incorporates Froy's remix into a collection of texts bearing the same name. The remix is part of a transmedia project *Sin maíz no hay país* (Without corn there is no country), that spreads its ideas through various intersemiotic texts.

Legitimization. The remix discusses the challenges encountered by the Mexican countryside. *Sin maíz no hay país* is a collective that emerged in 2003 with the aim of safeguarding the 64 species of native Mexican corn from genetically modified corn. It is widely recognized that corn production has been in crisis since the 1980s. To meet the demand and mitigate the crisis, one solution was to use genetically modified corn, which is more resistant to pests and pesticides. In 2005, the government passed the Genetically Modified Organisms Biosafety Act, also known as the Monsanto Act, which allowed for experimental crops despite being stopped. According to the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) report, transgenic crops were contaminating native corn (Sanchez, 2019; Dirección General de Comunicación Social, 2017). The main issue is not the transgenic itself, but rather its implications for the countryside. These include the dominance of transnational corporations over the land, economic control over corn producers, exclusive rights for the seed-selling company, and the fact that transgenic seeds do not produce more seeds. All of these factors contribute to the exploitation of peasants and the rise of transnational corporations as the new landowners, reminiscent of the Porfirian age.

The decline of the Mexican countryside is a debated topic. On one hand, there is pressure on Mexico to align with the use of transgenics due to its ratification of the TMEC. On the other hand, agricultural communities are experiencing an abrupt change marked by a lack of economic support and a transformation of their society. As Ortega (2003, p. 153) notes, this erosion is causing constant migration in search of a better quality of life. Oaxaca is a state that has caught the attention of transnational corporations. A remix was strategically placed at the entrance of a restaurant serving traditional food. The menu includes corn-based dishes such as tlayudas, ticucos, chilatoles, and enmoladas.

Zapata's motto was: "The land belongs to those who work it." The land may soon be taken over by corporations such as Bayer, Dow, DuPont, and Syngenta. Zapata and the field in the hands of the Mexican will remain in the collective imagination to remind us of the significance of corn in our

culture. However, this may only serve as a facade that benefits the true owners of the mythical corn and harms the Mesoamericans who are made of it, as the myth goes.

## **5. By way of conclusion**

According to Frederich Jameson, postmodernity is a spatial culture that organizes the past and future into a coherent experience through heterogeneous and random “collections of fragments” (1991, p. 61). The visual remix exemplifies this culture as it is a hybrid text resulting from an intersemiotic process. Intersemiosis involves the appropriation of external material to internal material through descriptors. Descriptors identify equivalent elements between the external and internal referents and adapt them to make them understandable within the culture.

Froy’s Efe remix is an example of visual intersemiosis that recombines external visual references and reinterprets it internally while maintaining the asymmetry between the external and internal elements. The source referents coexist in the same visual space, creating a tension that adds depth to the work. The analyzed remixes of Efe de Froy are reflexive versions that use the context of the external source reference to subvert its meaning and link it to the problems experienced within the border. The first remix uses the equivalence of Tylor’s face for Toledo, the second uses the apple for a stain, and the third uses salt for the importance of corn.

Efe de Froy employs the spectacular aura and cultural references of his generation. However, for a remix to be effective, the audience must be able to recognize the references at first glance, otherwise the message can slow down and become a private joke. Since Efe de Froy’s remixes are displayed in public spaces, it is possible that passers-by or followers who do not recognize the recombination of modules may find it amusing without fully understanding the message.

The visual remix is a playful exploration of modules that creates a network of meanings for the viewer. The recombination of modules is driven by a

proposal or idea expressed in the remix. In this analysis, Efe de Froy uses the remix to argue that art should not be limited by tradition, to acknowledge the failure of a six-year term, and to defend the importance of corn. Froy's intersemiotic approach enables the identification of the issues faced by Mexican society.

The combination of contrasting elements in the visual remix, such as modules that convey a complete message, playful imagery that addresses serious themes, and the alien that represents something unique, creates a genre that is not far from what Horatio called *utile dulci*.

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## Iconography

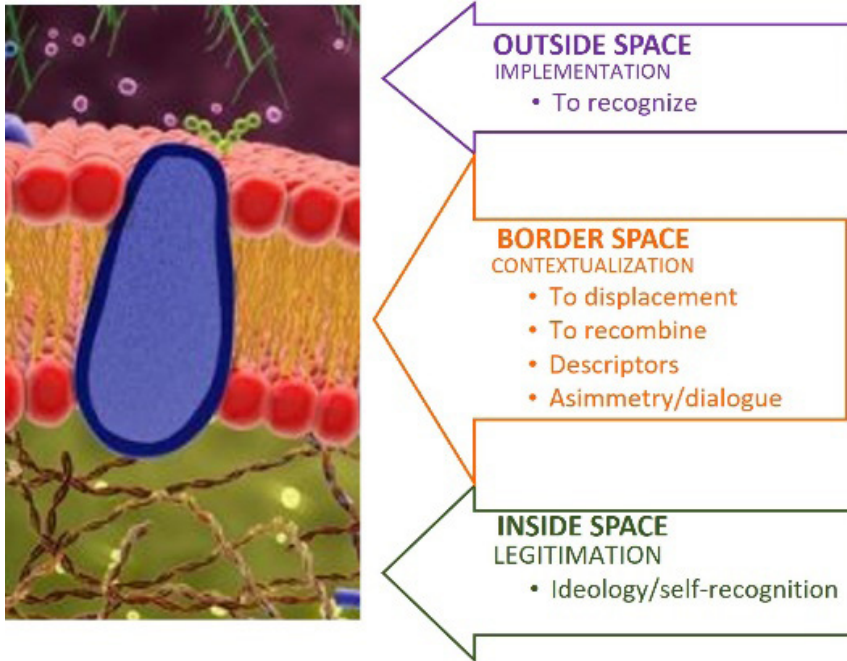


Figure 1. *Image of analysis guidelines.* Own elaboration. Image of membrane taken from Enciclopedia Concepto, Etecé, <https://bit.ly/3rHHVZT>.

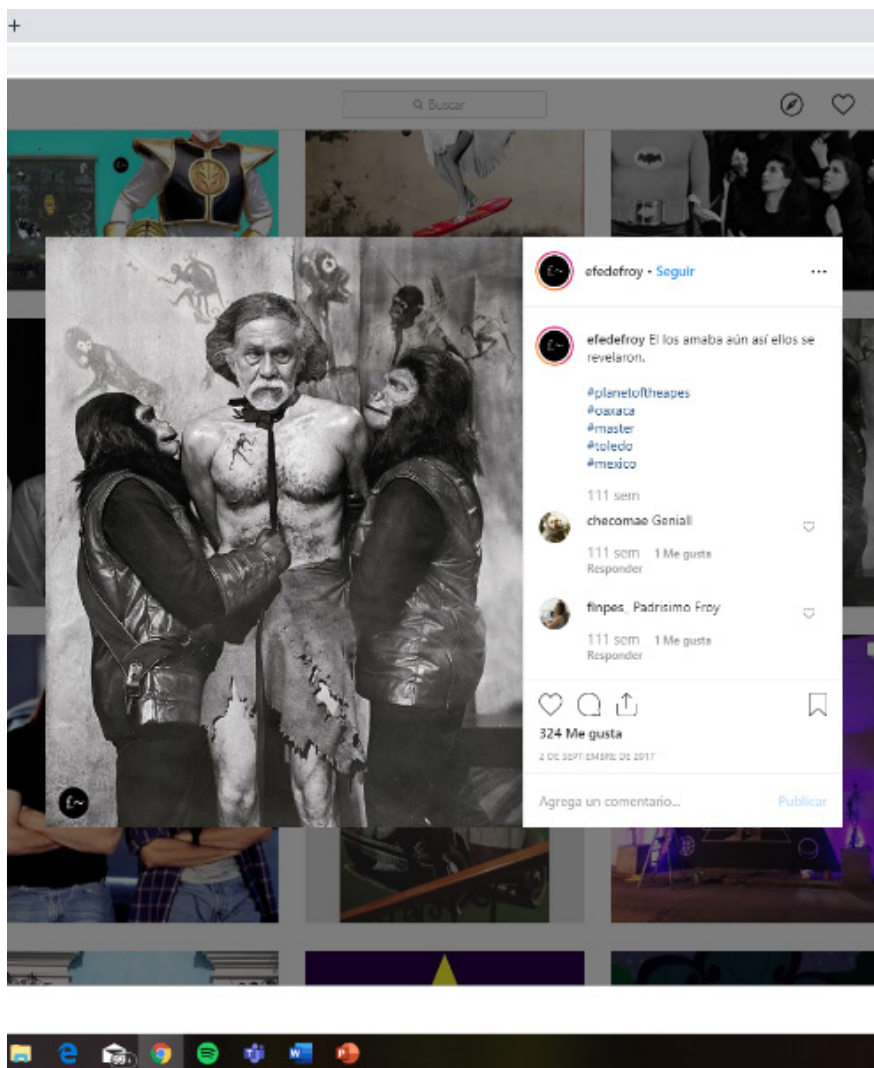


Figure 2. *Efe de Froy*. (2018). Él los amaba aún así ellos se revelaron. Source: @efedfroy <https://bit.ly/2J7vcO4>

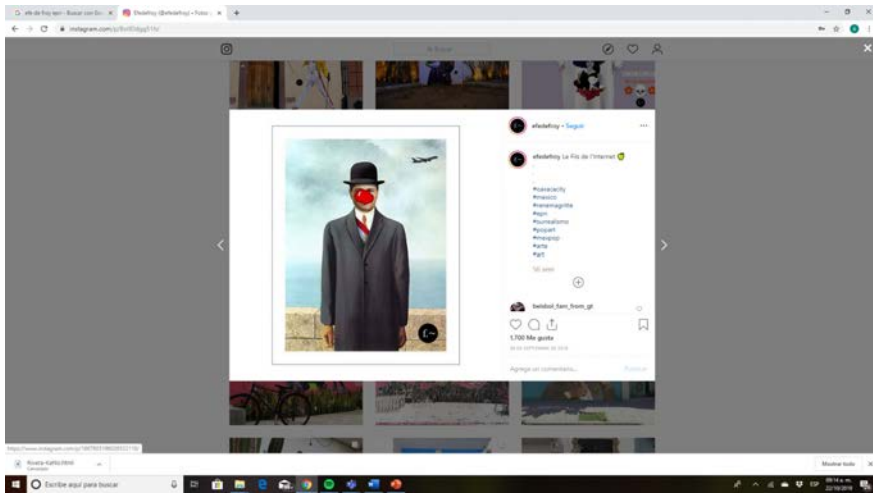


Figure 3. *Efe de Froy*. (2018). Le Fils de l'Internet. Source : @efedfroy <https://bit.ly/3nVJtg0>

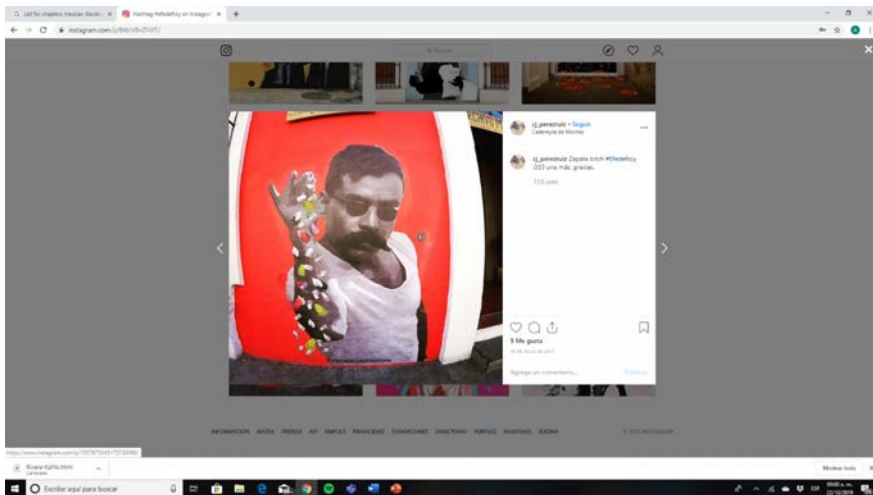


Figure 4. *Efe de Froy*. (2018). Sembremos maíz. Source : @efedfroy <https://bit.ly/2UWli4w>



Figure 5. *Efe de Froy*. (2018). *El alfarero del amor*. Source: @efedefroy <https://bit.ly/3Us6OJ8>

### **Author's Biography**

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Part II

# LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND IDENTITY





## **DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF TELANGANA ACCENT IN TELUGU MOVIES**

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**Abstract:** This paper focused on how language and visual elements in films contribute to intercultural communication based on the Telangana accent. The main aim of this paper is to analyze the use of language in dialogues with all the aspects like social, cultural, and hierarchy of the society. How do characters express cultural identities through accents, dialects, and language variations? Consider the impact of linguistic choices on character development and audience perception. How do these movies influence the audience with that Telangana accent? Is there any mismatch in the accent? In this paper, the researcher analyzed six Telugu movies, which have Telangana accents by using the discourse analysis method. Here, is a brief note about each movie. Those are 1. Pelli Choopulu: This film incorporates the Telangana accent in a few characters, contributing to the authenticity of the urban setting. While the main focus is on a romantic storyline, the use of the accent adds a local flavor to the narrative. 2. Fidaa: Fidaa skilfully weaves the Telangana accent into its narrative, especially in characters from rural backgrounds. The film captures the cultural nuances and linguistic diversity of the Telangana region, enhancing the overall storytelling experience. 3. Rangasthalam: While primarily it's in a rural setting. It includes characters with authentic Telangana accents, contributing

to the film's realism. The use of the accent adds depth to the characters and reinforces the regional authenticity of the storyline. 4. Kancharapalem: This independent film stands out for its genuine portrayal of life in the Kancharapalem neighborhood. Characters in the movie speak with authentic Telangana accents, effectively capturing the essence of the local culture and community. 5. Arjun Reddy: "Arjun Reddy" features characters with distinct Telangana accents, adding a touch of realism to the narrative. The film's focus on the protagonist's journey is complemented by the authentic linguistic representation of the region. 6. Gaddalakonda Ganesh: Formerly titled "Valmiki," this film includes characters speaking with Telangana accents, contributing to the film's portrayal of social issues. The use of the accent helps in creating a more immersive and genuine cinematic experience. The usage of the Telangana accent in films adds a layer of authenticity to the storytelling, providing a nuanced and realistic portrayal of the region's cultural and linguistic diversity. By using the Telangana accent, these movies connected to the audience very deeply. Most of the movies use a completely Telangana accent, for example, in the Fidaa movie, every character is in a Telangana accent, which the audience is attracted towards that movie and makes a blockbuster. After this movie, many Telangana youths used this accent in real-world situations. Nowadays, depending on the dominant language, different contexts, and proficiency, the society chooses their language usage. In the Pellichoopulu movie, the characters had Telangana accents but they didn't fulfill that accent in the movie. While watching the movie, we can understand that there is a mismatch in the dialogue delivery. The same situation in the Rangasthalam movie also, the characters have Telangana accents, but they didn't justify that. In those cases, the moviemakers tried to create an impact on the audience but it's not showing completely due to a mismatch in accent.

**Keywords:** Discourse analysis, Accent, Telangana accent, Telugu movies.

## 1. Introduction

Discourse analysis (DA) threads methodically weave a complex world of meaning beneath the surface of seemingly simple phrases. This interdisciplinary approach goes beyond single phrases to explore the core of how language influences and reflects our cultural norms, power relations, and social interactions. DA is not satisfied with breaking down single words or sentences; rather, it embraces the dynamic flow of meaning seen in spoken and written texts as a whole. It explores the complex processes that weave phrases together to form a cohesive conceptual fabric. The foundation of this analysis is coherence and cohesion, or the harmonious weaving together of ideas and words. However, DA goes beyond simple grammar, recognizing that shared information and context play a vital role in influencing how we understand what we read or hear.

This area of study benefits greatly from diversity and provides a wide range of methodologies, each of which throws light on a distinct aspect of communication. The term Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) refers to a set of methods by which scholars, including socio-environmental [S-E] scholars, can examine texts and cultural artifacts critically in order to identify underlying meanings and extract the broader cultural narratives that these meanings serve to sustain. Some people are motivated by social justice, such as CDA proponents. They uncover the underlying motives woven into our daily conversation and demonstrate how language can maintain power disparities and exclude particular groups. Some people, such as conversation analysts, find beauty in the finer points of casual conversation, painstakingly analyzing topic changes, turn-taking, and the delicate ballet of repair mechanisms that maintain a steady flow. Others, such as narrative analysts, explore the themes, structure, and ways that stories influence our perceptions of the world and ourselves in order to unleash the power of stories. Lastly, multimodal analysts remind us that meaning is constructed through a symphony of verbal and nonverbal cues in communication, including gestures, expressions, and sights. This dynamic field is proud of its plethora of trailblazing voices.

Through his work on CDA, Norman Fairclough brought attention to the subtle ways that language can perpetuate social injustices. Deborah Tannen raised awareness of the disparities between men's and women's language usage in order to highlight gender variations in communication. Teun A. Van Dijk revealed how ideology quietly seeps into writings and conversations by creating a paradigm of critical social discourse analysis. The systemic functional linguistics framework developed by Michael Halliday offered a strong set of tools for analyzing the various roles that language plays in conversation. However, DA's influence goes well beyond academic boundaries. It enables us to become astute information consumers by teaching us to analyze political speeches and media messages critically in order to spot potential biases and covert objectives. It facilitates improved communication in the workplace by illuminating the ways in which language choices affect team dynamics and decision-making. And most importantly, it promotes social justice by equipping us to identify and challenge discriminatory language use and advocate for inclusive communication.

Discourse analysis, in essence, is a gift that allows us to listen beyond the surface of words. It teaches us to appreciate the subtle nuances and hidden depths of language, reminding us that communication is not simply a transfer of information, but a complex dance of meaning-making, shaped by the multifaceted realities of our social world. In this paper, the researcher focused on the Telugu movies, which used Telangana accent in the dialogue delivery and cultural identities through language. The statement of the problem is how language and visual elements in films contribute to intercultural communication based on the Telangana accent. The main aim of this paper is to analyse the use of language in dialogues with all the aspects like social, cultural, and hierarchy of the society. The objectives of this study are threefold: firstly, to ascertain whether the Telangana accent is present or absent in certain contexts; secondly, to explore the representation of cultural identities within the framework of the Telangana accent; and thirdly, to evaluate the impact of this accent on audiences within the medium of cinema. The research questions guiding this investigation are as follows:

firstly, whether Telugu movies feature the Telangana accent; secondly, how characters communicate cultural identities through accents, dialects, and linguistic variations; and finally, how these cinematic portrayals influence audiences and whether any disparities exist between the depicted accent and its authentic representation.

## 2. Literature Review

Discourse analysis (DA) isn't just another academic field; it's a kaleidoscope of perspectives exploring the intricate symphony of human communication. To delve into its depths, we embark on a literary journey, tracing the evolution and diverse approaches within this rich landscape. Our journey begins with the early pioneers who laid the foundation for DA. Saussure's structuralism (1916) highlighted the relationship between language and social context, while Austin's (1962) speech act theory introduced the performative power of language. Halliday's (1978) systemic functional linguistics provided a framework for analysing various discourse functions. These giants laid the groundwork for the diverse approaches to bloom. From these intellectual roots, several distinct branches of DA emerged, each offering a unique lens to investigate communication: CDA: Championed by Fairclough (1989), CDA unmasks how texts and discourses perpetuate power imbalances and marginalize certain groups. Its sharp focus on social justice shines a light on hidden ideologies and agendas., I. Fairclough (2015) exposes how media portrayals of refugees in Europe, laden with dehumanizing language and framing, construct them as threats, justifying exclusionary policies. T.A. van Dijk (2017) delves into the manipulative tactics of populist discourse, wielding "us vs. them" framing, emotional appeals, and simplifications to gain power and silence opposition. M. Lazar (2020) dissects the linguistic weaponry of climate change denial, revealing cherry-picking of data, downplaying of evidence, and construction of alternative narratives to mislead the public. The Conversation Analysis: Spearheaded by Goffman (1967), this approach meticulously dissects everyday talk, examining turn-taking, topic shifts, and repair mechanisms. It reveals the intricate dance of

meaning-making in ordinary conversations. D. Boden and D.H. Zimmerman (2015) illuminate the intricacies of doctor-patient consultations, demonstrating how subtle linguistic cues like topic shifts, repairs, and pauses shape interaction dynamics and medical decision-making. J.A. Depperly and P. Drew (2018) showcase how everyday conversations achieve coherence and navigate misunderstandings through “repair sequences,” where participants self-correct, confirm understanding, and collaboratively construct meaning. E. Couper-Kuhlen and U. Quasthoff (2023) venture beyond words, exploring the multimodality of online meetings, where gestures, gaze, and body language complement speech to manage turn-taking, express emotions, and foster collaboration.

The Narrative Analysis: Labov and Walcott (1967) paved the way for this approach, which delves into the structure, themes, and functions of stories. It shows how narratives shape our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. Multimodal Analysis: Expanding beyond solely spoken or written words, Kress (2003) and others advocate for analysing the interplay of verbal and non-verbal cues like gestures, visuals, and sounds. This holistic approach captures the full spectrum of meaning-making. The Foucault’s discourse theory resonates with J. Arquilla’s (2015) work, which analyzes how the post-9/11 discourse constructs “terrorism” as a constant threat, justifying increased surveillance and control measures. M. Zembylas (2017) applies a Foucauldian lens to educational policies, exposing how standardized testing disciplines bodies, creates knowledge hierarchies, and stifles critical thinking. R. Braidotti (2022) reclaims Foucault’s concept of bio-power in the digital age, advocating for critical approaches to data surveillance, algorithmic governance, and citizen empowerment in the face of these technologies. The Feminist discourse analysis finds its voice in L. Cameron’s (2015) work, highlighting how political discourse marginalizes women’s voices through gendered language and trivialization of their contributions. C. Lazarus (2018) shines a light on online misogyny, revealing how language silences, threatens, and belittles women in digital spaces, emphasizing the need for safe online environments. D. Gillborn (2021) tackles the complex

interplay of race and gender in education, demonstrating how intersecting inequalities disadvantage female students of colour, calling for anti-racist and feminist teaching practices. Finally, exploring the world of multimodality and intertextuality, G. Kress (2016) analyses the “language of likes” in social media, unveiling how images, emojis, and other visual elements work alongside text to construct meaning, identities, and emotional appeals. R. & S. Scollon (2018) delve into the realm of digital literacies, showcasing how young people engage in intertextuality, remixing and reinterpreting texts across platforms to express themselves and challenge dominant narratives. J.K. Androutsopoulos (2023) brings us back to the newsroom, investigating how news outlets utilize multimodality—text, images, videos, and sound—to frame events and influence public opinion, highlighting the importance of critical media literacy in today’s world.

### **3. Methodology**

In this study, the research design is a comparative study design with a qualitative data analysis method. The sample was collected from secondary data. The researcher collected information from Pelli Choopulu, Fida, Rangasthalam, Kancharapalem, Arjun Reddy, and Gaddalakonda Ganesh movies. In the qualitative analysis, the researcher focused on the discourse analysis in a broad sense, but when it comes to the in-depth analysis of those movies, the analysis was a critical discourse analysis with the elements of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), Narrative Discourse Analysis, and Sociolinguistic Discourse Analysis. In Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): The analysis focuses on the power dynamics and social issues embedded within the use of the Telangana dialect in these films. It examines how the dialect is used to represent different social groups, challenge stereotypes, and raise awareness of social inequalities. This aligns with CDA’s focus on uncovering the hidden ideologies and power structures within texts. In Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA): The analysis considers not just the spoken dialogue but also the visual aspects of the films, such as cinematography, costumes, and body language, to understand the meaning-making

process. This aligns with MDA's focus on how different modalities (verbal and non-verbal) interact to create meaning and impact the audience. In Narrative Discourse Analysis: The analysis focuses on the narrative structure of the films and how the Telangana dialect is used to advance the plot, develop characters, and create emotional impact. This aligns with narrative discourse analysis' focus on how stories are constructed and how they shape our understanding of the world. In Sociolinguistic Discourse Analysis: The analysis examines the social and cultural context in which the Telangana dialect is used in the films. It considers how the dialect reflects and shapes the identities of the characters and the communities they belong to. This aligns with sociolinguistic discourse analysis' focus on the relationship between language and society. This analysis is a multifaceted example of discourse analysis, drawing from various methodologies to understand the complex interplay between language, power, representation, and social issues in these Telugu films.

#### **4. Data Analysis**

In this analysis, the researcher looked at the whole cinema but did not focus on only the conversations/dialogues in the cinema. In this analysis, the first movie is Fida. The connection between this movie and the Telangana dialect is incredibly significant and impactful. Here are some key points: 1. Groundbreaking Representation: Fida movie prominently featured the Telangana dialect spoken by the lead female character, Bhanumathi, played by Sai Pallavi. This was a stark contrast to the earlier portrayal of the dialect, often used for comic relief or associated with negative stereotypes. 2. Authenticity and Identity: The film showcased the dialect with authenticity, employing native speakers and incorporating natural nuances. This resonated deeply with Telangana audiences, offering a positive and relatable representation of their language and culture. It empowered them and sparked pride in their identity. 3. Emotional Depth and Character Development: Bhanumathi's character, depicted through the Telangana dialect, is strong, independent, and unapologetic. Her use of the dialect



becomes integral to her personality, contributing to her humour, wit, and vulnerability. This portrayal challenged traditional gender roles and resonated with young female audiences. 4. Breaking Stereotypes and Barriers: “Fidaa” challenged the perception of the Telangana dialect as being inferior or uncouth. The film’s success, both critically and commercially, proved that the dialect could be an expressive and effective storytelling tool, bridging cultural gaps and connecting with audiences beyond Telangana. 5. Lasting Impact: The film’s success paved the way for increased use of the Telangana dialect in mainstream Telugu cinema. This not only provided more employment opportunities for actors and artists from the region but also ensured a wider representation of Telangana culture and its nuances. In conclusion, “Fidaa” and the Telangana dialect are intricately linked. The film, through its authentic and powerful portrayal of the dialect, contributed significantly to cultural pride, challenged stereotypes, and paved the way for a more inclusive Telugu film industry. These are more impacting points, 1. Cultural Pride and Identity: Telangana Representation, Breaking Stereotypes, and Bridging the Gap. 2. Emotional Connection and Storytelling: Dialect as Expression, Fresh Narratives, and Universal Themes. 3. Lasting Legacy: Dialect Normalization, Cultural Dialogue, and Redefining Telugu Cinema.



Figure 1.

A few dialogues were here from the movie:

1. Telugu: Baadmaash balisindara.. bokkalu iragodtha: Heroine Dialogue

English: Idiot... I will break your bones

2. Telugu: Paisallevu...: Heroine Dialogue

English: I don't have money

Telugu: Kyku: Hero Dialogue

English: Why?

Telugu: Gnanam isthunnav kada pukkatla nenu em tisukonu: Heroine Dialogue

English: You are giving knowledge right; I won't take anything freely.

3. Telugu: Istamuntadhi kabatte chebuthunna, athadi tho eeda sagam sagam undalenu : Heroine Dialogue

English: I love him, that's why I can't stay here half half.

These dialogues were in complete Telangana accent. The standard Telugu is different from this accent lexically and phonologically also.

The second movie Pelli Choopulu (2016): "Pelli Choopulu" (2016) played a crucial role in paving the way for its wider acceptance and impact. Here's how: 1. Groundbreaking Representation: This movie featured Vijay Devarakonda as Prashant, a young man from Warangal, Telangana. He spoke the dialect naturally and authentically, marking a departure from the stereotypical portrayals often seen in Telugu films. This resonated with Telangana audiences who finally saw themselves represented on screen. 2. Normalization and Acceptance: The film's success, both critically and commercially, proved that the Telangana dialect could be a powerful storytelling tool, capable of connecting with audiences beyond the region. This helped

normalize the dialect and break down barriers of language and cultural prejudice. 3. Character Development and Identity: Prashant's character, with his Telangana dialect and rural background, was not the typical hero. He was flawed, relatable, and driven by his aspirations. This challenged conventional narratives and fostered a sense of pride in Telangana identity among viewers. 4. Emotional Connection and Humour: The use of the Telangana dialect added a layer of authenticity and warmth to the film's humour and emotional scenes. Prashant's banter with his friends, his interactions with his family, and his romantic moments with Charu were all infused with the dialect's unique rhythm and tone, creating a stronger connection with the audience. 5. Legacy and Impact: This movie paved the way for a wave of films featuring the Telangana dialect. From this movie, the impact of the Telangana dialect on the audience goes beyond mere representation and normalization. It weaves itself into the film's humour, emotions, and character development, leaving a lasting impact on viewers for several reasons: Prashant, the protagonist, doesn't conform to the traditional Telugu hero image. He is flawed, grounded, and speaks the Telangana dialect with pride. This challenges stereotypes of Telangana and instils a sense of cultural pride in the audience, especially those from the region. The dialect becomes a key ingredient in the film's humour. The dialect transcends being just a language; it becomes a shared cultural code, creating a sense of familiarity and connection with the audience, especially those from Telangana. The dialect becomes a tool for expressing a range of emotions in this movie. The dialect adds a layer of authenticity to the emotional scenes, making them more poignant and impactful. Tears in Prashant's eyes as he speaks the dialect hit harder, and his declarations of love in the Telangana tongue feel more genuine and heartfelt. It encourages a wider acceptance of regional dialects and cultural nuances, fostering a more inclusive and representative film industry. This sustained usage helped normalize the dialect and created opportunities for actors and artists from the region. The film's influence lives on in the increased awareness and appreciation for Telangana culture and its unique expressions.

A few dialogues from this movie:

1. Telugu: Naa saavu nenu sastha nikenduku: Hero friend (comedian) dialogue

English: My die I will die who do you want that

2. Telugu: Intha mundu call centre la oka job undey, girlfriend undey, ippudu rondu vikinay: Hero friend (comedian) dialogue

English: Earlier I had a job in a call centre and had a girlfriend, now those two have gone.

3. Telugu: Maa ayya levaka mundu inti bayata unta, panna tharu-vatha inti lopala unta, time ante Kaushik, Kaushik ante time: Hero friend (comedian) dialogue

English: I will come out before my father wakes up and I will go home after my father slept. Time is Kaushik, Kaushik is time.

All these dialogues were spoken with a Telangana accent. This accent differs from Standard Telugu in both lexical and phonological aspects.



Figure 2.

In the third movie, *Rangasthalam* (2018): “*Rangasthalam*” (2018) offers a unique and nuanced perspective on the dialect’s connection to the film and its impact on the audience. Here’s how:

1. **Historical Context and Authenticity:** “*Rangasthalam*” is set in the 1980s. The film meticulously captures this dialect’s nuances, employing native speakers like Ram Charan and Samantha Ruth Prabhu for key roles. This authenticity resonates with audiences familiar with the region and its history.
2. **Dialect as a Tool of Character Development:** The film uses the dialect to delve into the characters’ personalities, motivations, and social backgrounds. Chitti Babu, played by Ram Charan, speaks the dialect with a rural twang, reflecting his simple upbringing and connection to the land. Conversely, Rangamma, Samantha’s character, uses a more polished version of the dialect, highlighting her urban background and aspirations.
3. **Power and Conflict:** The dialect becomes a marker of power dynamics in the film. The local zamindar class speaks a more refined version, wielding their language as a tool of oppression against the downtrodden villagers. Chitti Babu’s defiance involves reclaiming his dialect, using its raw power to challenge the established order. This resonates with audiences who see language as a reflection of social and political struggles.
4. **Emotional Depth and Connection:** Beyond its social and political significance, the dialect adds a layer of emotional depth to “*Rangasthalam*.” Chitti Babu’s grief, rage, and love are all expressed through his dialect, making them more visceral and relatable for viewers. This emotional connection transcends language barriers, creating a universal impact on the audience.
5. **Legacy and Beyond-the-Region Impact:** While “*Rangasthalam*” celebrates the Telangana dialect within its specific historical and geographical context, its success showcased the dialect’s potential to resonate with a wider audience. This paved the way for further exploration of regional dialects and diverse narratives in Telugu cinema.

Here’s a deeper dive into the impact of the Telangana dialect in “*Rangasthalam*” on the audience.

1. **Cultural Pride and Identity:** Authentic Representation, Breaking Stereotypes, and Bridging the Gap.
2. **Emotional Connection and Storytelling:** Dialect as a Character Tool, Adding Depth and Nuance, and Universal Themes.
3. **Lasting Legacy and Beyond-the-Region Impact:** Normalizing the Dialect, Inspiring Dialogue, and A Celebration of Roots.



Figure 3.

A few dialogues from this movie:

1. Telugu: Chitti babu chevulloki mata elladam kashtame gaani okkasari ellidante adhi akkade undi poddi ayya...: Hero dialoggue

English: Chittibabu can't hear properly, but he hears anything it will remain there forever.

2. Telugu: Orey cheviti na kodaka! Bayatiki pora...: Hero's father dialogue

English: orey deaf fellow! Get out of the house.

These conversations were spoken entirely in Telangana accent. Both lexically and phonologically, the standard Telugu differs from this accent.

In the fourth movie, "Kancharapalem" (2018) offers a unique and nuanced perspective on the connection between the Telangana dialect and its impact on the audience. Here's how it stands out: 1. Everyday Life and Subtlety: Unlike other films focusing on historical context or grand

narratives, “Kancharapalem” explores the everyday lives of ordinary people in a Telangana village. The dialect becomes an integral part of their conversations, jokes, and expressions, woven seamlessly into the film’s fabric. This subtle and authentic portrayal resonates with audiences familiar with the region’s daily life.

2. Individuality and Diversity: The film doesn’t portray a monolithic version of the Telangana dialect. Each character speaks with their unique inflections and nuances, reflecting their age, background, and personality. This showcases the dialect’s rich diversity and avoids homogenizing the region’s linguistic landscape.

3. Humour and Warmth: The Telangana dialect becomes a source of humour and warmth in “Kancharapalem.” The playful banter between friends, the gentle teasing between family members, and the heartwarming conversations between lovers all unfold in the dialect, creating a sense of connection and intimacy with the audience.

4. Emotional Depth and Vulnerability: The film doesn’t shy away from exploring the darker aspects of life, from heartbreak and loss to societal pressures and economic struggles. The characters express their vulnerabilities and emotions through the Telangana dialect, adding depth and authenticity to their experiences. This resonates with viewers who connect with the raw emotions conveyed through the dialect.

5. Beyond Borders: While rooted in Telangana, “Kancharapalem” transcends regional boundaries through its universal themes of love, loss, and the search for meaning. The dialect, despite its specific cultural context, becomes a conduit for these universal emotions, allowing audiences from diverse backgrounds to connect with the film’s characters and stories.

In conclusion, the impact of the Telangana dialect in “Kancharapalem” extends far beyond mere representation. It creates a sense of authenticity, challenges stereotype, fosters cultural pride, adds depth to emotions and relationships, and connects with audiences through universal themes. This impactful usage of the dialect contributes to a more inclusive and diverse cinematic landscape, celebrating the richness of Indian cultures and languages.





Figure 4.

A conversation between the hero and heroine:

Hindi: kyum thum nahi aaya andar?: Heroine dialogue

English: Why didn't you enter into the table

Telugu : nenu devunni nammanu: Hero dialogue

English: I don't believe God

Telugu: evarni nammuthavu?: Heroine dialogue

English: To whom who believe then?

Telugu : chuttu unte janalni nammutha: Hero dialogue

English: I believe the surrounding people.



Every dialogue spoken in this conversation was Telangana accent. The lexicon and phonology of standard Telugu differs from this accent.

In the fifth movie, "Arjun Reddy" (2017) is a complex film that ignited controversy for its portrayal of violence and toxic masculinity. However, its use of the Telangana dialect also sparked conversations about representation, authenticity, and the power of language. Here's how the film connects with the Telangana dialect and its impact on the audience:

1. **Breaking the Mold:** Unlike earlier films that relegated regional dialects to supporting characters or comic relief, "Arjun Reddy" features the protagonist, Arjun, speaking the Telangana dialect fluently and naturally. This challenged the dominance of coastal Andhra dialects in mainstream Telugu cinema and offered a fresh perspective on Telangana identity.
2. **Authenticity and Realness:** The film doesn't shy away from the raw and gritty aspects of Telangana life. Arjun's speech reflects this reality, using slang, colloquialisms, and unfiltered expressions that resonated with audiences familiar with the region's dialect and cultural nuances. This authenticity added a layer of realism to the film and its characters.
3. **Character Development and Identity:** The Telangana dialect isn't just a language in "Arjun Reddy"; it's an integral part of Arjun's personality and identity. His emotions, anger, frustration, and even vulnerability are all expressed through his dialect, making him a more relatable and nuanced character. This challenged viewers to see beyond the film's controversial elements and engage with Arjun's complex persona.
4. **Cultural and Social Commentary:** The film's use of the Telangana dialect sparked discussions about regional disparities and social hierarchies within Telugu society. Arjun's background and upbringing influence his dialect and behaviour, raising questions about privilege, class differences, and the impact of societal norms on individuals.
5. **Legacy and Impact:** "Arjun Reddy" paved the way for a wave of films featuring the Telangana dialect, including "Fidaa" and "Rangasthalam." This wider representation helped normalize the dialect and opened doors for actors and artists from the region. However, the film's controversial content also raised concerns about the portrayal of violence and its potential impact on viewers.

In conclusion, the connection

between “Arjun Reddy” and the Telangana dialect is multifaceted and complex. While it offered authentic representation and challenged stereotypes, the film also sparked debates about its portrayal of violence and social issues. Nevertheless, its impact on the audience and its contribution to the wider acceptance of the Telangana dialect remain significant, marking a turning point in Telugu cinema and sparking ongoing conversations about language, identity, and social representation.

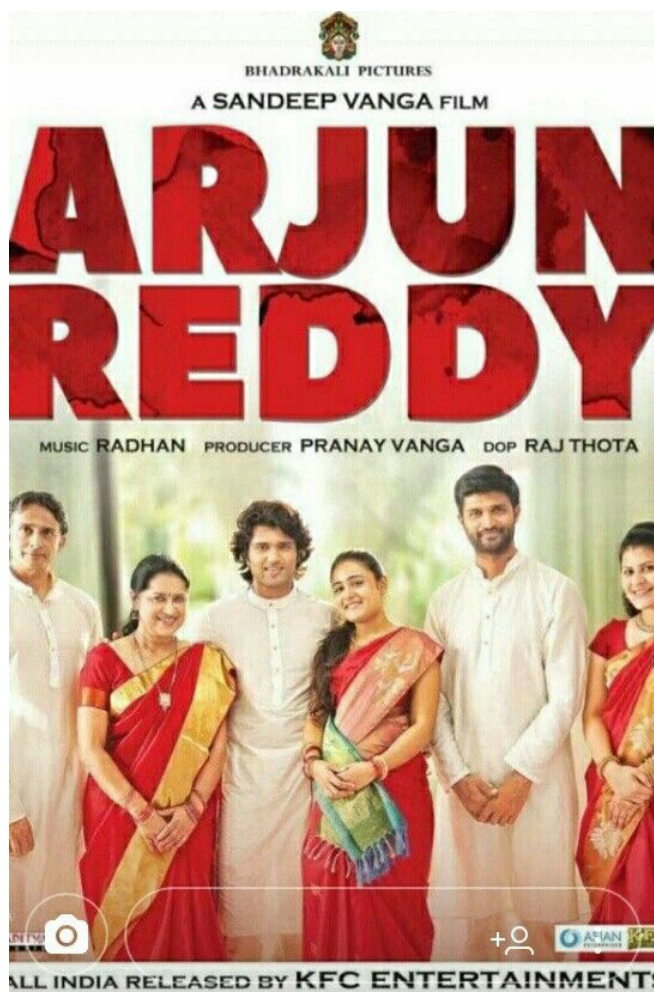


Figure 5.

A few dialogues from this movie:

Telugu: Maniki emaina aithe, manam pothe the most effected person okkaruntaru.. adi na life lo aa pilla, aa pillaki emaina aithe I'll be the most effected person, understand! : Hero Dialogue

English: something happens to us, if we die, there will be a person, who is most effected one. In my life that girl is the one, if something happens to her, I'll be the most effected person, understand!

The entire conversation was spoken in a Telangana accent. There are lexical and phonological differences between this accent and mainstream Telugu.

In the sixth movie, "Gaddalakonda Ganesh" (2019) offers a unique and intriguing connection between the Telangana dialect and its impact on the audience, distinct from the films we discussed previously. Here's how:

1. Dialect as a Tool of Deception and Morality: The film's protagonist, Gaddalakonda Ganesh, uses the Telangana dialect to mask his true identity as a notorious criminal. He adopts a simple, innocent persona and speaks the dialect flawlessly, creating a stark contrast to his violent actions. This manipulation of the dialect becomes a key plot point, blurring the lines between good and evil, and forcing the audience to question their perceptions.
2. Evolving Dialect and Character Transformation: As Ganesh's true nature emerges, so does a shift in his use of the dialect. The film subtly shows how his speech patterns change, becoming harsher and more aggressive, reflecting his inner turmoil and descent into darkness. This connection between dialect and character development creates a compelling narrative arc, drawing the audience deeper into Ganesh's psyche.
3. Moral Ambiguity and Audience Response: The film's deliberate use of the Telangana dialect to portray both innocence and villainy creates a complex moral landscape. This ambiguity challenges the audience to question their own biases and preconceived notions about the region and its language. Some viewers may sympathize with Ganesh despite his actions, while others may condemn him, highlighting the film's effectiveness in sparking conversations and provoking thought.
4. Exploring Social Issues and Power Dynamics: Beyond

the individual level, the film uses the Telangana dialect to explore broader social issues like poverty, caste discrimination, and the struggle for justice in rural Telangana. The contrasting speech patterns of Ganesh and the privileged classes highlight the power dynamics within the region, prompting the audience to consider the social context that shapes identities and motivations. 5. Legacy and Beyond-the-Region Impact: “Gaddalakonda Ganesh” contributed to the ongoing conversation about regional representation in Telugu cinema. The film’s nuanced portrayal of the Telangana dialect, with its moral ambiguity and social commentary, stands out from previous portrayals, offering a fresh perspective and challenging viewers’ expectations. In conclusion, the connection between “Gaddalakonda Ganesh” and the Telangana dialect goes beyond mere representation. The film uses the dialect as a tool for storytelling, character development, and exploring complex themes of morality, identity, and social justice. This unique approach has a profound impact on the audience, sparking critical thinking, challenging preconceived notions, and fostering a deeper understanding of the cultural and social realities of Telangana.



Figure 6.

A few dialogues from this movie:

Telugu : Naa paina pandalesthe gelustharu; Hero dialogue

English: If you bet on me, you will win

Telugu : Naathoti pandalesthe sastharu: Hero dialogue

English: If you bet with me, you will die

Telugu: love gurinchi naku cheppaku, love chese itla aina: Hero Dialogue

English: Don't tell me about love; after loving only I became like this

Telugu: nenu kuda andarini eedichipetti, annitini eedichipetti nikosam vacchesina; Hero dialogue

English: I also left everyone, and everything, and came for you

The entire dialogues were spoken with a Telangana accent. This accent differs from normal Telugu in both lexical and phonological aspects.

## 5. Conclusion

After the critical discourse analysis with various other aspects, the researcher provided the results of the analysis of the data. Here, the following points explain the importance and impact of those movies by using the Telangana dialect, 1. Pelli Choopulu and Rangasthalam: Normalizing the Dialect and Bridging Cultural Gaps: These two films stand as pioneers for using the Telangana dialect authentically and with pride. "Pelli Choopulu" broke stereotypes by showcasing the protagonist speaking the dialect fluently and confidently, instilling a sense of cultural pride among Telangana audiences. "Rangasthalam" went further, employing the dialect within a historical context, enriching the narrative with regional nuances, and bridging the cultural gap between Telangana and Andhra audiences. Both films contributed significantly to normalizing the dialect in mainstream Telugu cinema, paving the way for wider representation

and acceptance. 2. *Kancharapalem* and *Gaddalakonda Ganesh*: Exploring Emotions and Challenging Perceptions: These films shift the focus beyond mere representation, using the dialect to delve into deeper emotional territories. “*Kancharapalem*” takes viewers on a poignant journey through everyday life in Telangana, showcasing the subtle variations in the dialect used by different characters, adding authenticity and depth to their relationships and struggles. “*Gaddalakonda Ganesh*” employs the dialect as a tool for deception and exploring morality, blurring the lines between good and evil through the protagonist’s shifting speech patterns. This unique approach challenges viewers’ preconceived notions and sparks discussions about social issues like poverty and justice. 3. *Arjun Reddy*: A Controversial Catalyst for Conversation: This film’s use of the Telangana dialect is undoubtedly controversial, sparking debates about the portrayal of violence and toxic masculinity. However, it cannot be denied that “*Arjun Reddy*’s” raw and unfiltered use of the dialect contributed to normalizing the language within mainstream cinema. Despite the controversy, the film’s impact lies in its ability to ignite crucial conversations about regional representation, societal expectations, and the portrayal of complex characters in cinema. The characters of all six movies express cultural identities through accents, dialects, and language variations. The impact of linguistic choices on character development and audience perception. By using the Telangana accent, the characters of each movie were very close to the audience’s heart. In a few scenes of *Arjun Reddy* and a few scenes of *Rangasthalam*, there was a mismatch in the Telangana dialect. Ultimately, all six films contribute to the ongoing conversation about the power of language, the importance of regional representation, and the diverse ways the Telangana dialect can enrich storytelling and connect with audiences, paving the way for a more inclusive future. The Telangana dialect, once relegated to the fringes, now finds itself at the heart of diverse and impactful storytelling, a legacy woven by these six films and countless others to come.

## **Filmography**

1. Fidaa Telugu movie : Released on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2017,  
Director- Sekhar Kamula  
Producer- Dil Raju  
Cast- Varun Tej and Sai Pallavi
2. Pelli Choopulu Movie: Released on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2016  
Director- Tarun bhaskar  
Producer- Raj Kandukuri  
Cast- Vijay Devarakonda and Ritu Varma
3. Rangasthalam: Released on 30<sup>th</sup> march 2018  
Director- Sukumar Bandreddi  
Producer- Naveen Yerneni  
Cast- Ram Charan and Samanta Ruth Prabhu
4. Kanchara Palem: Released on 7<sup>th</sup> sept. 2018  
Director- Venkatesh Maha  
Producer- Sweekar Agasti  
Cast- Vijaya Praveena paruchuri, Mohan Bhagat and Subbarao
5. Arjun Reddy: Released on 24<sup>th</sup> August 2017  
Director- Samdeep Reddy Vanga  
Producer- Pranay Reddy Vanga  
Cast- Vijay Devarakonda and Shalini Pandey
6. Gaddalakonda Ganesh: Released on 20<sup>th</sup> Sept 2019  
Director- Harish Shankar  
Producer- Ram Achanta  
Cast- Varun Tej and Pooja Hegde

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# **RECLAIMING AUTHENTICITY IN TRANSCULTURAL NARRATIVES: DECOLONIZING COFFEE THROUGH FLAVOR IN YOGYAKARTA'S CAFE CULTURE IN INDONESIA**

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**Abstract:** Since the 17th century Dutch colonials introduced coffee by force using the Cultuurstelsel forced cultivation system, Indonesia today has become one of the world's top producers and consumers. This intercultural narrative study investigates how Yogyakarta's cafe culture in Indonesia, a city notable for its popularity as a major student hub and growing tourism destination, with a startling number of around 3,000 coffee cafes as of 2023, contributes to the decolonization of coffee by fostering the creation of authentic local flavors through a cross-cultural media landscape and cultural activism. Drawing on the theories of postcolonial scholars this study employs ethnography by following the discourse of coffee in Yogyakarta as the center of tourism, education, and cultures. Our findings elucidate the decolonization of coffee through two main processes: hybridity and specialty, driven by socio-cultural determinants in Yogyakarta's coffee cafe culture. These processes are empowered by the power of taste, market, and socio-cultural influences, embedding coffee with layers of global and local issues. The study further

reveals how media—encompassing traditional and social platforms, ambient elements, and interactive events—serve as transcultural narratives that reclaim authenticity in cafe culture. This reciprocal influence between media and cafe culture, bounded by power dynamics, marks a shift from the hybridity phase post-independence to the current specialty phase, aligning with the third wave of coffee. This narrative study contributes to a broader understanding of how postcolonial societies negotiate identity and resistance in globalized contexts.

**Keywords:** Café Culture; Decolonization of Coffee; Hybridity; Postcolonial Indonesian.

## 1. Background

Since the 17th century, when the *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* and the Netherlands East Indies colonials instituted the *Cultuurstelsel* forced cultivation system, coffee has been part of Indonesian life. The International Coffee Organization indicated in April 2023 that Indonesia is the second largest coffee producer in Asia Pacific after Vietnam and the second largest consumer after Japan consuming (Mediaperkebunan, 2023, p.1). Indonesia, home to 280.73 million people spread across 17,508 islands and 360 distinct ethnic groups, has sparked a wide range of transcultural tales surrounding coffee. This is due to the fact that, in 2023, Snapcart polled 4538 Indonesian people about their coffee drinking habits and found that, of them, 79% were regulars at coffee shops and cafes serving specialty coffee (Musika, 2023, p.1). The transcultural narrative on the coffee discourse reconciles Indonesia's former colonial powers—the Dutch, Portuguese, and British—with American capitalism. The founding fathers' decolonialization attempts eliminated Dutch influence from the country's political framework, educational system, and official language, but popular culture, particularly coffee, continued to embrace colonial values. As a result, cafe culture spaces have replicated hybrid spaces like labelling coffee types, agricultural patterns, processing beans, and serving coffee.

Accordingly, we place this work in cultural studies with a postcolonial perspective on decolonization in Yogyakarta coffee shop culture. In contrast to the profit-driven liberal capitalist coffee shop industry, Yogyakarta—a monarchical province in the world's third-largest democracy and a city famous as a cultural, student, and tourist hub—creates café identity as cultural activism. Yogyakarta cafe culture is an anomaly in noisy mass communication marketing (Camilo, 2020, p.262) concerning coffee brands by employing classical and digital media in cross-cultural advertising to develop cultural sensitivity through decolonial identity. Yogyakarta café culture creates brand awareness media with unique visuals, written material, and sensory experiences infused with Javanese tradition to embrace global identity patterns. As Bouziane (2016, p. 145) and Chirig et al. (2023, p. 132) explain, promotional media that domesticates and foreignizes becomes a hybrid space or purifying locality movement. We call this market resistance by subjugated agencies cultural activism through coffee cafe culture reproduction from authentic flavor brands.

From a postcolonial vantage point in cultural studies, coffee has undergone decolonization, allowing it to traverse transcultural narratives in search of authenticity within a complex area where local and global interact. Several studies have examined coffee cafe culture from a postcolonial standpoint in different parts of the world. For example, in Hong Kong, there is a hybrid tea and coffee culture (Chan, 2019, p. 311). In Japan, there is a global deconstruction of coffee commodities through local products (Grinshpun, 2014, p. 343). In Singapore, there is a kopitiam culture as a public space (Chang & McGonigle, 2020, p. 213). In Somali Coffeeshouse, people search for authentic identities and belongings (Serunkuma, 2023, p. 2), and Ethiopian cafe culture produces its own coffee (le Roux, 2017, p. 464). To support the novelty of the study, we use the framework of decolonization of “taste”. Previous decolonization studies mostly focused on decolonization of religious rites (Marzouk, 2023, p. 152), decolonization of the media (Abel, 2013, p. 111), and decolonization of education (Morris et al, 2000, p. 100). In response to this, this study develops the main research question, namely *how does*

*Yogyakarta's cafe culture contribute to the decolonization of coffee in Indonesia through the creation and representation of authentic local flavors?.* Gayatri Spivak (subaltern), Homi K. Bhabha (hybridity), and Frantz Fanon (decolonization resistance) may assist in addressing this question with our inquiry focuses on authenticity in Yogyakarta's café culture and post-colonial legacies in Indonesia (Bhabha, 2013, p. 100; Clover, 2018, p. 40; Spivak, 2005, p. 480).

## 2. Method

Ethnography was chosen for this study because we are native Yogyakarta residents from the millennial and Z generations, and our coffee understandings lead to different café culture experiences. Cafe culture in Yogyakarta is changing as Millennials watch. The city was dominated by indigenous-run community cafes with communal spaces, but now, like Gen Z in Jakarta, specialty cafes are catering to people wanting a more authentic and independent culture. *“There was no social media, the number of cafes could be counted on one hand, promotions through newspapers, posters on the road, or word of mouth, and coffee was only known as brewed coffee of Kopitubruk,”* said Fuji, a 1990-born Yogyakarta Millennial. Born in 2002 in Yogyakarta, Raffi recognized Fuji's experience and generational relationships. *“We Z's are happier with specialty coffee beans and how they are treated, authentic dilution is absolutely essential,”* he added. In conclusion, ethnography helps bridge generational gaps and illuminate how media narratives create cafe culture.

Ethnography helps us understand that “everyday life” is a postcolonial discourse from birth (Carter, 2018, p. 350; Morita, 2017, p. 239). Ethnography provides a detailed look at café culture by allowing researchers to personally observe and engage with the social interactions and cultural behaviors that define these spaces. This method captures the nuances of human interaction and cultural dynamics, completely understanding how café surroundings influence everyday life. In postcolonial studies, deconstruction is often called decolonialization, which we interpret by reproducing Spivak's

claim that deconstructive procedures are needed to uplift subordinated knowledge. We agree with Spivak since the “genealogy” paradigm lets us think diachronically by following the coffee discourse and civilization’s history. For centuries, the Dutch, British, and Portuguese studied genealogy to define ethnicity in Indonesia, then introduced new values like religion, education, and language. In-depth interviews, observation, media studies, and cafe and menu visual analysis are our data collection methods. We intentionally sampled each cafe type to investigate the cross-cultural and media lifestyle typology in this study. To ensure a complete understanding, we utilized narrative patterns to connect with readers from different countries as we processed all of this data using theme analysis data processing tools.

### **3. Results and Analysis**

This section addresses research issues on decolonizing coffee through taste in Yogyakarta’s café culture in Indonesia by dividing it into two parts. The first part addresses the historical diachronic genealogy paradigm in post-colonial studies by examining socio-cultural determinants of Yogyakarta Coffee Cafe Culture, which leads to two decolonization processes: hybridity and specialty. Field findings show that the key factors of decolonization in our study are the power of taste, market, and social-cultural variables. Reclaiming identity in Yogyakarta through media confluence transcultural narratives Cafe Culture defines “media” including 1) “media as a noun” in the form of traditional media (cafe posters, menu books, specialty flavor cards), social media (cafe presentations on Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, and others), 2) “media as an adverb” in the form of ambient media (curated music, visual elements of cafe design, cafe artwork, and scents), 3) “media as a verb” such as cafe events (discussions, coffee competitions cafe) as well as customer-barista interactions, and 4) “media as an adjective” (cafe unique label, coffee certification). In a decolonization perspective, media and cafe culture influence each other in a reciprocal manner limited by power, with the post-independence timeline up to the 2010s being a hybridity phase and the 2010s to the present being a specialty phase.

### **3.1 Reclaiming Authenticity: The Overview of Yogyakarta's Cafe Culture**

*"We are enjoying a cup of special specialty coffee as a celebration of the defeat of democracy,"* Raffi commented at Tadasih Cafe on February 14, 2024, while drinking a cup of Johan Vergara from Las Flores Farm in Colombia. Fuji replied to Raffi's statement *"The quiet majority defeated the oligarchs. Even the victorious president commodified the lowest classes, and 'Starling' (Roving Starbucks) was politicized."* Fuji replied with his own cup of Dhillgee Riripa Ethiopian coffee. As "coffee nerds" sipping two foreign coffees at this home cafe, our small talks express our concern about Indonesian democracy. When this study was completed, the discourse of coffee in Indonesia had also become material for the commodification of political media by inviting 2000 *Starling* (mobile Starbuck) or cycling coffee sellers, at the general stadium in Jakarta (Anggrainy, 2023, p. 1). In addition, presidential contenders visited important Islamic religious leaders such Gus Iqdam, a millennial preacher who became famous for identifying "coffee and cigarettes" as a traditional masculine Islamic identity (Pradana, 2023, p.1). This proves that the narrative of coffee discourse has become hegemonic in all aspects of media in Indonesia.





Figure 1. Coffee Philosophy box office poster (Open source of online news, Octafiani, 2017).

At national level in a broad context, our brief discussion above says coffee is the “language of civilization”. Media production is inspired by coffee, and the media reproduces coffee with café culture. We take one example of how this ‘transmission of value’ from coffee went from a novel to a film with two sequels that hit the box office, then inspired national actors to open a cafe in Yogyakarta called Filosofi Kopi with labels of specialty Indonesian coffee and Javanese buildings. *Philosophy of Coffee* has entered the box office (Pangerang, 2015, p.1), this film has a sequel, *figure 01* (Octafiani, 2017, p.1), adapted from a novel. Film has Dewi Lestari’s best-selling novel’s famous line “*coffee which, when you drink it, will make us hold our breath in amazement, and we can only say: life is perfect.*” This transcultural narrative notion, “coffee-induced film” and film-induced tourism make Yogyakarta Cafe Culture even more unique in Indonesia.

As it stands, coffee is becoming a “social drug”—a phenomenon that cultural studies scholars find fascinating. Coffee’s discourse is consumed as a drink and as a “brandscape” in novels, films, music, posters, and even political issues (Gould, et al., 2000, p. 42). Hollywood films use product placement (Segrave, 2004, p. 10; Zhang, 2011, p. 80) by showing actors sipping Starbucks to represent New York’s modern lifestyle. The media plays a crucial role in hegemonizing the lifestyle of Indonesians, as evidenced by films like *June dan Kopi* (2021), *Filosofi Kopi* (2015), *Filosofi Kopi Sekuel II* (2017), and *Secangkir Kopi Pahit* (1985). In addition to films, there are hit songs in Indonesian, such as *Secangkir Kopi* (Trisouls), *Kopi Dangdut* (Nella Kharisma), *Kopi Susu* (Fiersa Besari), *Secangkir Kopi* (Joni Iskandar), *Kopi Lambada* (Nella Kharisma), *Kopi Pahit* (Rita Sugiarto).

In the Yogyakarta level in specific context, our initial exploration area showed us that Yogyakarta has several different geographical landscapes: the central area is the tourism, the southern area is the art and culture center, and the northern area is a magnetic center for education. In more detail in the geographical landscape, Yogyakarta’s 3,185.80 km<sup>2</sup> monarchy was founded by Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Sultanate and Pakualaman Duchy. From the 2020 census, the Central Bureau of Statistics of Yogyakarta

(2024, p. 1) recorded 3,668,719 residents at 1,084 per km<sup>2</sup>. The Central Statistics Agency explains 126 universities and 640,658 long-term tourists in 2023, making this province “a student city”. Besides Bali, this province is “a significant tourism destination” with 7 million visitors in 2023 and two UNESCO World Heritage sites, Prambanan Temple Compounds since 1991 and Cosmological Axis of Yogyakarta since 2023.

In the historical landscape aspect, Yogyakarta’s history is a postcolonial laboratory. After Cornelis de Houtman arrived in 1596 to handle the spice trade, Yogyakarta’s patron Sri Sultan HB IX helped eradicate Dutch colonial influence before 1945. Dutch invasion escalated after Governor General Jacob Mossel separated Mataram into Yogyakarta and Surakarta in 1755. Indonesia can resist Dutch hegemony through nationalization politics, agricultural reform, and cultural education revolution (Pamungkas, 2021, p. 50). In the anthropological landscape, many studies reveal that European colonial forced Javanese vassal kingdoms to plant coffee and tea as a major European crop, causing the people to lose their land rights and kingdoms (Sondarika, 2019, p. 65). Colonial Societet culture established cafe and leisure culture in the 1800-1949 Nederlandsch-Indie administration. *Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant* published a Java Koffie advertisement in the Netherlands in 1933, as shown in Figure 02.

De grootste attractie van het amusementspark is het **PRACHTIGE STRANDBAD 'MOLENSCHUUT'**.  
 Aparte vermaakruimte voor kinderen, en bijzonderheid: kleine kiosk met snoep, snoepgoed en ijs.  
 Entree, Zaterdag en Zondag 25 cent.  
 Andere dagen 15 cent.  
 Telefoonnummer 1 2 20.  
 OPENING DONNERDAG 25 MEI.  
 De amusementspark is in KILBOMER.

**BUREAU VOOR ACCOUNTANCY EN BEDRIJFSORGANISATIE.**  
 WED. J. VAN DER WOUDE, 3810  
 D. B. J. TROUWEN, 3810  
 D. B. J. TROUWEN, 3810  
 D. B. J. TROUWEN, 3810

**S.B. Dames**  
 Tilburg Heuvelstraat 77  
 KOLONIALE WAREN  
 TELEFOON 203.

**Koffie-Reclame**  
 voor een klein koffie.  
 DEZE WEEK het tweede half pond koffie voor de halve prijs.  
 PEARL per 1/2 pond 42 cent  
 JAVA KOFFIE per 1/2 pond 42 cent  
 JAVA MELANG per 1/2 pond 42 cent  
 SUVER SMAKEND per 1/2 pond 42 cent  
 Desgewenst gemalen.

**KONINKLIJKE DEMONSTRATIE**  
 van een Krijgsmacht-Gezondheids Winkels  
 10 Mei a.s. van 10 tot 12 uur 's ocht.  
 11 tot 12 uur 's ocht. van 12 tot 14 uur 's ocht.  
 15 tot 16 uur 's ocht. van 16 tot 18 uur 's ocht.  
 19 tot 20 uur 's ocht. van 20 tot 22 uur 's ocht.  
 23 tot 24 uur 's ocht. van 24 tot 26 uur 's ocht.  
 29 tot 30 uur 's ocht. van 30 tot 32 uur 's ocht.

**Jos. van Zantboek-Graafmans**  
 KROUWELSTRAAT 106.  
 Voor de Pinksterdagen  
**een Reuze Reclame bij:**  
**Corn. Snoeren Plusstraat 31**  
 bij grote afname tot zaterdag 1 Juni bij bestelling van 1/2 pond koffie van 25 cent. 1 van twee bestellingen.  
 1/2 pond koffie van 25 cent 1 van twee bestellingen.  
 1/2 pond koffie van 40 cent 1 van twee bestellingen.  
 1/2 pond koffie van 40 cent 1 van twee bestellingen.  
 1/2 pond koffie van 40 cent 1 van twee bestellingen.

**EXTRA VOORDEELIG**  
 in **BREKELMANS' SCHONMAGAZIN**  
 NIEUWSTE OPANKEN voor f 2.75  
 SANDALEN voor 65 ct.  
 WIT LINNEN voor 70 ct.  
 WILHELMINAPARK 14 TELEFOON 747

**DE ADVERTEERDER WINT.**

**ZIJ**  
 die zijn naam op een goed geplaatst  
 dagblad, om het dat de beste resultaten  
 kan behalen is

**LEZEN BIJ VOORKEUR**  
 in Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant, waarvan  
 de naam de grootste bekendheid  
 geniet in deze regio, en welke  
 vermaakt is door de beste redactie  
 van de regio.

**DE Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant**

**DE NIEUWE MODELLEN**

**CITROËN**  
 TYPE  
**8**

Een DANCE automobiel voor alleen en gezamenlijk.  
 Veel groter en veel degelijker gebouwd dan de typen "kleine wagens".  
 Wordt ook geleend met autoverzekering voor 4 pers. of 2 pers. en 500 K.G. vracht. Prijs f1950

**CITROËN**  
 TYPE  
**10**

Een GROOTE automobiel - hoog economisch in verbruik en snelheid.  
 Maximale eendaags afmetingen.  
 Ook leverbaar als 7 pers. gestofteerde model met of zonder autoverzekering.  
 Prijs 5 pers. conditie interieur: f2550

**CITROËN**  
 TYPE  
**15**

De LUXEUSE & CYL. Carol.  
 Verrijkt met vijf en zesde rijen zitplaatsen.  
 Leverbaar als: Familien-automobiel en Familien-automobiel (2-4, 5 en 7 pers.)  
 Prijs 5 pers. conditie interieur: f3450

**CITROËN**  
**CITY-GARAGE**  
**GEBR. v. d. BREKEL,**  
 PLUSPLEIN 43. TELEF. 2213

**KARPETTEN**  
 DE GROOTSTE KEUS - DE LAAGSTE PRIJZEN

**U KUNT KIEZEN UIT**

**500 KARPETTEN**  
 TAPIS-BELGE KARPETTEN, in maten 3 x 4 m ..... f 6 90  
 TAPIS-BELGE KARPETTEN, in maten 1 halve meter breed, maten 1 x 2 m ..... 15 75  
 TAPIS-BELGE KARPETTEN, geheel zacht wollen kwaliteit, gewicht 200 g, 2 x 4 m ..... 19 00

**Alf bijzondere reclame 25 STUKS**  
**AXMINSTER-KARPETTEN**  
 190 x 290 c.M., mooie wester kwaliteit, met de mooiste dessin, op maat gewoven.  
**16 50**

**SOUELA KARPETTEN**, zachte haarprijs, 190 x 290 ..... 17 50  
**MOD. PATROIN** hand ..... 26 00  
 maatregelen, 200 x 300 ..... 27 50  
 maatregelen, 200 x 300 ..... 27 50

**WILTON KARPETTEN**, zeer belangrijke voordeelige, in maten 170 x 270 ..... 27 50  
 maatregelen, 200 x 300 ..... 39 00  
 maatregelen, 200 x 300 ..... 47 50  
 maatregelen, 200 x 300 ..... 47 50

**WILTON KARPETTEN**, mooie en zachte kwaliteit, gewicht 200 g, 2 x 4 m ..... 22 50

**MOQUETTE TAPIT**, voor randen van kamers, maatregelen, in maten 70 c.M. breed ..... 1 45  
**MOQUETTE TAPIT**, Japen Sleur, goede kwaliteit, 100 c.M. breed ..... 1 85  
**MOQUETTE TAPIT**, zeer nieuw, mooi, maatregelen, 100 c.M. breed, 70 c.M. breed ..... 3 90  
**AXMINSTER TAPIT**, originele Eng. kwaliteit, in diverse dessin, 70 c.M. breed ..... 4 25

**VROOM & DREESMANN**  
 TILBURG.

**De Crisis Rijksdaalder.**  
 Welke is afgeleverd de twee gulden 1919 - 44n Crisis Rijksdaalder - omgezet in 100.000, ook U valt het niet mee!  
 Meer weet U wel, dat U met dien enkele Crisis-Rijksdaalder de zon kunt laten schijnen in duizenden Nederlanders gezinnen!  
 Diegenen toch krijgt het Nationaal Crisis Comité dien uitnodiging om te komen, want het zou geen zinnig zijn willen voldoen. En juist die Crisis-Rijksdaalder maakt het mogelijk. Val daarom, indien U het nog niet gedaan heeft, nog beiden het aanvraagformulier van den Crisisdaalder in en overboeking geschiedt automatisch. Geenszins hoeft u hem te betalen.  
 Geen exemplaar meer bij de hand? Dan even een aanvraag bij het Nationaal Crisis Comité, Den Haag.

**N.C.C.**  
 NATIONAAL CRISIS COMITÉ

Figure 2. Visual advertisement printed in the newspaper entitled Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant with Java Koffie on the menu, printed in the Netherlands in 24-05-1933 (Source: Open access digital newspaper Delpher.nl) with link <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/view?coll=ddd&identifier=ddd:010236742:mpeg21:p016>



However, since coffee was originally used for mystical Sufi worship in Yemen and the Ottoman dynasty, we still wonder if coffee commodities were exchanged in Indonesia in the 14th century by the majority of Yemeni and Gujarat traders before the arrival of European colonialists. We are also curious why Javanese ancestral beliefs still employ coffee as an offering. According to Prastowo, et al. (2017, p. 102), the Javanese diaspora community in the Netherlands still practices the Javanese tradition of using coffee as the main element of ancestral offerings, as shown in figure 03 below.



Figure 3. sacralization of coffee as an offering to ancestors in Kejawen which is a syncretism of Java and Islam in the Javanese Diaspora community in the Netherlands (Source with author's permission: Prastowo, et.al, 2017, p.102).

Why do we need to explore Yogyakarta's geography, history, and anthropology before studying coffee café culture? According to Spivak's subaltern perspective, the genealogical paradigm promotes reading Yogyakarta as a coherent "discourse arena" to understand relatively intact route dependencies in the spirit of postcolonialism advocating subjugated knowledge. Our decolonization method analyzes an object from colonialism that we acquired and uses in our daily life diachronically and synchronically. We found many cafe typologies during the investigation that can be grouped as follows:

Table 01. Typology of Coffee Cafés in Yogyakarta (Source: Authors, 2024)

Family Café (Brand Type)	Genus Café (Brand sub-type)	Characteristics
Indigenous-run Community Cafe	Angkringan Warung Burjo/Bubur Kacang Ijo. Lesehan Kopijos No Coffee Sells Café using “kopi” as the name (Kopi Prambanan, Kopi Klotok)	Family-owned cafes offer an inviting atmosphere, act as community hubs, serve affordable bites, and reflect cultural emphasis on togetherness.
Home-based Coffee Café	Specialty Table Experience Café Kitchen Table Experience Café. Warung Specialty	Home-based cafes offer a personal and intimate setting with homely ambiance, prepare everything from scratch, have limited seating, provide attentive service, and value community support.
Specialty Coffee Cafe	Specialty Consignment Café Specialty and Roastery Café Specialty Coffee Lab Cafe	Specialty cafes offer higher quality coffee, emphasizing on the “bean-to-cup” experience, staffed with skilled baristas and various brewing methods, feature single-origin coffee beans.
Mobile Coffee Cafe/ Food Truck	Starling/ (moving starbuck) Pedagang Kaki Lima	Mobile coffee service operates from movable vehicles, caters diverse events and markets, ideally found in urban areas, offering convenience to customers, having limited coffee selection.
Co-Working Coffee Cafe	Bank-owned café Campus/School Café Collaborative Space	Flexible workspace with high-speed internet, comfortable seating, workstations, meeting rooms, coffee bar, healthy food, quiet zones, networking, and professional atmosphere.
Commercial Cafe	American Style Franchise Local Style Franchises Small and medium enterprises (SMEs)	Commercial Cafe emphasizes profitability and efficiency with standardized operations and customer satisfaction as key priorities for commercial success.
Heritage and Nostalgia Cafe	Colonial Building Café Javanese Royal Cafe	The cafe transports patrons to the past, evoking nostalgia and celebrating cultural heritage through its ambiance and offerings.

Community-Focused Cafe	Live Music Cafe Sports Cafe Indonesian Ethnic Cafe. Outbond Cafe.	The cafe acts as a community hub, promoting belonging and social interaction among local residents, fostering connections and engagement.
Gourmet Coffee Lounge	Luwak Café Upscale Hotel Café Ramayana ballet and dining cafe	Upscale coffee lounge prioritizes luxury, premium coffee, gourmet cuisine, and overall indulgence, tailored to discerning tastes and preferences for excellence.
Resilience Cafes	Village run Cafe slum-de-stigmatizing cafe	Resilience Cafes promote community empowerment, sustainability, social impact, cultural preservation, collaborative partnerships, including village-run and “slum-de-stigmatizing” Cafes.

### 3.2. Battle of Flavors : Yogyakarta’s Hybrid Space Cafe Culture

This subchapter data shows a dynamic process of hybridization occurred as a result of interactions between Javanese and Indian cultures in antiquity, Portuguese, Dutch, British, Arabic, and Chinese cultures in colonial times, and Americans in modern Indonesia. This mix of flavors represents coffee’s decolonization through Yogyakarta’s café culture’s transcultural narratives. Early spices over quality signified decolonization, like the first wave of coffee. Word-of-mouth media shapes transcultural narratives, processing, and product capital. Cafe culture is still heavily influenced by the community system, which represents the expansion of tropical flavors.

A cafe at 0 KM in Malioboro, we had coffee at a colonial café with several Dutch-speaking international tourists. Figure 04 shows Kopi Pakpos (Postman’s café). Tulip plate ornaments with the VOC insignia, Wieteke Van Dort coffee melodies with *Koffietubruk* song, and other Netherlands East Indies symbols are used. This cafe uses the Dutch flag, which is banned under the constitution, instead its taste is hybrid and transcends colonial memories. We find it intriguing that “colonialism” is often overlooked but the one space without colonial influence is served on the menu.



Figure 4. Kopi Pakpos Cafe which uses a 1912 post office building in the Dutch era (Prastowo, 2024a).

The cafe example shows that hybridity is a kind of power resistance in a colonizer-colonized negotiation. Colonial-themed cafes create transcultural narratives by retaining colonial media nostalgia. This finding is consistent with several prior research we analyzed. The Tea Cafe in Hong Kong (Chan, 2019, p. 311), Chinese tea in Australia's Chinatown (Zhang, 2022, p. 187), Cafe Culture in Somalia (Serunkuma, 2023, p. 15), and Kopitiam in Singapore (Chang & McGonigle, 2020, p. 214). However, this study contradicts Huat & Rajah (2001, p. 166), who found that food availability in Singapore's heterogeneous community compromises ethnic food authenticity, therefore there are no clear limits between "Chinese food", "Indian food", or "Malaysian food". This study supports our argument, as illustrated in figure 03, which demonstrates how coffee as an offering by the Javanese diaspora in the Netherlands was adapted to the availability of local items. In short, this study found several café typologies, which we divided into product kinds, sales concepts, and socio-cultural influences on social space:



Table 02. Typology of Hybridity (Source : Authors, 2024)

Cafe Brand Typology	Cafe Culture
Product Based: Taste Kopi Tubruk Rempah Jawa (Javanese Spiced Ground Coffee) Ginseng brewed coffee for concoction for sexuality from Chinese spices	The products sold have flavor elements from herbal spices originating from Java such as ginger, galangal, turmeric, along with spices from China such as ginseng.
Based on Sales Concept: Market Kopi Tubruk Jos	Marketed predominantly at Angkringan and lesehan dominated in Malioboro by tourists with charcoal mixed coffee eaten along the sidewalk.
Based on social space: socio-cultural determinants. STMJ Tubruk Coffee (Ginger Honey Egg Milk Coffee)	Coffee is consumed by the majority of stalls among students or workers with a 24 hour communal model.

Brewed coffee or *Kopi Tubruk* that meets Javanese flavors, which produces spiced coffee and Chinese taste, which then produces ginseng brewed coffee for male sexuality, are the space for hybridity, as Bhabha noted. Interestingly, numerous Spiced coffee cafes were from chart categories that were no longer available, indicating the defeat of the dominance of specialty coffee. Spiced coffee is only available at tourist novelty stores, like figure 05.



Figure 5. Spiced coffee found as a superior product of the gift shop (Sopyan, 2024a).

Cafe culture's transcultural narrative nurtures storytelling model, including tactile media with interactive aspects. Figure 05 shows transcultural narratives organically highlighting stamina booster, body metabolism, men's health, and other benefits. Coffee is inherently commodified to attract this market because it contains adjectives indicating masculinity. Many spiced coffee shops give samples, thus this is part of interactive installations that blend hybrid flavors like the Angkringan model of consignment sales that bring buyers and sellers together. Figure 06 shows Kopijos, a Malioboro tourism center attraction, using this.



Figure 6. Kopijos in a tourist center that combines Angkringan as a communal space (Sopyan, 2024b).



Figure 7. Goeboex Cafe which combines cafe activities, futsal and live music. (Prastowo, 2024b).

Figure 07 shows how socio-cultural elements affect cafe culture and community-based models like Goeboex Coffee & Roastery, which uses Dutch spelling “oe” instead of Gubuk. On Instagram @goeboexcoffeeroaster, this typonomy refers to the shop’s take on early 2000s era media strategy. Similar to Bhabha’s hybridity hypothesis and Fanon’s “Black Skin, White Masks” description of the superior and the inferior. Before the internet, this cafe used a classic style with Dutch spelling, but in the digital era of specialty coffee, English was used in all elements. In conclusion, Yogyakarta’s café culture’s hybridization from ancient to modern times represents Bhabha’s third space, where cultural identities blend and produce new meanings. The dynamic relationship provides transcultural narratives that complement Fanon’s decolonization idea. Coffee culture’s shift from preferences to quality and community shows decolonization. These phenomena demonstrate Bhabha’s and Fanon’s cultural hybridity, freedom, and decolonized identity that appreciates diversity.

### 3.3 Decolonization of Taste Through Specialty Coffee: Resistance and Paradox

In this student market, “specialty” cafés compete by serving authentic coffee and educating consumers about coffee plantations, post-harvest, and manual brewing. Like this café, tech-savvy digital native coworking spaces embrace Industrial Zen Interior Design. In 2017, Hayati Specialty Coffee Roaster got renowned on Instagram as @hayaticoffee. Customers trust Indonesian and foreign green beans and roasted coffee manufacturers in Hayati, see figure 08. *“Here, customers deliberately come from outside the city to access the authentic taste and history of coffee, the quality of which we maintain, everything can be proven up front before buying,”* added the Hayati Barista. Meanwhile, as shown in figure 09, storytelling in proximity and exclusivity, Tadasih’s barista only offers 10 chairs and adjusts the cafe’s hours deviating from the American style market, depending solely on his mood. *“The uniqueness of a specialty is determined by the materials, barista skills, tools, as well as the uniqueness of each cafe which has its own media to build its own characteristics,”* he said.



Figure 8. Hayati Cafe displays coffee beans as an interactive medium for inhaling the aroma (Prastowo, 2024c).



Figure 9. There are no more than 10 seats in Tadasih Cafe to maintain the intimacy of specialty connoisseurs (Prastowo, 2024d).

Cafes like Hayati and Tadasih have dominated Yogyakarta's cafe scene for a decade. Gen Z coffee drinkers, who are educated, have helped establish cafe culture in Yogyakarta by introducing a wave of exceptionalism, a "scene subculture" such as a Coffee nerd who deliberately explore hidden gems for an authentic taste of coffee so called "*pemburu kedai kopi kerikil*/tiny coffee shop hunter" — (Aloha, 2023, p. 1). Coffee was consumed hybridly in the previous sub-chapter, but the coffee purification movement has led to specialty coffee in Yogyakarta and worldwide. Third-wave coffee is sophisticated like wine and differentiates products (Fischer, 2021, p. 114). According to Sepúlveda et al. (2016, p. 998), specialty coffee is influenced by both extrinsic factors (production chain) and intrinsic elements (taste). Bacon (2005, p. 498) confines specialty coffee to "sustainable coffee" validated by social, economic, and environmental balance assessments during production to ensure farming community viability.



This complements Spivak’s focus on minority voices because the movement involves grassroots resistance to colonial and industrial forces. We conclude, like Fanon’s decolonization, specialty requires flavor purity and manufacturing chain transparency: 1) type of beans: Robusta, Arabica, or Liberica beans, 2) label of origin: Sumatra, Java, Flores, Bali, Sulawesi, Papua, 3) agriculture models include open canopy, integrated farming, and agroforestry coffee, 4) processing modes: full wash, semi wash, natural wash, anaerobic, honey, carbonic maceration, and others.

Table 03. Typology of Specialty Café (Source: Authors, 2024)

Type of Specialty Cafe	Café Culture
1. Specialty Gourmet Coffee of Luwak	Cafes that are often located in tourist centers in Yogyakarta like Malioboro and Kraton. Targets middle-upper class tourists for its exoticised Luwak coffee. Offering moka pot as its main brewing method. Costs around IDR 100,000/6 Euros per cup served by english-fluent baristas that tells the story about Luwak coffee.
2. Consignment Specialty Cafe	Cafes that brew with entrusted beans supplied from partnering roasteries, similar to the business model of a Javanese Angkringan. Scattered around campuses with students as their main customers. Focuses more on the workspace rather than the coffee itself. Offering a balanced menu between manual brew and espresso-based coffee.
3. Specialty and Roastery Cafe	Aside from offering various specialty coffee menus, this cafe also roasts and sells coffee beans imported from farmers of specific regions. Separated into two spaces: the cafe itself and a dedicated roasting facility. The interior of the cafe matches that of Tapas Bar. Staffed by roasters, baristas, and brewers with specialty coffee certification. Acts as a hub for coffee enthusiasts.
4. Specialty Coffee Lab	Cafes that import coffee cherries instead of beans for extended and customized in-house coffee processing and roasting. Experiments with coffee fermentation process. Offering limited seats and visited by “coffee nerds” as their regular customers. Focuses more on the coffee instead of place with strong emphasis on taste and experience.



Figure 10. Interactive media typical of Luwak coffee which displays the exoticism of civet feces seeds at the Java Luwak Cafe. (Prastowo, 2024e).

*“Because Luwak coffee costs 100,000 Rupiah or 6 Euros each cup, only foreign tourists buy it”*, Barista stated. In addition, Luwak coffee comes from wild civet coffee in Temanggung, Central Java, to reduce stress and raise environmental and animal welfare awareness among foreign tourists. The excerpt from the interview shows an anomaly when local residents taste Luwak coffee, which Barista says is too expensive for Yogyakarta, which has one of Indonesia’s lowest minimum wages per month, 2,324,775 Rupiah or 142 Euros. The Bucket List (2007), the Hangover II (2011), Zoolander II (2016), Star Wars: The Last Jedi (2017), Crazy Rich Asians (2018), the Laundromat (2019), and Hollywood TV shows like Entourage (2004-2011), The Good Wife (2009-2016), Hawaii Five-0 (2010-2020), New Girl (2011-2018), and The Mindy Projects (2012-2017) have also made Luwak coffee exotic. This proves that the film industry’s role is significant as promotional media for civets throughout the world.

Using Spivak's subaltern critique and Fanon's decolonial theory, the transcultural narratives model critiques Java Luwak Café's exoticism of Luwak coffee's taste and production narrative. Visual coffee history and taste cards can decolonize civet coffee's exoticism. This part concludes that the specialty was intended to enable farmer-to-coffee cup transparency. It opposes hybridity decolonization's closedness. Ironically, we are also aware of criticism of this view that this taste-based quest for authenticity reproduces how colonials associate exoticism with coffee identity transparency. Critical reflection reveals that the specialty market mimics the colonial paradigm of exploration into exotic locations for the market in Java, which dominates islands throughout Indonesia as in line with figure 02, which describes how colonials presented descriptions of Javanese coffee as exotic promotional marketing for the Dutch markets.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, coffee has been integrated into Indonesians' daily existence, causing home-blindness and detachment from pre-colonial flavor dependence. Despite the decolonialist ethos passed down from Indonesia's founding fathers, the flavor of coffee is also attempting to be negotiated in this manner, thus we did not conduct this study with a chauvinist attitude that everything from Europe must be rejected. Our ethnographic and postcolonial findings show Yogyakarta's hybridity and specialized coffee culture, where sociocultural elements, market forces, and taste's expanding dominance influence these processes. Transcultural narratives restore and redefine cafe culture authenticity using traditional and new media.

This move represents a more significant trend of postcolonial societies actively negotiating their identities and opposing global uniformity. Our findings add to the broader discussion of how cultural practices anchored in the global and local nexus can be practical tools for decolonization and authentic self-expression in postcolonial nations. In theoretical reflection, specialty becomes a tool for resistance. Why does café culture emphasize specialty? According to Bhabha, transparency allows market forces, taste,



and sociocultural elements to reconstruct hybridity by regaining authenticity. Spivak agreed with Fanon that decolonization enhances subaltern culture. Before the 2010s, when specialty was lesser, the American franchise pattern standardized flavors for mass industry management. This study was part of the consumption community's taste resistance. The limitation of this study is that it only examined cafes' empirical events, not their history. This study could go beyond cafes by examining colonial documents in historical research.

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## Iconography

- Figure 01: Octafiani, Devy. (2017, June 17). Perjalanan hingga Luna Maya di Poster ‘Filosofi Kopi 2. *Detikcom*. <https://hot.detik.com/movie/d-3534099/perjalanan-hingga-luna-maya-di-poster-filosofi-kopi-2>
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- Figure 04: Prastowo, F. R. (2024a). Kopi Pakpos Cafe which uses a 1912 post office building in the Dutch era [Photograph]. Personal Collection.
- Figure 05: Sopyan, M. R. (2024a) Spiced coffee found as a superior product of the gift shop [Photograph]. Personal collection.
- Figure 06: Sopyan, M. R. (2024b) Kopijos in a tourist center that combines Angkringan as a communal space [Photograph]. Personal collection.
- Figure 07: Prastowo, F. R. (2024b) Goeboex Cafe which combines cafe activities, futsal and live music [Photograph]. Personal collection.

Figure 08: Prastowo, F. R. (2024c) Hayati Cafe displays coffee beans as an interactive medium for inhaling the aroma [Photograph]. Personal collection.

Figure 09: Prastowo, F. R. (2024d) There are no more than 10 seats in Tadasih Cafe to maintain the intimacy of specialty connoisseurs [Photograph]. Personal collection.

Figure 10: Prastowo, F. R. (2024e) Interactive media typical of Luwak coffee which displays the exoticism of civet feces seeds at the Java Luwak Cafe [Photograph] Personal collection.

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## **TERMINOLOGICAL ISSUES IN NEW MEDIA TRANSLATION: CITIZEN JOURNALISM AS A CASE STUDY**

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**Abstract:** Media Studies has been slow to wake up to issues of translation in general, and linguistic analysis of knowledge transfer in particular. This paper explores language use in the emerging field of New Media, taking the phenomenon of Citizen Journalism as a case study to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of some terminological issues observed in the field. Based on data-gathering research method, it scrutinizes the emerging lexicon of this form of participatory journalism in the context of English-Arabic translation. With a focus on some problematic translation techniques and procedures, the present paper demonstrates the challenges that translation imposes and how it affects language use and cross-cultural communication. Such findings will support and be useful for undergraduate translation trainees and journalism students, getting them familiarized with New Media environment, and keeping them current with the growing body of knowledge in the field of New Media Translation.

**Keywords:** Citizen journalism, Language Use, New Media Terminology, New Media Translation, Translation Techniques.

## 1. Introduction

The intent of this case study is to shed light on the reality and contemporary context of language use in one of the unprecedented modes of journalistic activities within the context of the new, computational media. The specific reality of the users' interpersonal interaction and interaction between users and content has generated the so-called Citizen Journalism. Citizen Journalism or Citizen Media (in this paper journalism and media are used interchangeably) is a reflection of the current changes in the ways citizenry access information and practice content coverage in today's globalized world. The use of modern tools of communication technology and information distribution, namely smart mobiles and computers, along with the Internet mediation within the so-called Internet Sociology, have led to a huge change in the traditional media and the emergence of 'New media' as a fully social institution identified by new forms of on-line journalism (Lister et al; 2003:12).

With ordinary citizens indulging in content coverage in terms of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information, not only new forms of collaborative journalism have emerged, but also the lexicon of today's media expanded. One of the defining features of this non-professional journalistic practice is the fact that its terminology and concepts are increasingly shaping the future of the media industry, affecting language use and knowledge transfer as well. Actually, the vibrancy and diversity of today's technology-assisted journalism have spawned relevant vocabulary set inspired by key ideas from technology-mediated fields, such as cybernetics and computer sciences, and concepts from other disciplines such as sociology and politics, to name a few.

The present study deals with the translated product of citizen-based media output in particular, taking into account the context of production and reception of its terminology and its function in the cultural and historical contexts of the target language. Although it is carried out with descriptive/explanatory methodological approaches, this study adopts an

evaluative lens and focuses on addressing issues of quality in some instances of naturally occurring terms and the challenges of their transfer into another environment.

Generally, the underlying rationale behind any product-oriented research in translation is to discuss issues of quality in translation in terms of reliability, credibility, validity, and ethics. In fact, product-oriented investigations reflect the challenges confronting the translation process in terms of meaning negotiation and decision-making (Saldanha & O'Brien; 2013). More than that, this research is fueled by the fact that new media linguistic research is scarce in Arabic and scant attention has been given to the linguistic transfer of new media output, including its emerging lexicon and vocabulary set, its translation, and translation quality assessment.

## **2. Method and selection criteria**

Starting with background definitions of some -problematic- key terms, the paper at hand addresses some examples of the English-Arabic rendering of citizen journalism nomenclature in connection with its imposed and transferred Arabic counterparts. One can notice that the translation of many terms necessitates serious reflection and should not be rendered out of mechanical activity, depending upon simple, one-to-one transfer. With a focus on translation problems confronting Arab translators in their work, it seeks to capture, interpret, and discuss particularly those instances where translators have to resort to creativity and compensatory strategies to avoid loss in translation, such as the making up of a different target text to establish equivalence, or paraphrasing the source text instead of translating it, etc. To investigate the linguistic aspects of the phenomenon, a descriptive, qualitative methodology is adopted.

Because of the data scarcity in Arabic particularly, online data collection has been conducted which allows to capture some up-to-date instances witnessed in new media literature and communication. The data have been chosen deliberately to expose the challenges that this type of technical

translation imposes on translators. The analysis deals with each English term and scrutinizes its Arabic counterpart to reveal and discuss the translation techniques adopted. For these purposes, four prominent key terms have been selected from the jargon of citizen journalism, denoting the definition, the content, and the participants in this journalistic practice. These terms, considered to be the most communicated in the phenomenon literature, are clearly defined and their translation strategies are discussed.

### **3. Translation in new media**

Translation, as mentioned before in this paper, has been neglected in media studies; it has not been considered as a news writing strategy, rather it was restricted to literal rendering, that is a word-for-word transformation from one language into another. More than that, some translation scholars propose the use of ‘transediting’ in reference to the interplay between translating and editing (for a fuller discussion of translation in journalistic studies see Baumann et al, 2011: 136-137). Nevertheless, the challenges of the blurred boundaries between old and new in the complex, hybrid context of new media have led to rethinking translation strategies and methods. In the current age of transmediality (Lister et al; 2009: 9), research on media, communication and globalization studies start considering several questions that translators encounter in terms of language use and the current human communicational behavior change. According to Desjardins (2017), Translation and media share a similar history of struggle against the changing trends of globalization and technology so that ‘today’s social media and translation technology are so intertwined that it is now possible to have online content translated automatically in real time’ (2017: 16).

It is important to note that in the context of new media, translation faces multimodal media genres and novel forms of production and consumption performed by laymen on modern media networks such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Flickr, Wikis, Blogosphere, etc. This mode of user engagement involves virtual participation in multiple languages and forms of semiotic mediation that logically affect language and discourse. In

effect, new media technologies afford different contexts and understandings of textuality which disseminates relevant concepts and terminology of complex denotation and meaning. The coverage of news and information by ordinary users through several Web 2.0 platforms and websites including (micro) blogs, wikis, fanfiction communities, and games, reflects linguistically structured identities circulating in native and second languages every single moment (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008: 560). Therefore, interactions between users and new media technologies have broadened the scope of multimodality more than ever before.

As far as translation is concerned, the nascent communications and language use evolving from such intertwined environments makes the translator's task more pressing and highly demanding. Placing the audience at the forefront of content gathering and distribution through digital broadcasting has challenged journalistic translation, fueled the spread of new media philosophy, and contributed to re-delineating its definition, to some extent.

#### **4. New media: the quest for a simple definition**

In media studies, the term 'New Media' has emerged since the late 20th century as an umbrella term referring to the new forms of contemporary journalism and digitization of news production, distribution and use due to the advances in digital media technologies. According to Lister et al (2009: 10), the term reflects a shift from modernity to postmodernity; it has been used to draw distinctions from traditional media that relied before on print and analog broadcasting, such as newspapers and television. Today the distinction has been systematically made between a top-down model of journalistic content generation held by mainstream media versus a new horizontal model of interaction and user engagement undertaken by the citizenry.

The latter form of communication is manifested through a limitless, intense reliance on the Internet and relevant digital tools precisely, mobile telephony, which has gradually shaped the definition of new media, attributing

a set of characteristics to its concept, such as interactivity, virtuality, digital, hyper-textuality, networked, and simulations (Lister et al.; 2009:13).

In effect, the term 'new media' tends to be synonymous with 'online social media' denoting a whole range of transformations and dislocations of established practices, which have led to textual, conventional, and cultural changes. The significant shift in the medium on which a higher degree of information sharing occurs, as well as the speed at which communication is now collaboratively delivered, have contributed to structural changes in mainstream media and human communicational behavior as well. Large community involvement and citizen participation and interaction in the cyberspace of social media platforms, blogosphere, chatrooms, and news sites have paved the way for new media to rise and flourish without any permission or consent from the traditional gatekeepers.

As far as translation is concerned, the compound term 'new media' is rendered literally in Arabic as الإعلام الجديد, (Back Translation (BT): new media), respecting word class and order in accordance with the target language' syntactical structure (noun + adjective). This translation technique, known as (complete) Calque, is, according to Newmark, the most commonly adopted procedure for international institutional terms by far (1982:30). Despite the fact that translation by calquing manifests in one-to-one translation, it enriches the target language by expanding its vocabulary and avoiding the direct use of foreign words (i.e. borrowing or transliteration). However, the target text is still esoteric and vague as it does not provide a clear denotation about its semantic scope and borders.

In Arabic as in English, there is obviously no consensus on a simple, scientific definition that accurately defines the concept of 'New Media'; the term is whether defined as being an antonym to Mainstream Media (MSM); also traditional media or journalism; older media/journalism), contrasting the traditional homogenization of viewpoints, or as a synonym to the term Citizen Journalism in reference to those journalistic activities of news gathering and publishing conducted by the public. In fact, the term still

represents a fast, great leap forward that confuses the world linguists and translators (among others) who need to acquire a higher level of linguistic proficiency and domain-knowledge competence to grasp the semantic properties of new media terminology in general.

## **5. Citizen journalism: a myriad of synonyms for one concept**

Unlike 'new media', the semantic borders of the term Citizen Journalism (coined by Rodriguez, 2001) are clear-cut, despite the fact that there are several terms denoting its concept. In fact, there is a consensus that this form of journalism is widely defined as a phenomenon associated with laymen's (or residents of a community) involvement in collecting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information outside mainstream media institutions, without any journalistic expertise or training (Rodriguez 2001; Dowman & Willis 2003; Gillmor; 2004; Frosh & Pinchevski 2009). In other words, the term encompasses the journalistic activities conducted by Internet users or amateurs with no professional training, who publish news reports or share photos or videos on sharing sites, blogosphere, online forums, bulletin boards, social networks, or any other media outlet, from the event scenes to be disseminated globally, transcending the political borders of countries.

In brief, any individual can be a journalist today, playing the role previously held by professional journalists to communicate their opinion and voice to the world without the need to study journalism or belong to any media institution. Although there still exists legislative debate over its non-professionalism, the public's participation in journalism has been imposed and identified as a new paradigm with new standards different from the ones delineated by the traditional journalist-audience relationships and modes of communication.

It is worth mentioning that at the beginning of citizen journalism, this participatory activity was vague, unclear, and chaotic, and its concept was not within easy reach due to its novel, unprecedented work methods and modes. This actually could explain the efforts conducted by interested researchers

and subject-matter experts to decipher the concept from different perspectives, giving it different names and designations. More than that, citizen journalism has been considered one of the most controversial concepts, faced with fierce resistance from mainstream media and traditionalists, and been (and will continue to be) criticized as being untrustworthy and lacking in journalistic ethics and norms, such as realism, transparency, neutrality, credibility, objectivity, etc.

However, several synonyms have been attributed to this phenomenon (as mentioned earlier) and the nomenclature of itself concept has expanded to encompass more than 10 synonyms (at least), all denoting the same semantic features of a widespread citizenry voluntary involvement in digital journalism and broadcasting. Strikingly, one can notice a myriad of designations such as *Alternative Journalism*; *Participatory Journalism*; *Mobile Journalism*; *Grassroot Journalism*; *Open-Source Journalism*; *Interactive Journalism*; *Community Journalism*; *Democratic Journalism*; *Empowerment Journalism*; *Popular Journalism*; *Street Journalism*; *Guerilla Journalism*; *Witnessing Journalism*; etc.; and the list is long.

Remarkably, the nomenclature of citizen journalism is enriched with semantic features and connotations inspired by ideas, currents, and schools of thought from other disciplines, mostly human sciences (e.g. sociology; psychology; politics; cultural studies; etc.). One can notice that some of the terms given to this journalistic practice are based on the characteristics or identity of the users (i.e. citizen; Grassroot; community; street;). Other terms denoting the concept of citizen journalism refer to the tools used by users (i.e. mobile; open source (Internet)); whereas other terms reflect the adjectives and descriptions attributed to this phenomenon (i.e. participatory; alternative; democratic; popular; street; guerilla; witnessing; etc.;).

Surprisingly, some other terms focus on the content produced by the public or the outcome of news coverage in reference to the phenomenon itself, such as *User-generated content (UGC)*; *Grassroots reporting*; *Social media news sharing*; *Crowdsourcing* or *Crowdsourced news reporting*; etc. Given



the multiplicity of terms dedicated for one concept, an optimal definition of this form of journalism would not be completely and correctly delineated unless it includes some specific, decisive semantic features; it ought to denote the meanings of virality, immediacy, non-institutionalization, and (public) interaction.

As a result of direct contact between Arabic and English, Arabic reflects a similar designation dilemma too, even though the source texts are plain and easy to translate since they do not consist of neologisms or culture-specific items. Translation comes up with numerous terms generated via calquing technique, resulting in compounds preceded by the lexeme */sahafa/* (lit. journalism) in the form of annexation (e.g. Citizen Journalism as */sahafa't almuatin/*; Alternative Journalism as */sahafa badila/*; etc). Similarly, such a terminological multiplicity (e.g. the co-existence of several terms for the same concept) is confusing in Arabic as in English, and this has been caused by the different views and perspectives of media scholars in general and new media experts in particular, whose visions and thoughts have contributed to increasing the phenomenon's terminological fertility.

The synonymous nature of citizen journalism's nomenclature might practically confuse a novice translator exactly as any other technical field, imposing a jargon that might be hard to handle and translate. Translators can easily provide the closest, literal equivalence which does not always lead to adequate translation results. Literal translation is just one option in technical translation, but for translators in general, it is important to master this technique and figure out when it should be used and when it should not.

However, the fact that the phenomenon is new, and complex complicates the translator's task since no reliable Arabic sources and topic literature (e.g. specialized dictionaries; encyclopedias; glossaries; linguistic research; translation quality assessment; etc.) are available (until this moment) to assist translation and knowledge transfer into Arabic. As a result, translators with little subject knowledge might face translation problems and lack of assistance and thus fail to deliver the meaning accurately. In this case,

translators should resort to the help of linguists (notably terminologists) helping them successfully negotiate translation choices and decision-making challenges. Cooperation between linguistics and translation theory basically provides the principles and strategies necessary to tackle the problems of translation.

## **6. User-generated content (UGC)**

The term User-Generated Content, alternatively known as User-Created Content (UCC), refers to any form of content, ideas and interest that take many formats such as collage-writing, text, footage, video, audio, comments, or testimonials, posted on virtual platforms by ordinary citizens or amateurs. Within the framework of new media boosted by pervasive information technology, Perrino's (2009) concept of UGC has been triggered through commenting, liking, linking, and sharing, which creates an interactive mode of communication with a heavy influx of interaction between users, and between users and content.

Lister et al. (2009) stress that the rise of user-generated content relies essentially on technology-mediated modes of production within a higher level of virtuality and simulated, interactive representational spaces (2009:13). This form of collective consciousness of user engagement employs modern communicative modalities, appropriate genres (internet-specific), and interpersonal communication tools and materials. As a matter of fact, social networking, smartphones, and media-sharing websites have enabled content accessibility despite the fact that UGC can be highly subjective and biased, mostly reflecting a lack in journalistic expertise and professionalism. Actually, the extensive UGC momentum is another factor that contributes to the current shift in new media, leading citizen journalism to increase as a unique phenomenon and be the most effective form of content coverage and a main source for news everywhere in the world.

In Arabic as in English, UGC is not coined into a single lexical item; it is commonly translated via word-for-word technique, generating a longer

linguistic construction in Arabic. In English, UGC is rather a lexical creation that combines three units collocationally compounded to form a new construction: a compound adjective modifying a noun. In Arabic, however, the rendition of this kind of construction clearly shows the lack of translators' competence in terms of adopting adequate translation methods or techniques. The term has been literally rendered via a sentential construction in Arabic as follows:

محتوى ينتجه المستخدمون (B.T. Content produced by users)

محتوى ينشئه المستخدم (B.T. Content built by the user)

Despite the fact that there is no semantic loss or addition, the term -as mentioned earlier- is longer in Arabic; sometimes it involves a structural change, especially when a relative pronoun (الذي) is added to the target text: المحتوى الذي ينتجه المستخدم, resulting in a translation technique called calque with extension. Surprisingly, the term has been rendered into several forms in the target language; for instance, UGC appears on 'Reverso' online dictionary as:

المحتوى الذي ينشئه المستخدمون؛ المحتوى الذي ينشئه المستخدم؛ محتوى من إنشاء المستخدم؛  
المحتوى المقدم من المستخدمين؛ المحتوى الذي من إنشاء المستخدمين؛ المحتوى الذي أنشأه  
المستخدم؛ محتوى معد بواسطة المستخدم؛ المحتوى الذي أنشأه المستخدمون؛ المحتوى الذي  
ينتجه المستخدم؛ محتواك المعد بواسطة المستخدم؛ محتوى المستخدمين؛ والمحتوى الذي ينشئه  
المستخدم؛ المحتوى الذي يتم إنشاؤه بواسطة المستخدم؛

Such instances reflect the fact that the term is not the product of the target culture; so, there is no ready-made equivalent for such construction in Arabic. In their efforts to ease communication and convey the message and meaning beyond such barriers, translators have resorted to formulating a definition like target text, instead of creating a similar construction that imitates and captures both the form and meaning of the source text. This is, in fact, one example of a situation where the translator acts as a mediator between languages (Baker, 2001:3). For Newmark (1982:31), it is a truism

that using this method in technical translation results in a target text that might be accurate, but it lacks the concision and elegance of specific terms belonging to a specific field of knowledge.

## 7. Crowdsourcing

Borrowed from the context of business and market economy, the blend Crowdsourcing refers to the audience's (experts and laymen) contribution to help solve problems to enhance quality and productivity. It is defined by the online dictionary Merriam-Webster (2024) as "the practice of obtaining needed services, ideas, or content, by soliciting contributions from a large group of people and especially from the online community rather than from traditional employees or suppliers".

Since its coinage in 2006 by Howe, this concept has known multiple definitions depending on the domain or context of use. In the context of new media, however, the term is a portmanteau that means obtaining work, information, or opinions from a large group of people via the internet, social media, and smartphone apps. Desjardins (2017) defines the verb to 'crowd-source' as essentially meaning 'to go beyond an in-house team or group of employees in order to 'assign' a specific task to the masses, in the hope of leveraging the 'crowd's' diverse experience and knowledge (2017: 22). It becomes clear that within the context of citizen journalism, the term has been adopted to delineate the substantial role the audiences play in shaping the present and future of new media.

As far as translation is concerned, crowdsourcing is a challenging coined term that has undergone a lexical change in Arabic. Although the meanings of the two combined words (crowd; source) imply some truth about the real denotation of the term (making the crowd or the public a source of information); however, the individual words in crowdsourcing are not translated via one-to-one word in Arabic. Arab translators ostensibly prefer the method of calquing with substitution to come up with the collocation *التعهد الجماعي* (BT. collective assignment) as equivalent. This way, they have managed to

elaborate an alternative collocation that preserves the form of the term and indicates its meaning better than what a literal translation might do. In this example, substitution has been adopted which reflects the translators' efforts to adapt the source text to an adequate language use and technical translation principles, namely concision and accuracy.

### **Discussion**

Despite the fact that citizen journalism terminology tends to be univocal, having ready-made equivalents and straightforward, plain language use, the findings have shown that translators should resort to a creative elaboration of target texts in some instances. For example, some compound terms, being open, closed, or hyphenated, are problematic, especially longer compound nouns of more than two words (such as User-generated content; Social media news sharing; Crowdsourced news reporting; Mass news media; etc.). One can notice that the longer the source text is, the longer the target text tends to be, and the more inadequate it might sound, which is unacceptable in technical translation in particular.

The analysis has also revealed that calquing and paraphrasing are the prevalent techniques adopted in Arabic to achieve translation gain. Such methods reflect an extreme source language bias on the part of Arab translators, mostly due to the novelty of the subject matter. To overcome such problems and provide adequate solutions, mutual contact and constant dialogue should be established between linguists and terminologists on a regular basis. Along with subject matter knowledge, terminological knowledge and theories should come into play as a reliable source of assistance in this type of translation to help translators develop a sharper awareness of terms' generation and knowledge transfer competencies. Such afforest will effectively contribute to the advancement of knowledge dissemination and mutual understanding between cultures.

## 8. Conclusion

The study at hand has examined language and translation interaction in everyday language use in citizen journalism context, with focus on some instances of translation challenges. It has backgrounded some of the eminent key terms of citizen journalism and relevant nomenclature in the growing field of new media. It has pointed out some problematic cases in citizen media translation, providing detailed analysis central to the common techniques and methods adopted. The fact that some methods have been more predominant in Arabic explains the Arab translator's caution in dealing with the new, complex nomenclature of citizen journalism as a new area of research.

However, the complexity of the multimodal context of new media and the background multiplicity of its nomenclature necessitates a higher level of translation expertise. This mode of citizenry engagement has generated concepts inspired by different currents and schools of thought grounded in principles of democratic enlightenment and civic struggle. Furthermore, the language of today's digitally mediated media employs extremely specialized nomenclature from cybernetics and computer science (among others).

To translate the output of new media accurately in the digital era, today's translator needs to be acquainted with the context of use of the cyberspace language and the characteristics of the new electronic textuality. They should be furnished not only with bilingual, specialized dictionaries but also with domain knowledge competence that they can acquire by contacting experts in cybernetics and information technology for more insight. More than that, they have to put themselves in the place of the actors who produce and consume the new forms of contemporary media.

As far as definition multiplicity is concerned, effort should be made to achieve a higher level of vocabulary standardization from specialized institutions and language academies to help anchor unified technical translation outputs to assist translators and foster New Media research and communication.

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- [https://journals.ekb.eg/article\\_108654.html](https://journals.ekb.eg/article_108654.html)
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**Part III**

# **NEW MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION**



## **THE IMPACT OF FEMVERTISING ON THE ATTITUDES OF PORTUGUESE CONSUMERS: THE CASE OF WOMEN'S SECRET**

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**Abstract:** Messages deconstructing gender stereotypes have become increasingly prevalent in advertising discourse around the world. Their expansion has been so great that the notion of femvertising, which mixes feminism with advertising and encourages constructive communication between brands and women, was developed in 2015. Nonetheless, despite specialists claiming the effectiveness of this method in the field of communication, disagreements regarding its application have surfaced. In this context, a case study of the brand Women'ssecret was conducted with the goal of understanding the impact of femvertising on the attitudes of Portuguese female consumers toward the brand. A mixed-method approach was chosen for this purpose, incorporating, as exploratory techniques, five interviews and content analysis of advertisements; and, as primary techniques, two surveys targeting brand consumers - one featuring a femvertising advertisement and the other without femvertising - to enable a comparison of reactions to the phenomenon. The analysis of responses (n=389) allowed us to firstly identify the criteria recognized by brand consumers in femvertising

ads - Messages in favor of women, Minimization of sexuality, Use of diversity, and Coherence. Secondly, it highlighted the most prevalent emotions evoked – Trust and Bonding. Finally, it investigated their impact on customers' purchasing intentions. The results revealed that employing this strategy can have a positive impact on this regard, although it is understood that a single advertisement does not have a very pronounced influence.

**Keywords:** femvertising; advertising; Women'ssecret; consumer behavior; female stereotypes.

## 1. Introduction

In the context of advertising, the role of stereotypes in perpetuating inequalities is commonly accepted (Hainneville et al., 2022). In the specific case of the representation of women, Jalees and Majid (2009) emphasize that, by perpetuating an “ideal of beauty”, advertising is regularly blamed for feeding unrealistic expectations, an inferiority complex, and the myth that women are not only sexual objects but also inferior to men. This creates, reinforces, and disseminates stereotyped images of the feminine sex and what is socially established as women's gender roles, which led to the rise of femvertising in 2015 (Bayone & Burrowes, 2019).

Femvertising is a complex concept, and despite its proven effectiveness as a communication tactic, it continues to be the target of numerous criticisms and skepticism. On the other hand, there is scarce theoretical and empirical background on the subject in Portugal. Therefore, the goal of this study is to help close the gap that has been found in Portugal's communication sciences, particularly in the domain of advertising. To do this, a Case Study was conducted, concentrating on the Portuguese environment, and evaluating a company that incorporates femvertising into its advertising discourse: Women'ssecret.

## 2. Concept and Attributes of Femvertising

Resulting from the combination of the words feminism and advertising (Bayone & Burrowes, 2019), the term femvertising was coined in 2015 by the former media agency SheKnows Media, now known as She Media (Yarimoglu, 2021). It is a type of advertising that challenges traditional stereotypes of female advertising, emphasizing the importance of not only including physical aspects of females when analyzing this phenomenon but adopting a holistic view of women, including the deconstruction of stereotypes (Akestam et al., 2017). Bayone and Burrowes (2019) additionally state that the central purpose of femvertising is positive dialogue between brands and the female audience. With this strategy, brands seek to enhance their image and provide greater identification of their target audience with the products and services in question. Two good examples are the #likeagirl campaign<sup>1</sup> from Always, and “the fearless girl” campaign<sup>2</sup> from the State Street Global Advisers.

Dove appears to have been a pioneer in producing advertisements with a broader and more inclusive perception of beauty, featuring “real” women (Bissell & Rask, 2015; Bayone & Burrowes, 2019). However, in the last decade, brands such as Nike, Always, and Pantene, have also embraced this approach. Following this trend, She Media launched the #Femvertising competition to honor brands using stories, images, and/or messages of female empowerment in their advertising (Yarimoglu, 2021), and this phenomenon has become its own category at the prestigious international advertising festival Cannes Lions (Akestam et al., 2017).

For Becker-Herby (2016), these are the five pillars of femvertising:

- i. Use of diversity: Femvertising is intersectional, just as contemporary feminism should be. Femvertising campaigns, instead of relying on models that conform to the ideal beauty standards, showcase diverse body

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtDMYGjYlMg>

2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRFsFPRQVKY>

- shapes, ethnicities, and ages, among other characteristics. Consequently, women feel more accurately represented.
- ii. Crafting messages in favor of women: Femvertising rejects messages in which the product is portrayed as the solution to consumers' problems. Instead, it employs inspiring and inclusive messages, aiming to instill feelings of self-affirmation and confidence in women.
  - iii. Challenging gender stereotypes and perceptions of what a woman/girl "should be": Femvertising campaigns do not depict women in situations associated with traditional stereotypes, such as performing household tasks. Instead, they often appear in competitive, leisure, working, or neutral settings.
  - iv. Minimization of sexuality: If the female body appears in a femvertising campaign, it is portrayed in a relevant, authentic manner, without exaggerating appearances through sexual poses or excessive aesthetic sophistication.
  - v. Authentic representation of women: All advertising aspects (e.g., product, talent, setting) in femvertising campaigns are authentic. The conveyed message is credible and aligns with the elements of the advertisement. Becker-Herby's (2016) pillars served as an analytical framework for several studies on femvertising and have become relevant in understanding the effectiveness of femvertising as a Marketing Communication strategy.

### **3. Femvertising as a Marketing Communication Strategy**

Several authors have suggested that femvertising is a successful strategy for reaching the female audience (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2020; Akestam et al., 2017; Drake, 2017). However, other studies that question its effectiveness (Hainneville et al., 2022; Jalakas, 2016).

Drake (2017) conducted an experimental online study with a sample of 181 women aged 18 to 34. They were randomly exposed to either traditional television ads or femvertising ads from the same brand and subsequently

asked to respond to a questionnaire survey. This research revealed that, in general, femvertising has a positive impact on women's opinions of the brand, increases emotional connection, and makes them more likely to purchase from that brand. In another experimental study with 346 women aged between 18 and 40, Akestam et al. (2017) confirmed that femvertising, compared to ads portraying traditional images of women, improves women's attitudes toward the brand. Both studies emphasize that brands should challenge stereotypes associated with beauty standards and use images that contribute to increasing female self-esteem, as this stimulates and strengthens the relationships consumers have with brands.

On the other hand, Jalakas (2016) takes a more neutral stance on the topic. Through 14 interviews with women who viewed femvertising ads, her study revealed ambivalence in the results, stating that the reaction to this phenomenon cannot be generalized. According to the author, women extract different meanings from the ads, adjusting them to their individual context, and making judgments based on their prior knowledge about the brand in question.

Analyzing femvertising from a distinct perspective, Abitbol and Sternadori (2020) aimed to understand whether the degree of rurality and preference for specific ads are associated with attitudes toward this strategy. Through 418 online surveys, they concluded that the more urban the location of the respondents, the more educated they tended to be, and the more likely they were to support gender equality. However, this did not translate into a more positive attitude towards femvertising. In other words, their study suggests that companies and marketing professionals should consider transcending the more serious tone of most female empowerment messages.

Champlin et al. (2019) also delved into femvertising, this time in conjunction with the concept of brand-cause fit. After a qualitative analysis of the winning ads from the #FemvertisingAwards in 2015, they highlighted key themes that differentiate them and concluded that the effectiveness of campaigns does not depend on brand-cause fit but on how the brand addresses

the social issue. Thus, challenging female stereotypes can be beneficial not only for a limited range of products (e.g., feminine or household products) but also for a wide range of product categories (e.g., cars, intimate and sportswear, shampoos) in any advertising medium.

Hainneville et al. (2022) adopted a qualitative methodology, conducting in-depth interviews with 17 women to explore the nature of authentic femvertising and differentiated it from femwashing (inauthentic femvertising). The authors emphasize that, while some consumers perceive sincerity in brands using femvertising, others question its authenticity, motivations, and feminist nature, leading to the concept of femwashing. The results suggest that the concepts of femvertising and femwashing coexist in consumers' minds, which justifies some of the contradictions found in the literature regarding its true effectiveness (Hainneville et al., 2022). Additionally, the authors identified six dimensions of authentic femvertising:

- i. **Transparency:** implies the absence of modifications in both body shape and skin texture. Advertisements should include representations of everyday life, as elements distant from real life diminish the perceived level of realism by consumers (Hainneville et al., 2022);
- ii. **Consistency:** refers to the consistency between the brand identity (history, values, parent company), its communication, and its offering. Participants do not believe that a brand's approach is credible if it has communicated in a sexist manner in the past. On the other hand, a company that has positively contributed to the representation of women since its inception is more easily perceived as genuine;
- iii. **Identification:** the existence of a bond between the advertisement and the "self" is a prerequisite in femvertising ads. According to the study, consumers understand that an advertisement is authentic when they can recognize themselves in it;
- iv. **Diversity:** does not only refer to inclusive advertisements at the level of physical appearance (ethnicity, morphology, style), identity (age and



- gender), and health issues. It also implies the absence of justifications from brands regarding the use of inclusion;
- v. Challenging stereotypes: involves the deconstruction of gender stereotypes (career, domestic activities), physical appearance stereotypes (beauty standards), and stereotypes related to women's interests (personality, preferences);
  - vi. Respect: is based on brands respecting women (reducing sexualization without making it taboo) and women respecting themselves (encouraging self-acceptance, self-esteem, and self-confidence).

#### **4. The impact of femvertising on women**

The consequences of femvertising are not exclusively reflected in terms of the brand's emotional and purchase intention (Drake, 2017). According to Bayone and Burrowes (2019), 91% of the 628 surveyed women believe that how they are portrayed in advertising directly affects their self-esteem. Citing entertainment magazines that publish weight-loss tips and ideal body standards, also Bissell and Rask (2015) assert that the media is one of the major causes of low self-esteem in many women. This fact, encompassing body dissatisfaction and "self-objectification," can have more serious consequences, such as anorexia, bulimia, and depression.

To analyze the negative consequences of femvertising, Lin and McFerran (2016) conducted an experimental investigation involving 168 women and found that when there is an acceptance of a larger body, individuals exhibit lower motivation to commit to healthy behaviors and consume larger portions of unhealthy food. In another research, Varghese and Kumar (2020) conducted an experimental study to analyze femvertising as a media strategy to increase the self-esteem of both female and male adolescents and found that femvertising helps improve the self-esteem of adolescents, with no gender difference.

## **5. Methodology**

This research aims to understand how the femvertising used in Women'secret's advertising influences Portuguese consumers' attitudes towards the brand. In this perspective, the central question was defined as: "What is the impact of Women'secret's femvertising on the attitudes of Portuguese consumers towards the brand?". Based on the tripartite attitude model referenced by Baynast et al. (2018) – which includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral components – the following specific objectives were established:

1. Identify the femvertising criteria perceived by Women'secret consumers in its advertisements;
2. Evaluate the emotions evoked by Women'secret's femvertising in its Portuguese consumers;
3. Analyze the relationship between Women'secret's femvertising and the purchasing intention of its Portuguese consumers.

### **5.1 Study Design and Method**

Since this research specifically focuses on the Women'secret brand, it is classified as a Case Study, defined by Bryman (2015) as a detailed exploration of a specific case. A mixed-method sequential exploratory design (Creswell & Clark, 2018) was adopted, consisting of two phases: an initial qualitative phase followed by a quantitative phase.

### **5.2 Data Collection and Methods of Analysis**

Two exploratory techniques were applied to complement the subsequent primary technique. In the first phase, exploratory interviews were conducted with consumers of the brand being studied. Next, a content analysis was conducted on Women'secret advertisements in 2022. Finally, a questionnaire survey was administered to the brand's consumers as the primary research technique, aiming to address the proposed objectives and the main research question.

### 5.3 Exploratory Interviews

Due to their exploratory nature,, five interviews were conducted to gather the perspectives of the participants regarding their stance on femvertising and identify potential criteria that could contribute to the subsequent primary technique. The target audience for the study was defined based on information collected about Women'ssecret's typical consumers in Portugal: Portuguese women, aged between 25 and 45 years.

The interview analysis identified a relevant variable to include in the questionnaire survey: Coherence. According to the interviewed women, communication must align with the brand's values and actions. Otherwise, femvertising efforts may have a counterproductive effect, distancing consumers from the brands (Table 1).

Table 1 - Femvertising criterion identified through exploratory interviews

Criterion	Description
Coherence	The brand's values are aligned with its communication. Otherwise, femvertising efforts may have the opposite effect, distancing consumers from the brands.

### 5.4 Content Analysis

In this research, content analysis was used as a data analysis methodology to select the advertisements included in the questionnaire. The goal was to choose two ads: one featuring femvertising and another without. After reviewing Women'ssecret's most-viewed ads on YouTube in 2022 for the Portuguese audience, two ads were selected based on a femvertising criteria analysis model constructed for the research, incorporating insights from Becker-Herby (2016) and Hainneville et al. (2022) (Table 2). The analysis concluded that the two most-viewed Women'ssecret ads on YouTube in 2022 for the Portuguese audience met the desired criteria for the research (Appendix 1).

Table 2 – Selected femvertising criteria

Criteria	Authors	Description
Crafting messages in favor of women	Becker-Herby (2016)	The product is not the solution to consumers' problems. Inspiring and inclusive messages are included, seeking to evoke feelings of self-assertion and confidence in women.
Minimization of sexuality and respect for the body	Becker-Herby (2016) Hainneville et al. (2022)	The body is shown naturally, avoiding exaggerated looks, sexual poses, or excessive aesthetic appeal. Brands prioritize respecting women by toning down sexualization without making it taboo, while also encouraging self-respect, confidence, and acceptance among women themselves.
Challenging gender stereotypes and perceptions of what a woman/girl "should be"	Becker-Herby (2016) Hainneville et al. (2022)	Deconstruction of gender stereotypes (career, domestic activities), physical appearance stereotypes (beauty standards), and stereotypes related to women's interests (personality, preferences). These stereotypes typically manifest in competitive environments, leisure settings, at work, or in neutral scenarios.
Relatability/ Authenticity	Becker-Herby (2016) Hainneville et al. (2022)	The existence of a connection between the advertisement and the "self". Consumers perceive an advertisement as authentic when they can see themselves reflected in it.
Use of diversity	Becker-Herby (2016) Hainneville et al. (2022)	Presentation of diverse body types, races, ages, among others, instead of models conforming to the ideal beauty standards. However, this doesn't only refer to inclusive advertisements regarding physical appearance (ethnicity, morphology, style), identity (age and gender), and health issues. It also implies the absence of justifications from brands regarding the use of inclusion.
Transparency	Hainneville et al. (2022)	Absence of modifications in both body shape and skin texture.

The model presented earlier was used both in the phase of content analysis and in the initial part of the questionnaire survey, as will be evident in the following subsection. Additionally, it is important to note that, to ensure impartiality during the data analysis, we chose to exclude the Transparency and Identification/Authenticity dimensions from the content analysis. These dimensions are subjective and should be evaluated only from the consumers' perspective. Similarly, we decided not to include the Coherence dimension in the content analysis since it pertains more to consumers' opinions about the brand rather than the advertisement itself. These three variables will only be considered in the analysis of the survey data.

### **5.5 Survey**

The two exploratory techniques outlined earlier proved essential for constructing the survey. According to Creswell and Clark (2018), this is a convenient and cost-effective technique that provides a numerical description of attitudes and opinions within a population by studying a sample.

To understand if femvertising has any impact on shaping consumers' attitudes towards the brand, and considering the approach taken by Drake (2017), two surveys were administered with the same questions, but each presented one of the two selected ads: one featuring femvertising<sup>3</sup> and the other not<sup>4</sup>. This approach facilitated the comparison of results, allowing for more conclusive insights.

The survey was made available via the Google Forms platform and distributed from August 20 to September 3, 2022. It was shared within the researchers' network of contacts and on their social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn). A total of 400 responses were recorded (202 for survey 1 and 198 for survey 2), with 389 considered valid (194 and 195, respectively).

3. Ad with Femvertising here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LI468cNWGJU>

4. Ad without femvertising here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Crij2wGLMAo~>

## 5.6 Methodological Construct of the Survey

In this study, the survey was employed to fulfill the aforementioned objectives and to address the research question, as well as the study's specific goals. The sections of the survey were designed considering the Tripartite Model of Attitude.

Table 3 - Summary of the Primary Methodological Strategy

Research Question					
What is the impact of Women'secret's femvertising on the attitudes of Portuguese female consumers towards the brand?					
Primary Technique					
Survey					
Tripartite Model of Attitude	Objectives	Research Questions	Variable	Source	Question
Cognitive component <sup>5</sup>	Identify the femvertising criteria perceived by Women'secret brand consumers in its advertisements.	What are the femvertising criteria perceived by consumers of the Women'secret brand in its advertisements?	Crafting messages in favor of women	Becker-Herby (2016)	1
			Minimization of sexuality and respect for the body		2
			Challenging gender stereotypes and perceptions of what a woman/girl "should be"	Becker-Herby (2016); Hainneville et al. (2022)	3
			Relatability/ Authenticity		4
			Use of diversity		5
			Transparency	Hainneville et al. (2022)	6
			Coherence	Interviews	7
Affective component <sup>6</sup>	Evaluate the emotions evoked by Women'secret's femvertising in its Portuguese consumers.	What emotions does Women'secret's femvertising evoke in its Portuguese consumers?	Trust	Rossiter e Bellman (2012)	8
			Bonding		9
			Resonance		10
			Companionship		11
Behavioral component <sup>7</sup>	Analyze the relationship between Women'secret's femvertising and the purchasing intention of its Portuguese consumers.	How does Women'secret's femvertising influence the purchase intention of Portuguese consumers?	Purchase intention	Shimp (1981)	13 and 14

5. For the cognitive component of the tripartite model of attitude, the criteria described in the "Exploratory Interviews" and "Content Analysis" chapters were used.

## 6. Results

### 6.1 Application of the Survey- Sociodemographic profile

Among the total sample of 389 women, 37% are between 25 and 29 years old (144); 25% are 30-34 years old (98); 19% are 35-39 years old (75); and 19% are 40-45 years old (72). Regarding the residential area of the respondents, 163 live in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (42%), 20% live in the Algarve region (76), followed by 16% who live in Alentejo (63), 12% in the central region of the country (45), and 10% in the northern region (38). The remaining 4 respondents live in the Autonomous Region of Madeira (0.5% - 2); in the Autonomous Region of the Azores (0.25% - 1) and outside Portugal (0.25% - 1). In terms of academic qualifications, more than half of the respondents have completed a Bachelor's degree (59% - 229), 26% have a Master's degree (101), and 13% have completed secondary education (51). With smaller numbers, there are 5 women with a Ph.D. (1%), 1 with no formal education (0.3%), 1 with primary education (0.3%), and 1 woman with basic education (0.3%). Finally, regarding occupation, 85% of women are employed (331), which corresponds to the largest portion of the sample. 34 women are working students (9%), and the remaining 6% are evenly divided between unemployed (12) and students (12).

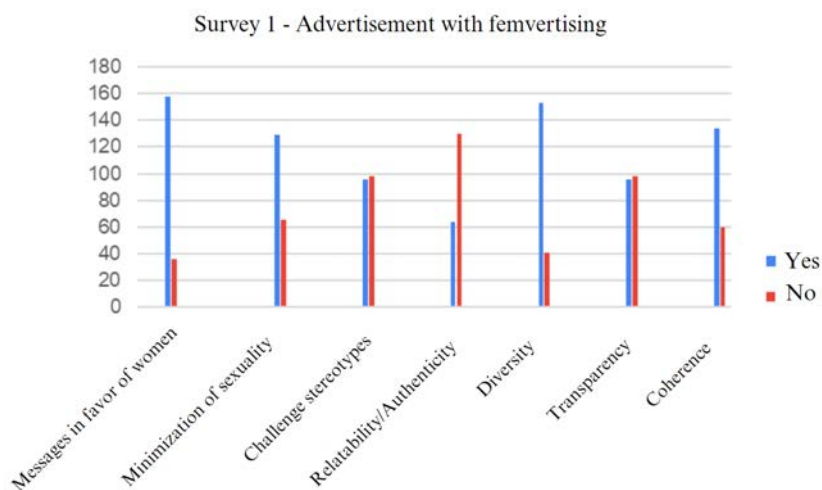
### 6.2 Criteria of femvertising perceived by Women's secret brand consumers in their advertisements

Graph 1, which includes the femvertising criteria marked by consumers in Survey 1 (with femvertising), reveals that the majority of participants perceive messages in favor of women in the ad they viewed, where the

6. For the affective component of the Tripartite Model of Attitude, we relied on the contribution of Rossiter and Bellman (2012). Regarding emotion, Rossiter and Bellman (2012) conducted a large-scale study with over a thousand participants, measuring consumers' emotional bond with certain brands. To do this, they administered a questionnaire survey based on five variables - Trust, Bonding, Resonance, Companionship, and Love. Each of these variables was associated with a brief description. Participants had to choose which of the descriptions, in their opinion, applied to the brand: "I trust this brand" (trust), "I consider this brand as mine" (bonding), "I use this brand because it fits the image I have of myself" (resonance), "It's like a companion to me" (companionship), and "I would say I feel deep affection, like love, for this brand and would be really upset if I couldn't have it" (love).

7. For the behavioral component, we relied on the contribution of Shimp (1981), who proposed that attitude toward an advertising message plays a significant role in consumer brand choice. Shimp argued that consumers' attitudes toward advertisements can have a significant impact on their evaluations of advertised brands and, ultimately, on their purchase intention.

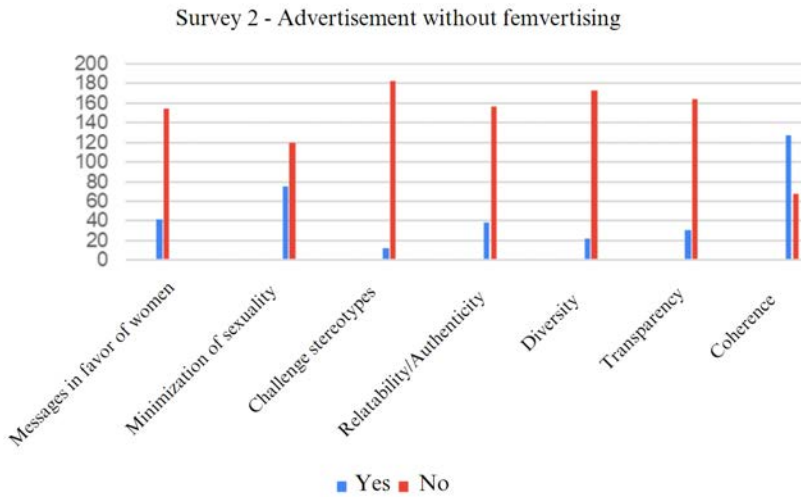
product is not presented as the solution to problems, sexuality is perceived as minimized, the body is respected, there is diversity among women, and there is coherence with the brand's values. However, challenging stereotypes and transparency regarding body modifications are not as obvious to consumers, with responses being quite divided. Finally, the least selected criterion was reliability with the ad.



Graph 1. Summary of femvertising criteria marked by consumers in Survey 1.

In the case of consumers who saw the ad without femvertising (Graph 2), the criterion that stood out was the coherence between the message conveyed in the ad and the brand's values. Minimizing the sexuality of the body, with authentic poses and without exaggerating appearance, was identified by some women, but still, the majority did not mark it. Finally, the remaining five criteria were selected only by a small portion of women, with most respondents not relating to what they saw. For a large part of the brand's consumers, the ad is not transparent and does not include inspiring and inclusive messages, does not challenge stereotypes, and does not use diversity.

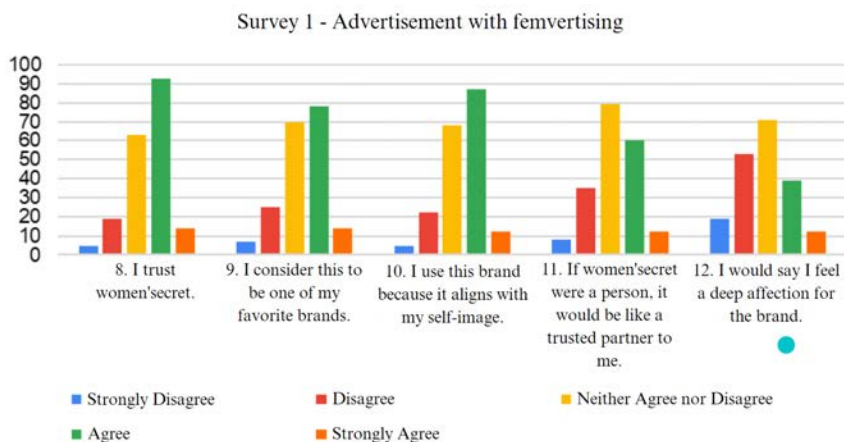




Graph 2. Summary of femvertising criteria marked by consumers in Survey 2.

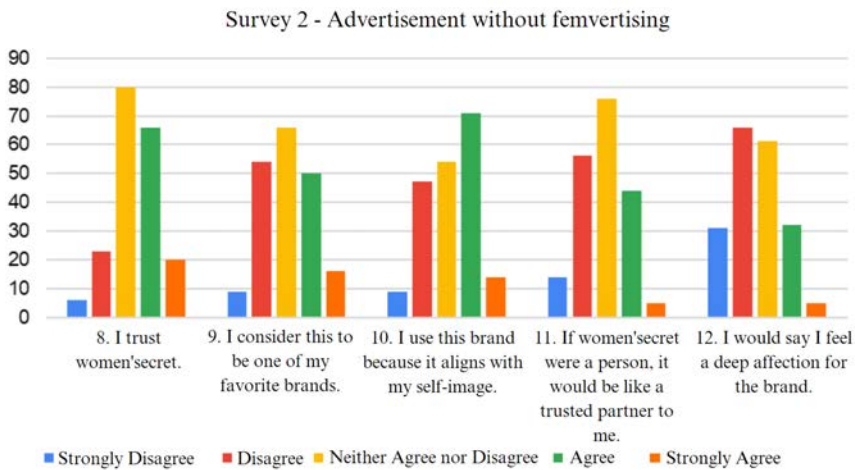
### 6.3 Emotions evoked by Women’ssecret’s femvertising in its Portuguese consumers

As can be seen in graph 3, which includes the synthesis of responses to questions associated with the second objective of the research, the most frequently selected responses in the Confidence, Bond, and Resonance variables was “Agree.” In these three cases, the second most recorded option was “Neither agree nor disagree.” This was also the most recorded response in the questions associated with Companionship and Love from consumers towards the brand. While in the Companionship variable, the second preference was “Agree,” in the case of Love, it was “Disagree.”



Graph 3. Synthesis of emotions evoked in respondents from Survey 1 - With femvertising.

The responses given most frequently by women who watched Ad 2 were quite different from the above, as can be seen in graph 4. “Neither agree nor disagree” was the favorite option for women regarding statements about the Confidence, Bond, and Companionship variables. In the Confidence variable, the second most frequent response was “Agree,” unlike the others, with the “Disagree” response being the most voted for. The statement of Resonance was the only one that more frequently recorded the “Agree” response, and Love was the only one that recorded the “Disagree” option in greater numbers.



Graph 4. Synthesis of emotions evoked in respondents from Survey 2 - Without femvertising.

#### 6.4 Influence of Women'secret's femvertising on the purchase intention of Portuguese consumers

The first question in the section associated with the behavioral component of the Tripartite Model of Attitude was “Does the ad you viewed influence your intention to purchase products from the brand?” 55% of respondents who viewed the ad with femvertising answered yes (107), while 45% answered the ad does not influence on their intention to purchase products from the brand (87). No participant responded that the ad had a negative impact.

Of the 130 consumers who viewed the ad without femvertising, 67% responded that it did not influence 23% considered the ad had a positive impact, and the remaining 10% considered that the ad negatively influenced their intention to buy Women'secret products.

At this stage of the survey, the concept of femvertising was introduced. After reading its definition, consumers answered the question, “Do you think the use of this strategy can influence your intention to purchase products from the brand?” The responses to this question from participants in both groups were very similar. Most women consider this a strategy that can positively

influence their intention to purchase products from the brand, with 77% of participants choosing this response in the survey that included the ad with femvertising and 73% in the one that included the ad without femvertising. 26% of women who viewed the latter consider that this strategy has no impact, with 1% of women considering that it may have a negative influence. It is also worth mentioning that 21% of brand consumers who saw the ad with femvertising responded that the strategy does not influence their purchasing behavior, with 2% considering that it has a negative influence.

## **7. Discussion of Results**

The first objective of this study was to identify the femvertising criteria perceived by Women'secret consumers in their advertisements. Survey responses revealed that most women who viewed the femvertising advertisement confirmed the presence of various criteria proposed by Becker-Herby (2016) and Hainneville et al. (2022): Messages in favor of women; Minimization of sexuality and Respect for the body; and Use of diversity. Coherence (a variable identified in the interviews) was also observed. However, most participants in this study did not relate to the advertisement. Additionally, the Challenge of stereotypes and Transparency in body modifications were not as evident for these consumers, with responses being divided on these two criteria.

This indicates that, on the one hand, the fact that the advertisement meets femvertising criteria is not a guarantee of relatability with it. This is just one criterion, among many other factors that impact what a woman may feel. Among these factors are the product itself, quality-price ratio, accessibility – as revealed in the exploratory interviews – as well as individuals' permanent characteristics (personality, self-image, lifestyle), individual variables (perceptions, needs, motivations, attitudes), and sociological and psychosociological variables (group, social class, cultural variables, family) (Baynast et al., 2018).

On the other hand, although a significant portion of consumers recognize the diversity of women, about half believe that body modifications might have occurred. This might explain why most women did not consider that stereotypes are being deconstructed. In other words, the existence of diverse bodies in the advertisement does not necessarily imply that consumers perceive the brand as challenging stereotypes.

Nevertheless, when comparing the results obtained by the first group with the group of women who saw the ad without femvertising, it is evident that relatability was higher in women who saw the femvertising ad. The only criterion that consumers considered relevant was coherence between the video's message and the brand's values, with the remaining six criteria identified in the ad by only a small portion of the group. For most respondents, the ad was not transparent, did not include inspirational and inclusive messages, did not challenge stereotypes, and did not use diversity,, indicating that the chosen ad fulfilled its purpose.

The second objective of this investigation was to evaluate the emotions evoked by Women'secret's femvertising in its Portuguese consumers. In the interviews, emotional connection with an ad proved to be an important factor for women to identify with a brand. As in Drake's (2017) conclusions, the emotional responses of Women'secret consumers after seeing the ads were generally better for women who saw the femvertising ad, primarily in terms of Trust and Bonding. However, in both questionnaires, most respondents admitted to using the brand's products because they are associated with their self-image (Resonance). Furthermore, Love and Companionship recorded indifferent responses in questionnaire 1. In questionnaire 2, the responses were similar, with less emphasis on Love towards the brand. In general, for women who saw the ad without femvertising, the responses were mostly indifferent. This analysis highlights the fact that it is not necessary to have Love towards the brand for Women'secret consumers to purchase their products and consider them a fit regarding their self-image. However, women who saw the femvertising ad appeared to trust the brand more and have a stronger emotional connection with it than those who did not see it.

After the previous reflections, a new question arises: does the femvertising ad positively influence the purchasing intention of Women'secret products for consumers? According to the survey results, to some extent, yes. This is the focus of the third and final objective of this investigation: to analyze the relationship between Women'secret's femvertising and the purchasing intention of its Portuguese consumers. A large part of women indeed consider that the ads had some influence on their purchase intention (55% positive influence for those who saw the femvertising ad; and for those who saw the ad without femvertising, 23% positive influence and 10% negative influence). These results are consistent with those obtained by Shimp (1981), who suggests that there can be an attitude transfer from an ad to the brand's attitude.

It is noteworthy that the femvertising ad did not negatively impact the purchasing intention of any consumer, but the ad without femvertising negatively impacted a small percentage of women (10%). Advertisers, by portraying an ideal beauty standard, suggest that women are not on the same level as the models depicted (Jalees & Majid, 2009), hence understanding why some consumers might have a negative experience when looking at such ads (Myrén & Danås, 2022). This information is consistent with the majority of opinions from the interviews, where most respondents emphasized their desire to see beauty standards challenged in advertisements. Nevertheless, most of the participating consumers in the survey consider that the ad had no impact on their purchasing intention (45% for those who saw the femvertising ad and 67% for those who saw the ad without femvertising).

Not resorting to femvertising is neither beneficial nor detrimental to Women'secret, but employing it seems to have some positive impact, as the results of the next question appear to demonstrate. After explaining the concept, most respondents confirmed that the use of femvertising positively influences their purchasing intention, in both questionnaires (77% and 73%). However, cross-referencing this data with the results of the previous question – where high levels of indifference were recorded – reveals that a single femvertising ad alone does not have a profound impact. Several

interviewees pointed to Dove as a brand whose ads they appreciate, and this could be justified by the fact that a broader and more inclusive perception of beauty is evident in all communication from this brand (Bayone & Burrowes, 2019; Bissell & Rask, 2015).

According to interviewed consumers, the best way for brands to use femvertising is through a real representation of the target audience in ads. A representation not tied to stereotypes can, in addition to benefiting brands in terms of purchasing intention, influence how women perceive themselves – as mentioned by Bayone and Burrowes (2019) – and impact how society views women (Heilman, 2012). According to the study by Ferreira et al. (2021), advertising messages play an important role in creating new meanings, especially in moments of social change.

Nevertheless, for a percentage of 21% and 26% of women, using femvertising is indifferent, and there is still a negligible percentage (2% and 1%) that disagrees with the use of this strategy. For Hainneville and colleagues (2022), this may be because some consumers question the authenticity, motivations, and the feminist nature of the messages.

Thus, returning to the third objective of this investigation, we understand that the purchasing intention of a large portion of the brand's consumers seems to be, to some extent, impacted by using femvertising in ads. However, despite the apparent trend, the positive results of femvertising reactions cannot be generalized. According to Jalakas (2016), women extract distinct meanings from ads, adjusting them to their context and making judgments based on the prior knowledge they already have about the brand in question. The present study aligns with the conclusions of this author: most respondents agree that femvertising can influence their purchasing behavior for the brand's products, but not everyone.

## 8. Conclusion

The present study aimed to understand the impact of Women'secret's femvertising on the attitudes of Portuguese consumers towards the brand. The novelty of the femvertising concept and the limited research on the concept in Portugal justify the choice of the theme, which is increasingly present in current brand communication. The relevance of this study is highlighted by filling a gap in the field of communication sciences at the national level, particularly in advertising.

The first objective of this research was achieved, as the results of the first section of the surveys identified the femvertising criteria most strongly present in the minds of consumers: Messages in favor of women, Minimization of sexuality, Use of diversity, and Coherence.

Furthermore, the second objective was also achieved, as it was proven that femvertising appears to bring a higher emotional connection in terms of Bond and Trust of consumers with the brand. Nevertheless, the results in terms of Resonance (using products because it is associated with self-image) were high for both consumers who saw the femvertising ad and those who saw the ad without femvertising.

Finally, the last objective of the study allowed for the most surprising conclusions to be drawn: not using femvertising seems to neither harm nor benefit the Women'secret brand, but its use can positively impact consumers' purchasing intentions. However, it is important not to overlook that a single ad does not, by itself, have a very marked influence. Brands looking to benefit from this strategy should ensure harmony between their purpose and the concrete actions that which showcase the messaging conveyed through their communication.

Regarding the study's limitations, there is some difficulty in objectively verifying the existence of femvertising criteria in content analysis. The responses from the first part of the survey revealed that, even though biased, consumers' perception of the criteria is not unanimous.



As for future work suggestions, conducting more national-level case studies is recommended to increase the theoretical framework and further understand this phenomenon, as well as effectively verify its effectiveness in the advertising field. Additionally, studies on the stereotypes that may emerge from the femvertising phenomenon are proposed. Although it may seem paradoxical, the analysis of interviews raised this question, which appears to have the potential to be a new research field.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1

Ad with femvertising

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LI468cNWGJU>

With the title “We are all extraordinary women by Women’ssecret” and a duration of 10 seconds, this advertisement takes place in a forest, with a violin sound in the background and a voice-over declaring: “Extraordinary women wanted. Surprising, powerful, just like every single woman.” Throughout the advertisement, various women with different skin tones (e.g., white, brown, black) appear, although white is undoubtedly the predominant color. There are different body types (e.g., slim, curvy, athletic), with various hairstyles (e.g., straight, curly, tied up), performing possible and impossible actions: aerial acrobatics, making fire with their hands, standing on horseback, running, and doing cartwheels. The body is always represented from a distance, and there is no specific type of clothing that stands out: dresses, sportswear, pajamas, lingerie, sweaters, skirts, pants, among others, are shown. The video ends with the phrase “We are all extraordinary women.” Regarding the femvertising criteria, it’s important to note that in this advertisement, the following criteria were almost fully met.

Regarding the femvertising criteria, it’s important to note that in this advertisement, they are almost entirely met:

1. Elaboration of messages in favor of women - besides the product not being presented as a solution to consumers’ problems, an inspiring message

of self-confidence is included, focusing on the fact that all women are equally powerful, talented, and amazing.

2. Minimization of sexuality and respect for the body - the body is not sexualized nor prominently featured in the advertisements. There are no sexual poses or any aesthetic sophistication.
3. Challenge to gender stereotypes and perception of what a woman/girl “should be” - women are shown performing “extraordinary” and unconventional actions in a forest - a neutral setting - without room for gender stereotypes. In terms of physical appearance, the existence of more than one body type is noticeable, not just the stereotypical one.
4. Use of diversity - different body shapes, races, hair types, and clothing are shown in the advertisement, instead of just models within the ideal beauty standard. The brand in the advertisement does not emphasize or provide justification for the use of inclusion. Despite this, it’s noted that the white and slim body type appears more frequently than others.

Although the fourth criterion was not fully met, it was considered that the overall message of the advertisement is congruent with femvertising.



Image 1. Frame of the Ad with femvertising.



Image 2. Frame of the Ad with femvertising.



Image 3. Frame of the Ad with femvertising.

### Ad without femvertising

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Crij2wGlMAo~>

The second most-viewed advertisement is titled “Sorte que te deixei para trás by Women’ssecret”<sup>8</sup> and has a duration of 20 seconds. The advertisement, set in a house, begins with the following sentence written in the video: “7 out of 10 women wear underwear in the wrong size.” Throughout the video, Spanish music is heard, and in the subtitles, one can read the translation: “You were always so tiny. We never fit together, damn it... Luck that I didn’t give up and found one for me. One my size at last.” To conclude, it appears written in the video “At Women’ssecret, we are specialists and help you find your ideal size.” During the video, nine women appear: eight white and one black, all with a slim and similar body type. Some are blonde and others brunette, and their hair is straight or wavy. All appear in close-up shots and wearing lingerie, performing tasks such as playing music, taking off a towel from their hair, looking at themselves in the mirror, dancing, eating, petting a cat, taking selfies, and attempting juggling. Regarding the femvertising criteria, it’s important to note that in this advertisement, the following criteria were not met:

1. Elaboration of messages in favor of women - in the case of this advertisement, the product is presented as the solution to consumers’ problems, as the brand positions itself as an expert in finding the ideal bra size. There doesn’t seem to be a direct inspirational and confidence-building message for women.
2. Minimization of sexuality and respect for the body - some of the women appear with very natural poses, while others have more carefully crafted poses with some aesthetic sophistication. All women are shown in lingerie. There isn’t a direct encouragement towards self-acceptance and self-esteem.

8. “Lucky that I left you behind by Women’ssecret”

3. Challenge to gender stereotypes and perception of what a woman/girl “should be” - all women are depicted in domestic settings, engaged in routine actions such as looking at themselves in the mirror, eating, and playing music. The representation doesn’t clearly challenge gender stereotypes or stereotypes associated with beauty standards.
4. Use of diversity - The women portrayed correspond to a thinness ideal, with the majority having white skin. There isn’t a great variety in terms of body type, race, age, among others.



Image 4. Frame of the Ad without femvertising.





Image 5. Frame of the Ad without femvertising.



Image 6. Frame of the Ad without femvertising.



## **Authors' Biography**

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Part IV

## MEDIA AND SOCIETY



# **MEDIA FRAMING IN THE 2023 ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN WAR: A CROSSROADS OF NARRATIVES AND IMPLICATIONS**

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**Abstract:** The 2023 Israeli-Palestinian war has been a focal point of international attention, where Western news outlets play a critical role in disseminating, yet, framing, information to different audiences worldwide. That is, this article tackles the paramount issue of media framing with regards to this newly sparked out war; it underlines this issue's potential to steer and shape public opinion, not to mention its capacity to impact international diplomacy and politics. The study's purpose revolves around three aspects: to investigate how Western news outlets frame this war and identify dominant and recurrent narratives, to establish a methodological framework for media framing analysis, and to put in the spotlight the implications of media framing on conflict resolution diplomacy efforts and public opinion steering. However, by employing lexical and sentiment content analysis, this article will operate on revealing framing patterns that are instilled in two Western news representative articles edited by Daily Mail and The New York Times. The contributions of this study are centered on revealing divergent framing strategies employed by the two outlets, offering a systemic methodological framework of content analysis for future media analyses. The results of this article centralize upon the framed narratives presented by these outlets,

and enable the understanding of media framing discourse influence on complex international conflicts. The implications of this research suggest the potential for more informed and objective media reporting and diplomatic efforts in the quest for conflict resolution in the destabilized warzone.

**Keywords:** Media Framing; Ideology; Content Analysis; Lexical Analysis; Sentiment Analysis; Conflict Resolution; Western News Coverage; News Articles.

## 1. Background of the 2023 Israeli-Palestinian war

The Israeli-Palestinian war has been a focal point of attention for decades in the middle east. The roots of the conflict trace back decades where historical, territorial and religious tensions between the two parties have been ignited to a great degree. This conflict is mainly centered on the competing claims to the historical land, known as Palestine, which now becomes ethno-politically involving Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2023, a significant escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict erupted. When Hamas, the military organism that assumes political and military governance of the Gaza Strip, has led Palestinian militant groups for strategic purposes of launching a surprise attack on southern Israel from Gaza Strip. That is, Hamas orchestrated a coordinated series of assaults that involved targeting both civilian communities and military Israeli personnels: The offensive commenced with the Hamas launching more than 5000 rockets from the Gaza Strip into the Israeli field. Subsequently, leveraging these strategic barrages as a diversionary tactic, the group sought to breach the Israeli border.

That is, this marked the most substantial military escalation in the region since the Yom Kippur War fifty years ago. The conflict quickly escalated to a form of war, leading to extensive hostilities, between the two parties, primarily centered in and around the Gaza Strip but also involving clashes in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and along the Israel-Lebanon border. The

war, which constitutes the fifth war in the Gaza-Israel conflict since 2008, has deep roots in the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In response to Hamas' offensive, dubbed: "Operation Al-Aqsa Flood", Israel declared a state of war, tightened its blockade, evacuated parts of the northern Gaza Strip, and initiated "Operation Swords of Iron" with the aim of dismantling Hamas and rescuing hostages. That is, the escalation of hostilities, represented in the brutal Israeli response, has led to widespread devastation and loss of life in the Gaza Strip. The conflict has also triggered global protests and geopolitical divisions, with various countries taking different stances on the issue.

Henceforth, the war has evolved into a media-centric war, as there exists a strategic imperative to justify the severity of the conflict through the steering of international public sentiment and the persuasion of global leadership regarding the delineation between legitimacy and terrorism. Within this context, the framing of media narratives assumes a pivotal role in shaping perceptions and interpretations of the conflict's dynamics.

## **2. Significance of media framing in global discourse**

The significance of media framing in global discourse has been always profound and of paramount importance. That is, it is a matter that centralizes upon the substantial influence on shaping and steering the public opinion, political attitudes, and international diplomacy.

Ever since the publication of Goffman's seminal work in 1986, titled "Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience," the concept of framing has been employed by media scholars to examine the ways in which the media addresses various issues in the context of a globalized discourse that covers, for instance, wars.

That is, media framing refers to the strategic selective presentation of information and the construction of narratives that emphasize particular aspects of an issue while shadowing others. This process serves to not only

influence how events are perceived but also to shape the underlying meanings attributed to them; Goffman (1986) stated: “frames allow audience to locate, perceive, and label the flow of information” (p.21); These frames represent enduring cognitive, interpretative, and presentational patterns, involving the selection, emphasis, and exclusion of elements (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7); These patterns are routinely employed by individuals handling symbols to organize discourse, whether verbal or visual (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7).

In the context of global discourse, media framing plays a crucial role in shaping narratives surrounding geopolitical conflicts, humanitarian crises, and socio-political issues. By framing events in specific ways, media outlets can steer public opinion, influence policymaking, and even justify certain actions or policies. That is, media framing can contribute to the construction of societal norms, values, and ideologies, thereby perpetuating dominant narratives and reinforcing power dynamics.

In a comparable framework and in accordance with the paradigm of social constructivism as elaborated by McQuail (2005), framing analysis examines the focal points or cognitive frameworks employed by societal actors and interest entities, journalists (gatekeepers), and the audience to perceive and disseminate the surrounding reality: Succinctly put, framing defines the mechanism by which media entities interpret tangible occurrences and convey them to audiences with a specific thematic emphasis, especially when it is about occurrences that attract global attention.

### **3. Purpose and objectives of the research**

The purpose of this article is to investigate the critical role of media framing in the context of the 2023 Israeli-Palestinian war. That is, through the endeavor of examining how western media outlets shape and portray the ongoing war, the study seeks to understand the influence of media framing on public opinion, policymaking organisms, and international diplomacy that is usually assigned to conflict resolution approaching practices.



Specific objectives of this article include:

1. Analyzing the mechanisms through which the two under-study media outlets frame the conflict and depict the involved parties.
2. Assessing the impact of media framing on shaping public opinion and international perceptions of the conflict.
3. Identifying the strategic and political motivations behind media framing strategies employed by media interest-entities.
4. Exploring the implications of media framing on the broader Israeli-Palestinian war and its potential to influence diplomatic efforts and peace negotiations.

## **4. Literature Review**

### **4.1 Conceptualizing media framing**

The news discourse that revolves around conflicts, wars, and humanitarian crises usually presents a complex interplay of linguistic and semiotic elements; that is, this interplay attracts increasing attention within communication, linguistic, and media research. In this regard, the conceptualization of news discourse remains inconsistent, lacking universal acceptance across scholarly and journalistic spheres. Itule and Anderson (2003) emphasize the necessity for news discourse to possess a unique and extraordinary design to captivate public opinion.

Beyond mere attention-grabbing and apart from the fact that it is pretty inconsistent by tradition to define the nature of news discourse, factors in news discourse also play a role in “steering” public opinion, as highlighted by Albeladi (2019). This process involves the socio-cognitive and socio-cultural shaping of readers’ perceptions in alignment with their social, political, and cognitive realities. Albeladi’s (2019) exploration of “steering” has to do mainly with the concept of framing, expounding its manifestations in news discourse.

Media framing, according to Albeladi, serves to reconfigure readers' views to align with ideological agendas embedded within the media landscape, thereby generating a socio-culturally framed reality.

That is, media framing, as articulated by Albeladi (2019), represents the core focus of research into news discourse and its effects on public opinion. It is described as a discursive device of technical, cognitive, and socio-cultural nature employed to reorient readers' perceptions in accordance with motivated agendas. The term "highlighting" within framing denotes the utilization of discursive strategies, such as selective appropriation, to construct frames that resonate with readers' socio-cognitive realities. Selective appropriation, endorsed by scholars like Baker (2006) and Valdeon (2005), serves as a mechanism to domesticate and familiarize news reports to target audiences, contributing to the formalization of frames compatible with readers' socio-cognitive contexts.

That is, the conceptualization of framing within the context of our research has to do with a multifaceted terrain that incorporates diverse definitions and interpretations. Scholars have actually offered various perspectives on the constituents of framing to shed light on its critical role in shaping media discourse and influencing audience perceptions. Tuchman (1978) and Tankard et al. (1991) see framing as a product of professional strategies that serve to "delimit" reality. That is, these "professional strategies" can allow the interest-entities and agents, such as journalists, to present the world through their lens and perspective. This framing, akin to viewing the world through a window, is shaped by journalists' resources, the organizational structures of media outlets, and the formats utilized in covering events (Brosius & Eps, 1995).

Alternatively, media framing, as articulated by Tuchman (1978) and Tankard et al. (1991), extends beyond mere issue-highlighting to incorporate a reinterpretation of reality within a new context or through a novel relationship with preceding events. This ontological reinterpretation, distinct from the factual basis of news or information itself, imbues framing with

transformative potential that can reshape audience perceptions and discourse dynamics (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

In our research, these framing conceptualizations can identify media discourse mechanisms, notably regarding the Israeli-Palestinian war. By analyzing framing as a professional strategy and a cognitive tool, this article reveals how media narratives shape audience interpretations of geopolitical and ethno-political events, while underlining discursive strategies employed to perpetuate ideological agendas.

#### **4.2 Media framing in conflict zones**

The concept of framing in the context of conflict zones is of paramount importance to study; one of the logical reasons for that is that framing can be seen as a major technical tool for limiting reality, and thus, manipulating it; this can be a major consequence to escalate wars and devastating humanitarian norms by the exploitation of media machines and disseminate information of legitimizing patterns. However, research on the impact of media framing, a significant determinant of conflict escalation in conflict zones, remain relatively limited in scholarly inquiry (Thankachan and Thomas, 2021).

That is, the scholarly inquiry has to focus on many aspects, one of which, as Thankachan and Thomas (2021) highlighted, a comprehensive examination of the literature concerning media and conflict, incorporating various forms of political conflicts (both intra and interstate), underscores the necessity for sophisticated analysis of the content and contextual framing of individual news narratives. That is, the scholarly work on analyzing content and contextual framing of individual news discourse, notably the one related to wars and conflicts, can be of high degree of importance to provide advanced insights on the capacity of framing in influencing public perceptions.

Media framing, in this regard, can be situated to serve media's capacity to stimulate, highlight or even downplay certain thematic domains and thematic discussions, be it political, social, and related to humanitarian crises; that is, framing, as Nelson, Oxley, Zoe, and Clawson et al. (1997) stated, can

find greater relevance in the context of political conflicts, as it facilitates the effective presentation of news with a compelling emotional backdrop that highlights its marketability.

However, the utilization of framing techniques by political elites across diverse news media platforms significantly influences public opinions by mobilizing preexisting beliefs, sentiments, and assessments. It is imperative to recognize that framing operates within specific socio-political contexts and does not occur in isolation.

### **4.3 Theoretical frameworks for analyzing media framing**

Framing theory, introduced by Gregory Bateson in 1972, puts emphasis on the cognitive processes that underly media interpretation and presentation (Bateson, 1972; Hallahan, 2008). That is, Bateson theorized, in his work, the cognitive terrain of framing. That is, framing theory in this regard proposes that media constructs frames, or interpretive lenses, that shape audience understanding of issues (Mass Communication Theory (Online), 2017).

According to Goffman (1974), frames can be categorized into natural and social frameworks, influencing how individuals interpret and communicate information (Goffman, 1974; Mass Communication Theory (Online), 2017). Natural frameworks perceive events as physical occurrences devoid of social forces, while social frameworks attribute events to human actions and motivations (Mass Communication Theory (Online), 2017). In the context of conflicts, audiences usually adopt social frameworks to interpret and perceive events and, thus, delineate, for instance, in this war, who is the good and who is the bad.

Another intersected theoretical framework that can be assigned to media framing is the one related to agenda-setting theory, particularly at its second level, that focuses on the salience of attributes of issues (Weaver, 2007; McCombs, 2005; Ghanem, 1997). Media framing accordingly not only directs attention to specific topics but also guides audience interpretation (Mass Communication Theory (Online), 2017).

That is, agenda-setting theory assumes that media framing not only influences what issues are deemed important but also operates on the basis of how these issues should be understood, prioritized, and perceived by the audience. Through agenda-setting, media organizations and interest-entities generate significant influence over the salience and prominence of certain topics, and, thus, shape public and global discourse and policy agenda.

Entman (1991) identified five common frames used in news framing: conflict, human interest/personalization, consequence, morality, and responsibility (Entman, 1991). These frames influence how events are portrayed and interpreted by the audience (Entman, 1991).

That is, the five frames can generate distinct influences on audience perceptions. First, the frame of conflict prioritizes depicting discord between parties, often overshadowing substantive decisions. Second, Human interest/personalization frame emphasizes individual narratives and fosters audience empathy and engagement. Third, Consequence frame underscores the far-reaching impacts of events and includes implications for unity or global standing. Fourth, Morality frame injects ethical considerations into coverage and highlights moral evaluations of actors and policies. Last, Responsibility frame assigns accountability for either causing or resolving events and shapes audience perceptions of culpability. These frames collectively shape news narratives and, thus, guides audience interpretations and attitudes towards reported events (Entman, 1991).

Frames can be categorized as specific or generic, depending on their focus on particular events or broader issues (Mass Communication Theory (Online), 2017). Furthermore, framing operates at two levels: communication and thought, incorporating both media presentation and audience interpretation (Mass Communication Theory (Online), 2017).

The primary focus of news framing is to establish cognitive shortcuts, oversimplify complex issues, and influence audience perceptions (Mass Communication Theory (Online), 2017). By creating frames, media professionals guide audience understanding and shape public and global discourse.

## 5. Methodology

### 5.1 Mixed-method approach rationale: Lexical and sentiment analysis

In the context of the complex nature of media framing in the 2023 Israeli-Palestinian war, a mixed-method approach that incorporates lexical and sentiment analysis is of paramount importance. That is, Lexical analysis operates on the basis of a systematic examination of the language employed in Western news articles to frame the conflict; this examination, however, can identify recurrent narratives and underlying themes.

Meanwhile, sentiment analysis provides insights into the emotional tone and bias present in media coverage and sheds light on the implicit perspectives conveyed to audiences.

That is; by integrating these two methodological approaches, this study aims to underline the framing patterns instilled in Western news outlets' coverage of the war. Through a comprehensive analysis of language and sentiment, the research endeavors to expound the strategies employed by media outlets to shape public opinion and influence diplomatic efforts in conflict resolution.

### 5.2 Selection criteria for Western news outlets and articles

In conducting the analysis, this article employs systematic selection process for two representative Western news articles and outlets. That is, the study focuses on analyzing two samples of news articles from prominent two Western outlets renowned for their coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The selected outlets include the *Daily Mail* and *The New York Times*. These outlets are chosen for their widespread readership, extensive international coverage, and reputation for reporting on geopolitical and ethno-political conflicts with diverse perspectives.

However, by including the two representative articles from these outlets, the analysis aims to capture a comprehensive range of framing strategies employed by Western media in portraying the 2023 Israeli-Palestinian war.

Additionally, this selection criteria ensures a representative sample of news articles that will provide insights into the various narratives and framing techniques shaping public discourse and international perceptions of the conflict.

### **5.3 Content analysis methodology**

Content analysis methodology is a systematic tool that can serve in understanding media framing, notably in the context of this article: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This section expounds the key methodological considerations and decisions essential for conducting a content analysis.

To commence, Neuendorf (2002) iterated that content analysis is a summarizing process that can involve a quantitative analysis of messages; this analysis can emphasize its reliance on scientific methods. That is, this methodological approach, involves systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics within text (Stone et al., 1996). For this article, the focus centralizes upon the analysis of western media articles that cover the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and aims to unveil framing patterns and dominant narratives.

Along the same lines, Berelson (1952) outlined five main purposes of content analysis, including describing substance and form characteristics of message content, making inferences to producers and audiences of content, and predicting the effects of content on audiences. Carney (as cited in Neuendorf, 2002) echoed these purposes and categorized content analysis uses as descriptive, hypothesis testing, and facilitating inference.

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) distinguished between behaviorist and humanist traditions in content analysis, with the former primarily concerned with effects and the latter focusing on societal reflections. That is, this dual perspective underscores the multifaceted nature of media content analysis, which may incorporate both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

In line with our research objectives, a mixed-method approach that incorporates lexical and sentiment analysis is adopted. This approach allows the

examination of framing strategies employed by Western media outlets. Lexical analysis, in this article's context, operates on the basis of the assessment of recurrent patterns within the narratives of news articles, and, thus, sets out the dominant and underlying structures of media framing. That is, accordingly this can offer insights into prevalent themes and discourses (Neuendorf, 2002). Conversely, sentiment analysis has to do mainly with the analysis of the emotional tone and connotations conveyed in media discourse, shedding light on framing techniques and agenda-setting frameworks.

#### **5.4 Lexical and sentiment analysis**

In our research context, a lexical analysis will be employed to focus on examining the lexical choices within news discourse, particularly in Western media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This content-analysis oriented method aligns with critical discourse analysis (CDA) principles and underlines the role of language in reflecting and perpetuating ideology (Van Dijk, 1998; Oktar, 2001).

That is, lexical analysis can involve the analysis of words and phrases that describe key actors (agents), events, and concepts, yet, themes in news articles and can shed light on the underlying ideological positions (Fang, 2001; Lee & Craig, 1992; Wang, 1993; Xu, 1999).

Correspondingly, following Halliday's linguistic theory, lexical choices serve as a fundamental aspect of ideational structure that influences the portrayal of social issues (Halliday, 1994). Zhang (2011) iterated that words can convey societal values and biases, shaping readers' perceptions and framing, for instance, our context of the conflict. Through lexical classification, ideological patterns can be unveiled in news discourse and implicit biases can be put in the spotlight (Kress & Hodge, 1979; Xin, 2005).

The analysis of this article operates on the basis of categorizing lexical choices into commendatory, derogatory, and neutral terms, as proposed by Zhang (2011). This classification enables to differentiate evaluative coloring within news articles and to delineate favorable, negative, or objective portrayals of actors and events (Zhang, 2011). For instance, terms like "freedom



fighter” versus “terrorist” carry distinct ideological connotations and reflect differing perspectives on conflict actors (Fang, 2001). Similarly, dichotomies such as “kill” versus “eliminate” reveal underlying ideological stances on violence and conflict resolution (Trew, 1979).

The lexical analysis seeks to expound how Western media outlets frame the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and highlight biases and narrative constructions. This approach aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how language shapes public discourse and perceptions of the conflict and offers insights into the role of media in perpetuating ideological narratives (Zhang, 2011; Trew, 1979).

The sentiment analysis method aims to analyze the emotions and opinions expressed in the news articles. While many existing studies have focused on utilizing machine learning algorithms for sentiment analysis, the article’s approach, diverging from this paradigm, centralizes upon a qualitative analysis method rooted in linguistic and contextual understanding.

That is, according to Saad and Yang (2019), sentiment analysis, also known as opinion mining, is a vital task within Natural Language Processing (NLP) that aims to determine the polarity of sentiments expressed in text and categorize them as either positive, negative, or neutral. The article’s methodology aligns with this definition and seeks to understand the subjective narratives present in news articles, yet, understand and recognize the complexities of human language and context.

Consistently, as highlighted by Feizollah et al. (2019), sentiment analysis often involves the extraction of emotional features from text, whether through manual sentiment lexicon formulation or automated methods like word vectorization. In our context, focus is mainly about extracting linguistic features such as mood, tone, and rhetorical devices employed within the news articles to differentiate the underlying sentiments.

Our article’s approach draws inspiration from the work of Bardhan et al. (2019) who employs qualitative paradigms to provide insights on the

sentiments that underly the narratives. Similarly, this investigation employs quasi-qualitative approach to underline framing models embedded in news articles and underlying emotions and opinions conveyed by the two outlets.

This study's sentiment analysis approach departs from conventional machine learning paradigms; instead, it emphasizes a qualitative textual analysis method rooted in linguistic understanding and contextual interpretation. Through putting into emphasis the subtleties of language and narrative, this study endeavors to expound the underlying sentiments expressed within the news sampled articles, and, thus, underline media framing patterns reflected as "sentiments".

## 6. Data analysis

### Sample 1

**Background:** This news article extract edited by *Daily Mail* covers the former Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal speech on his call to a day of jihad on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of October 2023, urging Muslims to protest against Israel's war and take to the streets in support of Palestinians. Meshaal emphasized the need for solidarity and active participation from neighboring countries like Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt in the fight against Israel.

***“Former Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal calls for day of jihad on Friday the 13th, and tells Muslims to ‘take to the streets’ in protest against Israel (Title)***

*‘It is a day for sacrifice, heroism, and dedication, and to earn the honour of defending the first Qibla of Muslims, the third holiest mosque, and the ascension of the trusted Messenger.’*

*Meshaal also praised those who took part on the attack in Israel. Oh my brothers and sisters, oh all my family and a quarter of this nation,’ he said. ‘These are your brothers and sisters who created this glory. They created this flood: Al-Aqsa Flood.’*

*The terrorist group said all should back their ‘just cause’.*

*‘We call upon the free people of the world to mobilize in solidarity with our Palestinian people and in support of their just cause and legitimate rights to freedom, independence, return, and self-determination,’ the group said.” (Daily Mail, 12 October 2023)*

## **Lexical Analysis:**

### **1.1 Speech of Khaled Meshaal ( Hamas Leader):**

- The speech by Khaled Meshaal includes several key lexical choices that are significant in understanding the framing of the conflict:
- “day of jihad”: This phrase characterizes the conflict as a holy war. It frames the conflict in religious terms and suggests Muslims bear responsibility to take action against Israel.
- “sacrifice, heroism, and dedication”: These lexical choices evoke a sense of valor and commitment to the cause and portray Hamas fighters as noble and righteous.
- “Al-Aqsa Flood”: This metaphorical choice portrays the Hamas military operation as a powerful force and underlines the escalation and intensity of the conflict.
- “legitimate rights to freedom, independence, return, and self-determination”: These choices highlight Hamas’s self- portrayal as freedom fighters who seek justice and national independence for the Palestinian people.
- “just cause”: This phrase puts in the spotlight Hamas’s narrative of fighting for a righteous and legitimate purpose, and frames their actions as morally justified.

### **1.2 Daily Mail’s Framing:**

- The Daily Mail’s lexical choices frame and depict Hamas as a terrorist organization through certain language:

- Referring to Khaled Meshaal as a “former Hamas leader” immediately associates him with the organization, reinforcing its militant image.
- Describing the speech as a call for “jihad” and referring to Hamas as a “terrorist group” further reinforces the narrative of violence and extremism.
- The use of phrases like “attack in Israel” and “Al-Aqsa Flood” without context may serve to depict Hamas’s actions as aggressive and destabilizing.
- Putting ‘just cause’ between brackets implies skepticism from the point of view of *Daily Mail* and, therefore, puts the Palestinian struggle for independence as something unrecognized.

### **Sentiment Analysis:**

#### **1.1 Speech of Khaled Meshaal (Hamas Leader):**

- The sentiment conveyed in Meshaal’s speech is one of fervor and determination, characterized by words like “sacrifice,” “heroism,” and “dedication.” These choices evoke a sense of passion and commitment to the cause among Hamas supporters.
- The use of phrases like “Al-Aqsa Flood” and “just cause” suggests a belief in the moral righteous justification of their actions and appeals to the emotions of supporters and framing the conflict as a struggle for justice and liberation from a brutal militarized occupation.

#### **1.2 Daily Mail’s Framing:**

- The sentiment conveyed by the Daily Mail’s framing of the article is more critical and skeptical of Hamas’s motives and actions.
- Terms like “terrorist group” and “attack in Israel” imply a sense of fear and condemnation and portray Hamas as a threat to the security and stability in the middle east region.

- The juxtaposition of Meshaal’s speech with descriptions of protests and uprisings may imply a sense of chaos and disorder and reinforces negative perceptions of Hamas’s activities.
- The sentiment tissue constructed by *Daily Mail* in this extract is basically one of caution and apprehension and highlights the potential dangers of Hamas’s actions while questioning the legitimacy of their cause.

In this extract, the *Daily Mail* framing reflects a pro-Israeli propaganda basis through its lexical choices and overall tone. That is, the outlet consistently depicts Hamas as a “terrorist group” and portrays their actions as destabilizing and implying violence. the *Daily Mail* perpetuates a narrative that aligns with the Israeli media-centric strategic interests, where Hamas is seen in these narratives as a threat to security and stability in a decontextualized way.

## Sample 2

**Background:** This news article extract covers the devastating impact of the conflict in Gaza. It underlines Hamas’s perspective and depicts their calculated approach to fight Israel as a way to escalate the conflict.

### ***“Behind Hamas’s Bloody Gambit to Create a ‘Permanent’ State of War (title)***

*Thousands have been killed in Gaza, with entire families wiped out. Israeli airstrikes have reduced Palestinian neighborhoods to expanses of rubble, while doctors treat screaming children in darkened hospitals with no anesthesia. Across the Middle East, fear has spread over the possible outbreak of a broader regional war.*

*But in the bloody arithmetic of Hamas’s leaders, the carnage is not the regrettable outcome of a big miscalculation. Quite the opposite, they say: It is the necessary cost of a great accomplishment — the shattering of the status quo and the opening of a new, more volatile chapter in their fight against Israel.”* (The New York Times, 08 November 2023)

### **Lexical Analysis:**

- **Lexical choices of violence and destruction:** This extract employs explicit language such as “bloody,” “killed,” “wiped out,” “carnage,” “rubble,” and “screaming children” to depict the devastation caused by the conflict. That is, these choices imply strong emotions and emphasizing human suffering.
- **Shadowing agents:** While detailing the destruction and suffering in Gaza, the extract shadows agents through the use of passive voice. It avoids explicitly attributing responsibility for these actions to the agent: “Israel”. This lack of explicit attribution, represented in lexical choices such as “killed” and “wiped out”, obscures the agency of Israel in perpetrating violence against Palestinians, therefore potentially framing the conflict in a neutral or ambiguous manner.
- **Framing of Hamas as Aggressive:** Hamas is framed as the instigator of violence. The extract depicts the organism as, ““bloody arithmetic”, and portrays it as calculating and unapologetic about the consequences of their actions. The use of a choice like, “cost”, suggests that Hamas views destruction and suffering as a means to an end in their fight against Israel.

### **Sentiment Analysis:**

- **Negative Sentiment:** The extract conveys negative sentiment about the conflict and characterizes it by words and phrases associated with violence and destruction that are reflected realistically in Gaza.
- **Absence of Empathy:** Despite the graphic descriptions of human suffering, there is a notable absence of empathy or compassion towards the victims of the violence. Instead, the focus is on analyzing the motivations and approaches of Hamas leaders. The extract portrays them as cold and calculating rather than empathetic or remorseful.

The New York Times operates on a pro-Israeli bias basis. The outlet tends to frame the conflict in a way that portrays Hamas as an organism responsible

for initiating violence and perpetuating instability. By emphasizing the destructive actions of Hamas while downplaying or obscuring Israel's role in the conflict, the article aligns with the recurrent narrative that justifies Israel's military brutal actions as defensive strategic measures against terrorism.

## **6. Discussion**

### **6.1 Interpretation of findings**

The research findings shed light on distinct patterns in the framing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by the two western Media outlets, *Daily Mail* and *The New York Times*. That is, by analyzing the two extracts, textually lexically and sentimentally, the two outlets maintain a pro-Israeli bias basis, frame Hamas as a terrorist organization, and downplay Israel's role in perpetuating violence and instability in the Middle-East region. Fowler (1991) sees that news media base their selecting approaches of covering events from general values about society, including "consensus" and "hierarchy". This implies that Western society and its media machines, exemplified in *Daily Mail* and *The New York Times*, are inclined to support the Israeli strategic agenda in the regard of the conflict.

That is, in both samples analyzed, although Hamas has operationalized a military offensive that targeted both Israeli civilians and militants, the organism is consistently portrayed as the party that escalates the conflict, with their actions depicted as calculated and unapologetic. These framing patterns serve to justify Israel's military actions, that killed over 30,000 thousand Palestinian civilians, as defensive measures against "terrorism" and align with the Israeli media-centric interests of the conflict.

The lexical choices made by the *Daily Mail*, such as labeling Hamas as a "terrorist group" and framing their actions as aggressive, contribute to the demonization of Hamas and the legitimization of Israel's military actions. Xin (2005) sees lexical classification as a means to describe events mainly in a polarized way. That is, the two outlets, in this regard, cares critically about the subtleties of presenting who is the terrorist and who is the defender.

Similarly, *The New York Times* employs language that emphasizes the destruction caused by Hamas while obscuring Israel's role as the aggressor, thus perpetuating a narrative that justifies Israel's actions and delegitimizes the Palestinian party. The language used in these outlets implies ideological patterns of steering public opinion, as Zhang (2011) iterated that language is not designed to operate on an objective basis. That is, language is a structure that can delimit reality and reconfigure the presentation of social participants.

## **6.2 Implications for public opinion and conflict resolution**

The findings of this research put emphasis on the implications for public opinion and conflict resolution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

That is, the pro-Israeli bias exhibited by the two Western media outlets, *Daily Mail* and *The New York Times*, as clarified in the analysis, implies outcomes of shaping public perceptions and steering public attitudes regarding the conflict. By framing Hamas as a terrorist organization and downplaying Israel's role in perpetuating violence in the ethno-politically divided state, the two outlets operate on influencing the Western society view in favor of Israel. Fowler (1991) sees that news discourse is an inevitable non-value-free machine of reality reflection, and this exactly how these outlets operationalize covering the conflict.

This biased covering can hinder efforts towards achieving a balanced understanding of the root causes of the conflict and tackle progress towards peaceful resolution: this is a decontextualizing media-centric practice. Therefore, assuming framing and bias present in news coverage implies critical evaluation with regards to the conflict to reinforce and promote informed public media discourse and support constructive efforts towards conflict resolution.



## 7. Conclusion

This article investigates the subtleties upon which two media outlets, *Daily Mail* and *The New York Times*, frame the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and highlight a consistent pro-Israeli bias across various occasions. Through lexical and sentiment analysis, the study works on underlining how language choices and narrative framing serve to shape public perceptions and attitudes towards the conflict.

Future research directions suggest deepening understanding media framing and its impact on peacebuilding, diplomatic efforts, and conflict resolution in the context of geopolitical conflicts: this is realized mainly by exploring multi-disciplinary approaches as well as exploring untraditional information media landscapes that become increasingly prevalent in the practice of disseminating news, such as well-known social media platforms.

That is, advancing research directions in this regard can serve to understanding media representations and biases, contributing to critical evaluation of news discourse, and promoting informed news that foster humanitarian empathy, civilizational reconciliation, and cross-cultural dialogue between the two polarized worlds, the East and the West.

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## **THE ETHICS OF AI IN MEDIA: CRAFTING INTEGRITY, INCLUSIVITY, AND IMPACT**

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**Abstract:** This chapter investigates the interplay between ethical considerations and artificial intelligence (AI) in content production and interpretation by trans-cultural audiences, focusing on the themes of integrity, inclusivity, and impact. It argues for the enhancement of critical and digital literacy to assess the authenticity of AI-mediated narratives, the need for AI to support rather than replace human judgment in avoiding misinformation, and the development of human-centric AI systems that respect cultural subtleties and foster equitable representation. Through ethical frameworks, such as consequentialism, deontological ethics, virtue ethics, and the ethics of care, I advocate for AI that promotes truthfulness, mitigates biases, and respects diverse identities. Transparency and critical literacy are paramount in empowering audiences to demand diverse media narratives and the responsibility for ensuring AI-generated content does not perpetuate stereotypes is placed on both the users and creators of AI. This chapter calls for ethical AI deployment that aligns with human values and enhances global cultural discourse, showing the significance of ethical foresight and humanistic considerations in transcultural communications.

**Keywords:** Artificial intelligence, human-centric, ethical frameworks, critical literacy.

## 1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a disruptive technology that is radically altering multiple domains, including that of media content creation. Since the early days of pen and paper, through the eras of typewriters and computers, to the emergence of generative AI models like ChatGPT, CoPilot, Bard, and Code Llama, the evolution of media tools has transformed the methods of content production and consumption. The release of ChatGPT-4.0, capable of generating human-like texts, and its subsequent multimodal version, ChatGPT-4o, exemplify these advancements. However, while AI technologies offer remarkable capabilities, they also introduce complex challenges. The transition from manual editing to automated and AI-enhanced error checkers such as Grammarly, and ultimately to full generative AI, not only speeds up the production process but also gives rise to important ethical and accountability questions.

In journalism and media, reporters traditionally bear the responsibility for their published words, upholding ethical standards and fostering trust among their audience. Yet, AI, as a non-sentient entity, cannot take responsibility for the content it generates. This introduces a critical dichotomy in the concept of authorship within AI-mediated environments. Journalists, who craft articles to captivate and engage—often starting with a catchy headline and a compelling hook—are now navigating the murky waters of AI-assisted content creation. This shift raises concerns about ethical responsibility, particularly as accusations of clickbait and compromised journalistic integrity would negatively impact the reputation of both the media creators and the media distributor. Unethical approaches that harness AI-generated content may result in the erosion of trust in the media, and negatively impact individuals, cultures and society in general. A central challenge lies in balancing the innovative capabilities of AI with the fundamental principles of responsible journalism.

The interaction of ethical considerations and artificial intelligence (AI) shapes both content production and its interpretation by transcultural

audiences. Given the potential impact of AI on media narratives, attention ought to be paid to ethics from the standpoint of all stakeholders. A clear understanding of the capabilities and limitations of AI is also needed to be able to make informed decisions. Since the viewpoints of both the media creators and the media consumers are vital to this discussion, knowledge of the content production process and how the content is interpreted can throw light on the issues at play. Likewise, the transcultural nature of audiences may play a role in the production and interpretation. To ensure that we have a shared interpretation, this chapter commences with a discussion of the key terms namely: ethical considerations, artificial intelligence, media content production, content interpretation and transcultural audiences.

Ethical considerations in media narratives are vital for fostering a responsible and informed society, ensuring that the information disseminated is accurate, fair, and respectful of all individuals involved. A notable example of ethical misjudgment occurred during the coverage of the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013, where the rush to report led several news outlets to prematurely and inaccurately identify suspects (Mortensen, 2017). This spread misinformation and caused distress and harm to individuals inappropriately associated with the crime, underscoring the importance of verification prior to publication. Conversely, the reporting on the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan by various media outlets showcased the power of sensitive, accurate, and respectful journalism (Keegan et al., 2011), and a supportive dialogic local press (Azuma, 2019). Reporters from around the world provided comprehensive coverage that respected the dignity of victims, highlighted the global outpouring of support, and carefully considered the cultural nuances and sensitivities. This demonstrated the ability of media to bring people together across cultural divides, exemplifying how ethical journalism can contribute to global understanding and empathy. These contrasting instances illustrate the impact of media ethics, from the potential for harm in the absence of diligent verification to the capacity for fostering international solidarity through considerate and accurate reporting.

AI may be envisaged as the simulation of human intelligence in machines that are programmed to think like humans and mimic their actions (Botvinick et al., 2017). In the context of media and communication, AI can analyze large sets of data to identify trends, personalize content for users, generate news stories, and even interact with audiences through chatbots or virtual assistants (Jones and Jones, 2021). The goal of AI in this field is to enhance the creation, distribution, and personalization of media content, making it more relevant and engaging for the audience. However, utilizing AI for news generation introduces significant challenges. One notable challenge is the tendency for Large Language Models to hallucinate, i.e. inadvertently fabricate details (Shen et al., 2023) and distort meaning, which can lead to inaccuracies and misrepresentations in the reported news. For example, when reporting on a nuclear disaster, an example of problematic AI usage might involve the creation of an image intended to depict survivors or affected individuals, but inaccurately includes a person with too many or too few fingers (See Figure 1 for an example). Despite this being a recognized issue with AI-generated imagery (Hutson et al., 2023), where algorithms sometimes misinterpret or inaccurately render human features, such an image could unintentionally suggest that the nuclear disaster actually caused physical mutations. This misrepresentation risks spreading misinformation about the consequences of nuclear accidents, underlining the critical need for careful review and contextual understanding in the use of AI in sensitive journalistic contexts.





Figure 1. AI image created by author in NightCafé with the prompt “hiroshima old woman who survived the atomic bomb”.

Media content production encompasses the creation and development of material for dissemination across various platforms, such as digital, broadcast, and print media. The production process includes research, writing, editing, filming, and ultimately distributing content aimed at informing, entertaining, or persuading audiences. However, this process is fraught with potential pitfalls, including bias, where content creators may unconsciously infuse their work with personal or institutional prejudices, leading to skewed representations (Entman, 2007). Accuracy and misinformation

present another significant challenge, as the pressure to publish content rapidly can result in inadvertent errors and the dissemination of unverified facts. Ethical concerns also loom large, with issues like invasion of privacy (Manheim and Kaplan, 2019), sensationalism (Noain Sánchez, 2022), and the exploitation of sensitive subjects (Blauth et al., 2022). Moreover, ensuring fair and diverse representation remains a persistent problem, with many groups and perspectives often underrepresented or misrepresented in media narratives.

On the other hand, the interpretation of media content involves how audiences perceive, understand, and react to the information and stories presented to them. Interpretation is inherently subjective (Harbers and Broersma, 2014), influenced by cultural background, personal experiences, and societal norms, which can lead to varied and sometimes conflicting understandings of the same piece of content. The digital age introduces additional complexities with the phenomenon of filter bubbles and echo chambers (Ross Arguedas, 2022), where algorithms tailor content to individual preferences, potentially narrowing exposure to diverse opinions and fostering polarization. Furthermore, discrepancies in media literacy (Tommasi, 2023) among the public can considerably impact the ability to critically engage with media content, sometimes leading to misinterpretation or the dissemination of misinformation. These potential effects highlight the importance of fostering critical media literacy skills and encouraging exposure to a broad spectrum of viewpoints to enrich public discourse and understanding. The interpretation of these narratives can drastically evolve, influenced by societal changes and shifting cultural norms. For instance, the concept of gender has undergone significant reevaluation. Historically, media often portrayed gender within a binary framework, reflecting the prevailing norms of the early 20th century. However, in contemporary Western societies, there is a growing recognition of gender as a spectrum, challenging traditional binary classifications and leading to more inclusive representations in media. This shift reflects broader societal acceptance of diverse gender identities. Conversely, in many parts of Africa and Asia, the view of gender

as a spectrum has not yet become mainstream, illustrating how cultural, regional, and historical contexts significantly shape media content interpretation (Mellado et al., 2017).

Transcultural audience refers to those who are watching, reading or listening to media from another culture. A century ago, the world was much more monocultural than today (Eudell, 2014; Hickman, 2007). Societies that were geographically isolated, for example, like island nations, such as Iceland and Japan or politically isolated, such as North Korea, and those with dominant ethnicities coupled with shared cultural and linguistic heritages, such as in Scandinavia, tended to the monocultural end of the spectrum, whereas societies that experienced migration become more multicultural (Kim and Oh, 2011). Multicultural refers to the co-existence of two or more cultural groups. Multiculturalism as a societal or organizational principle often involves policies and practices that promote the retention of cultural distinctions (DeSensi, 2012), rather than encouraging a single cultural norm. Transcultural, however, refers to phenomena that extend across cultures or that take place between different cultural groups. It is about going beyond the boundaries of individual cultures to find common ground or shared experiences. Transcultural processes often involve the blending or fusing of cultural elements, which may in turn lead to the emergence of new cultural realities that are not confined by traditional cultural divides. This can occur at national, regional, local and familial levels. When members of different cultures share a *lingua franca*, communication is possible. However, there is a difference between linguistic competence and cultural competence (Schwartz et al., 2010). For example, English-speaking learners of Chinese who are bilingual but not bicultural, may be able to greet their counterparts with accurate translations of “*How are you?*”, but fail to notice that the typical greeting among Chinese people is actually “*Have you eaten?*”. Differences in cultural expectations may negatively impact communications although at times may be a source of joy when the transgressions are viewed empathetically. The British teenager who looks at the ceiling

naively on being greeted by “*What’s up?*” by an American college student may simply have misunderstood the phatic communion and was not intending to purposely misconstrue the greeting.

## **2. Literature review**

The transition from traditional media ethics to artificial intelligence introduces a complex set of ethical challenges and considerations. AI is pushing and reshaping ethical norms that have traditionally been centered around human interactions and decision-making. Exploring the integration of AI across various media applications, from content creation to decision-making algorithms, highlights the critical task of ensuring these technologies adhere to established ethical standards. The review also assesses how AI affects the principles of fairness, accountability, and transparency, preparing the ground for a thorough evaluation of the influence of AI on ethical practices in media.

AI has significantly impacted modern technological advancement, influencing diverse fields medicine to manufacturing to media. Its ability to analyze vast amounts of data and learn from patterns has transformed traditional processes and enabled new research and application possibilities. The integration of AI into various sectors has optimized operations and generated innovative solutions for complex problems, establishing itself as an essential component of contemporary tech ecosystems.

Large Language Models (LLMs) represent one of the most notable achievements in AI, particularly for natural language processing, understanding and generation. These models process and generate human-like text by learning from extensive language data corpora, comprising billions of words. This capability allows them to perform tasks such as translating languages and generating coherent, contextually relevant responses in conversations. Their versatility and utility has been demonstrated in numerous applications. LLMs are reshaping industries by automating complex tasks that traditionally required human intelligence and linguistic understanding.

Their ability to generate accurate and context-aware text rapidly makes them invaluable for content creation, customer service, and even coding, challenging the conventional boundaries of machine capabilities and redefining what is possible with AI.

LLMs can produce content in a plethora of genres from newspaper articles, magazines, and in-depth reports through to financial analyses and fiction. AI-generated text is increasingly indistinguishable from content written by humans (Graefe et al., 2018). This shift not only accelerates content production but also raises questions about originality, creativity, and the role of human content creators in journalistic fields (Guzman & Lewis, 2020; de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022). News stories follow predictable structures, which simplifies the automation progress (Graefe et al., 2018).

AI's capability extends beyond text to the generation of images and videos, which has similarly revolutionary implications for fields such as digital marketing, entertainment, and education. AI-generated images and videos can create realistic and high-quality media that can be tailored to specific audiences and purposes without the need for extensive human input or traditional media production processes (Brennen, 2018; Brundage et al., 2018). However, the difficulty in discriminating between human-created and AI-generated media presents significant ethical challenges. This poses risks in terms of misinformation, intellectual property rights, and the erosion of trust in digital content, highlighting the need for robust mechanisms to verify the origins and authenticity of AI-generated media (Carlson, 2015; Guzman & Lewis, 2020).

This review has highlighted significant advancements and ethical challenges introduced by AI in media. However, there remains a distinct gap in understanding how these technologies can be governed within the frameworks of traditional media ethics. Particularly, the application of AI in shaping public discourse and opinion poses unresolved questions about bias, manipulation, and the safeguarding of democratic values. There is therefore a need

to address these gaps by proposing a framework or set of principles that integrate AI ethics into media practices, ensuring that the deployment of AI technologies are utilized in a conscientious and informed manner.

### **3. Methodology**

The objective of this study is to analyze the production and reception of AI-generated media through various ethical frameworks. This process was cyclical, but is presented here in an easier-to-follow three-phase linear format. In the first phase, four ethical frameworks were applied to both the media content production and content reception. The subsequent notes were analyzed using thematic analysis. Specifically, Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), a qualitative research method, was used to identify, analyze, and report the themes (Braun and Clarke, 2021). An in-depth analysis of each theme was then carried out, starting with identifying ethical issues affecting each theme in relation to AI-generated media production and reception.

#### ***3.1. Phase 1: Application of ethical frameworks***

In the initial phase, established ethical theories were applied to the analysis of AI-generated media. The four ethical frameworks that were selected to provide a range of standpoints were consequentialism, deontological ethics, virtue ethics and the ethics of care. Each of these is described in turn here.

Consequentialism, which evaluates the morality of actions based on their outcomes, was used to assess the impact of AI-generated content on society, focusing on the results rather than the intentions behind actions. This framework allowed for an examination of both positive and negative consequences of AI media, including potential benefits such as increased efficiency and accessibility, and drawbacks like the spread of misinformation and reinforcement of biases.

Deontological ethics, emphasizing adherence to a set of rules or duties, provided a framework to scrutinize AI practices and ensure they align with established ethical standards, regardless of the outcomes. This approach focused on the principles and rules guiding AI development, such as transparency, fairness, and respect for privacy. By applying deontological ethics,

AI-generated media was evaluated on its adherence to these normative principles, ensuring that ethical considerations are integral to the design and deployment of AI systems.

Virtue ethics shifted the focus towards the character and virtues of individuals involved in AI development, prompting a reflection on the traits that should be fostered within the AI community to promote ethical behavior. This framework emphasized the importance of cultivating virtues such as honesty, integrity, and responsibility among AI developers and users. It encouraged an evaluation of the moral character and ethical motivations behind AI-generated media, advocating for the promotion of virtuous practices in AI development and application.

The ethics of care centered on interpersonal relationships and responsibilities, advocating for AI applications that prioritize empathy and consideration for the well-being of all affected individuals and communities. This framework highlighted the importance of understanding and addressing the needs and vulnerabilities of those impacted by AI-generated media. It called for a compassionate and context-sensitive approach to AI development, ensuring that AI systems are designed and implemented with a focus on human well-being and social justice.

### ***3.2. Phase 2: Theme identification and synthesis***

Following the application of ethical frameworks, the notes taken during this phase were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA, Braun and Clarke, 2021). RTA involves a series of stages to analyze qualitative data. First, the data were reviewed multiple times to become deeply familiar with the content, involving reading and re-reading the notes to identify patterns and potential areas of interest. Next, the data were coded to capture important features, creating the first set of categories. The identified themes were then reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflected the data. The final stage involved synthesizing the themes into a coherent narrative to present the findings of the analysis, structured to highlight the central themes, which were discovered to be integrity, inclusivity, and impact.

RTA acknowledges the subjectivity inherent in qualitative research. The researcher's perspectives, interpretations, and decisions significantly shape the analysis. Reflexivity is crucial in RTA, requiring ongoing critical self-reflection to account for how personal biases and assumptions may influence the research process and outcomes. Through this reflexive approach, the analysis aims to provide an account of the ethical considerations in AI-generated media.

### **3.3. Phase 3: Analysis**

In the final phase, the identified themes were analyzed in depth within the context of the ethical frameworks applied earlier. This involved cross-referencing the ethical implications of AI-mediated communication across the frameworks, highlighting the collective ethical considerations necessary for responsible media production and interpretation. The analysis revealed the opportunities and challenges that AI presents in relation to media communication.

## **4. Results**

The key themes that emerged, namely integrity, inclusivity, and impact are considered through the prism of ethical considerations in AI-mediated communication. Central to this exploration are three arguments, namely: the importance of critical and digital literacy, the mitigation of AI in amplifying misinformation, and the adoption of human-centric AI. These arguments are discussed in reference to the ethical frameworks of consequentialism, deontological ethics, virtue ethics, and the ethics of care (Ward, 2011). Consequentialism focuses on the outcomes of actions, suggesting that the morality of an action is determined by its overall consequences. In the context of AI, this perspective would evaluate the ethical implications of AI technologies based on the outcomes they produce, such as the benefits and harms to society. Deontological ethics, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of following a set of rules or duties regardless of the outcome. From this viewpoint, certain actions may be inherently right or wrong, and AI practices should adhere to ethical principles or rules that are considered



morally correct. Virtue ethics shifts the focus from the actions themselves to the character and virtues of the individuals performing those actions. In terms of AI, this approach would highlight the importance of developing and fostering virtues like honesty, fairness, and compassion in those who design, develop, and deploy AI systems. The ethics of care centers on the importance of interpersonal relationships and the responsibility to care for others. This framework would encourage the development and use of AI in ways that prioritize empathy, care, and consideration for the well-being of all affected individuals and communities.

Integrity of cross-cultural communications hinges on the application of critical and digital literacy. Both content creators and audiences to critically assess the authenticity of the narratives. Deontological ethics advocates a moral obligation to truthfulness and accuracy. This necessitates the mitigation of the tendency of AI to generate misinformation, which is particularly pertinent in cases in which conflicting narratives exist, and where the consequentialist focus on positive outcomes underpins the need to convey the truth. AI should therefore be an adjunct to human judgment, preserving nuances and ensuring accurate narratives, and guided by virtue ethics.

Inclusivity in content demands an equitable representation of diverse cultures and identities, which aligns with the core characteristics of ethics of care that places human relationships and responsibilities at its centre. This framework emphasizes the relational dynamics and the importance of addressing the specific needs of different communities, ensuring that no group is systematically marginalized by algorithmic bias. The application of critical and digital literacies empowers audiences to discern and demand media narratives that reflect a plethora of perspectives, which may enhance the depth and scope of media engagement. Furthermore, creators must be vigilant against the inadvertent role of AI in perpetuating misinformation that can reinforce stereotypes and stigmatize the narratives of various groups and cultures. The aim of human-centric AI is to act with an empathetic understanding of human values.

The impact of AI on cross-cultural communications ought to be the key focus, given that this may be viewed as the practical realization of the application of integrity and inclusivity. Both potential impact and actual impact can be evaluated. A core difficulty, however, would be the selection of metrics to use and the determination of the target groups. The application of ethical frameworks to any communication should help guide content creators who harness AI to put in place checks and balances that help align with the greater good. To achieve this a consequentialist perspective is essential. The adoption of human-centric or human-in-the-loop approach to the application of AI is one way in which the impact of AI can be counterbalanced.

In synthesizing these themes and arguments, this chapter underscores the importance of navigating the AI-mediated media with ethical foresight and humanistic consideration, ensuring that the content we create and consume fosters a transcultural discourse rooted in integrity, inclusivity, and positive impact.

#### **4.1. Integrity**

In the context of transcultural media narratives, integrity involves the ethical use of AI to maintain the truthfulness and authenticity of content. This means ensuring that AI-generated or AI-curated content upholds journalistic standards (Opdahl et al., 2023) and reflects factual accuracy. For content creators, integrity includes the ethical responsibility to clearly disclose AI involvement in content creation and to avoid deceptive practices, such as the creation and dissemination of deepfakes or misinformation. For the audience, integrity impacts their ability to trust and rely on the information presented to them, which is foundational to informed discourse and cross-cultural understanding. In the era of fake news (Lazer et al., 2018), in which any individual can disseminate news online via a multitude of channels; building trust by consistently delivering truthful accurate stories is paramount.

The transparency of AI algorithms plays a crucial role in maintaining the integrity of AI-generated content. When AI systems curate or generate content, the processes guiding their decisions should be as open as possible.

This transparency ensures that both content creators and the audience understand how information is selected, prioritized, and presented. In academia, publishers of many journals require authors to declare how AI has been used in the generation of any manuscripts. Publishers of newspapers and popular magazines to date have been less forthright in declaring the usage of AI.

Transparency would raise awareness of potential occurrences of algorithmic bias skewing narratives. The current opaque black box nature of most AI systems complicates this endeavor, making it a critical area for improvement. Although researchers are breaking ground on interpretable and explainable AI (Samek et al., 2019), there is no white box or fully transparent system on the horizon. Users of ready-made AI systems, such as the easily accessible public Large Language Models (LLMs) that can be accessed online (e.g. Bard, ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini, etc.) can share the purpose and the extent to which generative AI was used in the content creation process. This disclosure is not merely a matter of transparency but also of ethical responsibility, enabling audiences to critically assess the content they consume. Knowing that a piece of content was generated or curated by AI allows individuals to maintain a sense of skepticism towards seemingly authentic but potentially manipulated material. Although LLMs may inadvertently hallucinate when generating content; they also play a role in fact-checking and combating misinformation (Alhabiti et al, 2023). By leveraging LLMs, media platforms can identify and correct false information more efficiently, even in contexts where language barriers might have previously impeded such efforts. This application of AI has the potential to become a valuable vehicle in upholding journalistic integrity, ensuring the free flow of accurate information across cultures and languages.

For content creators, the challenge lies in balancing the innovative potential of AI with the responsibility to ensure accuracy, fairness, and transparency. This balance is crucial in maintaining the trust of a diverse audience, whose reliance on media for information shapes their understanding of the world. It is imperative that AI-created content adheres to the expected quality of

media content, rather than compromise it. To fulfill this responsibility, a comprehensive oversight mechanism is needed for the entire content creation process, from the initial conceptualization and design of AI applications to their integration into content production and distribution. Such a system is likely to incorporate a *human-in-the-loop* approach (Wu et al., 2022) to provide an added layer of protection. This method is vital for verifying accuracy, identifying and correcting biases, and maintaining transparency; and, thereby preventing the spread of misleading or harmful information. This vigilance is key not only for AI-generated content, such as writing and editing, but also for marketing-related usages, such as audience identification and content recommendation algorithms, which influence the visibility of news stories and information. Ethical management also involves ongoing evaluation and adjustment of AI tools to align with ethical standards and public expectations. By doing so, content creators may safeguard against ethical breaches that could erode public trust, and help ensure that the deployment of AI technologies in media serves the public good. Reputable media are founded on integrity and trustworthiness, and the maintenance of these values is critical for the public to keep faith in these systems. The integrity of media content, therefore, not only affects immediate perceptions but also has broader implications for cross-cultural communication and understanding.

For the audience, the integrity of AI-mediated content has direct implications on their trust and reliance on media as a source of information. In a world where AI plays a significant role in shaping narratives, the ability to discern the authenticity and accuracy of information becomes paramount. This is particularly critical in cross-cultural contexts, where misunderstandings or misrepresentations can have far-reaching consequences for intercultural relations. The ethical use of AI in media, characterized by transparency and commitment to accuracy, empowers audiences to assess the veracity and certainty of the information disseminated. This enables the audience to engage in informed discourse. In this way, the integrity of AI-mediated content not only upholds journalistic standards but also strengthens cross-cultural communication.

## **4.2. Inclusivity**

Inclusivity touches on the ethical imperative for AI to foster diversity and representation in media narratives. For creators, it underscores the responsibility to use AI to broaden the diversity of voices and stories told in the media, ensuring that content is not only diverse but also culturally sensitive and accessible. This includes using AI to overcome language barriers, adapt content to different cultural contexts, and represent marginalized communities fairly. For audiences, inclusivity affects how well they see themselves and others represented in media, which can influence societal attitudes and cross-cultural empathy. The development of AI systems that are sensitive to diverse cultural contexts and languages is fundamental to enhancing inclusivity. These systems must be adept at creating and distributing content that is not just globally comprehensible but also culturally relevant and respectful. Achieving this requires an intricate understanding of the nuances across cultures and languages, guiding AI in generating content that bridges rather than exacerbates the differences.

The degree to which AI generates inclusive content is contingent on the degree of inclusivity presented in the training data for the language models. The data that reflects the broad spectrum of human experiences and perspectives should help minimize the degree to which biases and stereotypes are reflected in AI algorithms. The core conundrum here, however, is that data extracted from humans is biased. Each individual has biases, each segment of a population regardless of how it is divided has biases. But, given that LLMs learn from tendencies and tendencies trend toward the norm, the views of the outliers of these influential on models may not be learned. This is why LLMs, such as ChatGPT, that were primarily trained on texts that were generated by English-speaking Americans show the biases present among English-speaking Americans, such as Anglo-centric views on historical or political issues and the use of American rather than, for example, British English. The vanilla models, i.e. models that do not use any post-processing filters may generate texts imbued with negative stereotypes. The LLMs developers, however, attempt to address these inadvertently

learned biases, through sophisticated natural language pipelines. However, these attempts to unbiased models may result in overcorrections that may cause offense through the creation of implausible images. There is, therefore, an ongoing effort to scrutinize and refine the datasets, ensuring they are representative and balanced. By prioritizing ethical considerations in data collection and AI training, content creators can mitigate the risk of perpetuating harmful biases, fostering a media environment that is truly inclusive and equitable.

Another critical role of AI in promoting inclusivity lies in enhancing content accessibility for individuals with disabilities. AI technologies can fill significant gaps in the media available to people with various difficulties, for example, by offering solutions such as the creation of automated subtitles for the hearing impaired, audio descriptions for the visually impaired, and video for people who cannot process written language (Túñez-López et al., 2021). These advancements may both expand the audience base and provide more individuals with access to information.

### **4.3. Impact**

The theme of impact explores the consequences of AI integration into media on both a societal and personal level. This may be thought of as the practical realization of the practices of integrity and inclusivity, which may be inferred from textual or media analysis of the content, or may be judged based on the audience perceptions and subsequent actions. One impact of AI is the increase in the efficiency of the news-making process (Manish and Acharya, 2023; Noain Sánchez, 2022).

For content creators, a central consideration is the long-term effects of AI-enhanced media on public discourse, culture, and the political landscape. Ethically, this involves reflecting on how AI-generated content may shape, shapes or has shaped societal norms and values. For audiences, the impact is experienced in the way AI-influenced media narratives alter their perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors. The impact of AI-algorithms on the consumption of news via social media is a case in point. The transition from a

small set of news channels, potentially aligned with or against governmental agendas, to a widespread network of individual reporters disseminating their own news, has significantly expanded the range of available news venues. However, the veracity of their news is questionable. The algorithmic bias caused by recommender systems ensures that consumers are drip-fed with related news articles. These digital bubbles, reinforced by AI algorithms, amplify homogeneous views while filtering out dissenting voices, potentially skewing public opinion and impairing cross-cultural understanding. The risk is a fragmented society, where isolated communities form around polarized views (Sîrbu et al., 2019), hindering meaningful dialogue and the exchange of ideas. This phenomenon underscores the urgent need for ethical AI practices that prioritize diversity and foster a more inclusive information ecosystem. This is a laudable goal, but no practical solution is yet on the horizon (Eitel-Porter, 2021), given that the goals of the social media sites and news creators tend to be self-serving, e.g. to gain views, increase market share or simply make money.

Moreover, the ethical implications of AI's role in crafting social and political narratives are profound. As AI becomes more sophisticated in generating and curating content, its influence stretches across cultural boundaries, potentially standardizing certain narratives while marginalizing others. The role of the Twitter algorithm on the Trump-Clinton election and the role of Facebook algorithm and subsequent ban of Trump prior to the first Trump-Biden election show the persuasive power of AI in politics. The use of deepfakes and generated content impacted the second Trump-Biden election with supporters of both sides resorting to deceptive practices.

This raises critical ethical questions about whose values and perspectives are being promoted and whose are being sidelined. Ensuring that AI respects cultural diversity and promotes a plurality of voices is essential for maintaining a balanced and equitable social and political discourse. This altruistic goal is laudable, but given that anyone can generate content using freely-available LLMs, and automatic detection of generated text is

currently insufficiently accurate to state with certainty whether a text was written, revised or checked using AI, policing online content is beyond the current state-of-the-art.

On a positive note, AI holds the promise of bridging divides through trans-cultural media narratives, offering new avenues for global understanding. AI has the potential to enrich individual worldviews and contribute to societal cohesion. This potential may be realized by leveraging AI's capabilities to transcend language and cultural barriers through idiomatic and culturally-sensitive translations, fostering empathy, increasing cross-cultural understanding, which should or could lead to more acceptance of people from different cultures and countries, and less xenophobia

The influence of AI-generated content on individuals is another aspect that needs consideration. AI may be used to both incite and mitigate cultural tensions. AI-driven media can perpetuate stereotypes and misinformation, fueling divisiveness. Conversely, when harnessed ethically, AI may promote understanding and tolerance, highlighting shared human values and experiences. The challenge lies in the ethical use of AI to generate and promulgate content that enlightens and unites, rather than alienates.

Audiences should be encouraged to engage with AI-mediated content critically, recognizing the potential biases and influences shaping the stories they consume. As consumers of media, individuals have the power to demand more ethically produced and diverse content (or, at least, not click on biased content), driving a shift towards more responsible and inclusive media.

## **5. Conclusions**

The implications of AI-generated content for both creators and audiences are profound. Creators shoulder the responsibility of ensuring AI systems do not perpetuate existing stereotypes or cultural biases, a task that involves training AI on diverse datasets and continuously evaluating its output for fairness and inclusivity. This process is crucial in crafting content that reflects a broad variety of human experience without reinforcing prejudicial



narratives. Meanwhile, audiences encounter the consequences of bias in AI-generated content firsthand, with their perceptions and prejudices being shaped by the level of bias present. This necessitates a need for tailor-made tools and a high degree of media literacy to enable audiences to critically assess and recognize potential biases.

Transparency and disclosure become paramount for creators, who ought to clarify the extent of AI's involvement in the creative process. This includes how data is utilized to personalize content and the presence of AI-generated material, ensuring audiences are not misled about the origins of the media. Audiences should also demand this transparency to make informed judgments about their engagement with content, distinguishing between AI-generated and human-created works and understanding how their personal data might influence the content presented to them.

The issue of trust permeates the relationship between creators and audiences, especially concerning how AI is applied in journalistic contexts or in manipulating images and videos, such as deepfakes. Creators must adhere to ethical guidelines to maintain the trust that is foundational for informed decision-making and healthy public discourse. Audiences' trust in the accuracy and authenticity of its content is essential, emphasizing the need for truth and clarity.

Data privacy and informed consent present another ethical challenge for creators, who balance the desire to engage with the public while simultaneously ensuring privacy protections are in place. This balance is critical in maintaining a respectful relationship with audiences, who are often unaware of the extent to which their information is harvested for content personalization and targeted advertising, sparking concerns about surveillance and privacy.

Accessibility and inclusivity are at the heart of leveraging AI in media. This involves breaking down barriers related to language and accessibility, ensuring that content is not only reachable but also comprehensible to a diverse audience across different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

However, vigilance against cultural homogenization is needed to represent the full diversity of human cultures, languages, and abilities.

The emotional and psychological impacts of media consumption are significantly influenced by AI, with creators bearing the responsibility to avoid manipulative practices that could harm the emotional well-being of audiences. This is particularly pertinent in news and social media, where AI algorithms that prioritize engagement can lead to negative outcomes like addiction or anxiety. Audiences, therefore, are subject to the emotional tone and psychological effects mediated by these algorithms, highlighting the need for ethical considerations in AI design that prioritize mental health.

Finally, informational integrity remains a critical concern, with creators needing to ensure that AI supports the accurate and comprehensive dissemination of information. This involves an ethical approach to the quality and veracity of AI-generated content to prevent the spread of misinformation.

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### Author's Biography

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# **HEALTHCARE INSURANCE REFORMS IN MOROCCO IN A CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXT: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSES BY ONLINE MOROCCAN IMMIGRANT VOICES AND STATE MEDIA OUTLETS**

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the ways health care insurance reforms in Morocco are presented and communicated to the public in various forms (propaganda, news) by state media and debated by emigrant voices from Europe and Canada. Given the global context of reforms in the health care sector, the Moroccan state has always tried to adopt significant changes in health care insurance systems under the pressure of public grievances and claims especially in the aftermath of Covid-19 pandemic. These changes are enacted locally but they are undertaken in an international context where globalization sets models of reforms in transforming the health sector inspired by capitalist principles. Moving from one health insurance system to another fosters dialogue and often difference among social actors; meanwhile, state media outlets play important roles in the process by disseminating discourses to serve various interests and inform public opinion. With the growing space that social media platforms occupy in the public sphere, online media platforms have also gained influential status in the media landscape in addition to the traditional roles of state-run media. This study aims

at shedding light on the kind of discourses that both state and online media platforms disseminate to construct representations about health insurance reforms in Morocco. It explores the interplay between global health care systems and local implementation of reforms. The study is based on critical discourse analysis of two discourses, namely the official discourse of the state about reforms in health insurance system, and the discourse of immigrant voices who assess these reforms and contrast them with the insurance systems in western countries. Social media offer a cultural contact zone where official discourse is evaluated, criticized and even challenged by Moroccan citizens living and benefiting from the insurance systems of their host countries. The data was collected from two state-run TV channels 2M TV and Aloula, as well as from social media accounts of Moroccan emigrants (and influencers) living in western countries. The collected texts were analyzed using multimodal critical analysis of discursive strategies used in each discourse. The focus of the research was to analyze the ways these two hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses view health care reforms and present them to the public. The results show that the discourse of the state can be assessed and challenged, in a growing environment of a cross-cultural interconnected world, by the voices of immigrants who have had a different cultural experience in other countries and who could disseminate, by contrast, a different narrative about reforms and the state's optimistic claims and promises.

**Keywords:** healthcare insurance, social media, discourse, Morocco, state media.

## 1. Introduction

Reforms in health insurance systems in Morocco were accompanied by so many media narratives on health care and have been criticized and challenged by Moroccan emigrants' voices. With the limitless flow of media content on social media platforms by individuals and media outlets alike, public opinion on health insurance reforms has always been shaped withing a struggle over meaning making by opposing discourses. In fact,



state-run media narratives on health care reforms in Morocco strived to shape public opinion based on the state's agenda. Conversely, Moroccan emigrants represent new and often shocking narratives on health care for the public in Morocco based on their cultural experiences with foreign health care systems.

This paper aims at understanding the discursive strategies employed by opposing discourses in public sphere dialogue on health care reforms in Morocco. It uncovers the semiotic choices in representational strategies characterized by different orientations to difference in the construction of narratives by state-run media outlets and Moroccan emigrants alike. It studies the lexical and visual choices in texts and how they worked together to foreground or downgrade ideas and values communicated by social actors. The state-run media outlets 2M and Aloula utilized various discourse construction strategies; they drew largely on a recontextualization of political discourse and its incorporation in news reports and discussion programs. Given the fact that most reforms in the health care sector in Morocco has been initiated by the King Mohamed VI, there has always been media coverage of royal speeches in news reports, special programs to discuss the new reforms, as well as other programs that address health care issues. It can be argued that state-run media outlets as essential constituents of the public sphere suppressed difference in their narratives and only reproduced the state's agenda. Critical voices of health care reforms in Morocco were not given space and the deteriorated situation of public health care was absent from the narratives. On the other hand, emigrants constructed their representations in different ways. Some narratives provided neutral information by pointing to high quality health care services in the host countries, and at the same time acknowledging few positive aspects of health care in Morocco based on their experiences before emigrating. Other narratives were mostly critical of the official discourse of the state and the situation of health care in their country of origin. Gaining access to public sphere dialogue via social media platforms made emigrants criticize and even challenge the state's optimistic views on reforms in health care insurance systems.

Both state-run media and social media platforms operate differently that the narratives they propagate in the public sphere vary significantly. As it is the case with the two media outlets 2M and Aloula whose lines of production are pre-determined based on state's ownership and control issues<sup>1</sup>. Ownership and control of media institutions guide the process of producing and diffusing media content (Downing, 2011). Relying on advertising revenues and the state's funding makes the two media outlets operate according to the state's interests. In this respect, sourcing as one of the filters in media production is utilized to set the agenda for the public (Herman & Chomsky,1988). Both channels rely heavily on government and official sources in their reporting of events, which makes the narratives they propagate go in line with the state's aims and interests in shaping public opinion in particular ways. However, social media platforms are now part and parcel of the public sphere as long as it is "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed" (Habermas, 1964, p. 116). In this respect, we find so many Youtube channels owned by Moroccan emigrants such as Tahadi تحدي and Abou maysam ابو ميسم whose videos on health care issues challenged the discourse of the state. Thus, social media make other opposing discourse creators such as emigrants own their own channels on Youtube and take part in public debate though not with equal opportunities that the state-run media offer to other social actors.

The relationship between the Moroccan state and its diaspora has undergone significant changes over the years. Berriane et al. (2015) illustrate that "the first generation of the 1960s and 1970s has tended to remain strongly oriented towards Moroccan society and culture, the second and third generations identify with their European lands of birth while retaining strong ties with Morocco" (p. 510). The settlement of Moroccan families in the host countries resulted from the new waves of emigration that were driven by the unification of families as the first waves were mainly male-oriented.

1. Aloula and 2M are two TV channels owned by the Moroccan state. Aloula (meaning 'the first') is the first Moroccan public channel that was launched in 1962. 2M (standing for 'the Second' in French) was in the beginning a privately-owned TV channel that was launched in 1989 then the Moroccan state took over the control of the channel.

In this way, the state readjusted its policies towards the diaspora by giving Moroccan mothers the right to pass their citizenship to their children even if they were born in the host countries. “The ability of Moroccans to hold dual citizenship allows migrants to more be influential in the social, cultural and political transformation of Moroccan society” (Dadush, p. 21). This shows that the participation of Moroccan emigrants in public sphere dialogue in their countries of origin has been inevitable, and the Moroccan state followed various policies to deal with this issue. In this respect, Sahraoui (2015) argues that “the Moroccan monarchy significantly changed its approach as it pursued political normalisation and favoured co-optation strategies rather than control and repression” (p. 529). The importance given to the diaspora by the Moroccan state has led to an increase in its participation in the development of the country. These studies highlight significant findings on the Moroccan state-diaspora relationship, but the ways in which struggle over communicating meanings about reforms between different discourse creators in Moroccan public sphere haven’t yet been explored by previous studies. As it is the case with reforms in health insurance systems, Moroccan emigrants has always participated in various communicative forms in public debate on state’s reforms. Given this cross-cultural communication context, the main research question that this paper strived to answer is how Moroccan state-run media outlets and Moroccan emigrants constructed their narratives on health insurance systems in a way that acknowledged difference between social actors or suppressed it.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Data collection**

The data collected consisted of media content produced by two state-run media outlets 2M and Aloula and by Moroccan emigrants on their social media accounts. The two state-run channels were chosen because they often cover the state’s reforms and achievements in various domains, and the social media accounts that were selected for the study have wide popularity on social media platforms. The data was composed of 14 videos by 2M

and Aloula and 11 videos by emigrants. The media outlets' texts included news reports, discussion programs and special programs aired during the announcement of new health insurance reforms in Morocco. Emigrants' videos were collected from various YouTube channels. Given the wider sharing and circulation of such content on social media platforms, it was hard with a few cases to identify the first channel where an emigrant's video was posted. Such videos of emigrants on health care in Morocco often went viral and could be shared by multiple content producers. Some of the YouTube channels were as follows: Tahadi تحدي, Abou maysam ابو ميسم, الجالية 42, Vivre au Cannada العيش في كندا, Jihanne Canada. These are influential content producers on social media who have wide popularity among social media users. Their narratives on health care in the host countries consisted of podcasts on specific topics or recorded videos from public hospitals in European countries such as Spain and France.

The data collected was chosen based on a process of purposive sampling and data-thickening. Due to the continuous reforms in health care insurance systems in Morocco and the wider use of social media platforms worldwide, a lot of data could be found on the topic propagated either by state-run media or social media users' accounts. Yet, the data collected was 'Small Data' as opposed to 'Big Data'. Latzko-Toth et al. (2017) define 'Small Data' as "a dataset composed of a relatively small collection of datapoints or cases, so that their analysis can be performed single-handedly via human coding and with little algorithmic assistance, in contrast to Big Data strategies where computational support is required" (p. 202). The amount of data collected, which consisted of 25 videos, was analytically manageable as far as multimodal critical discourse analysis is concerned.

## **2.2. Data analysis process**

The present study was based on qualitative data analysis. It adopted Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) and a data thickening process to enrich the analysis. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) was conducted on the texts by considering lexical and visual choices in the construction of discourse by state-run media as well as by emigrants in a

struggle between opposing representations and orientations to difference in public sphere dialogue. The analysis was done on texts that contain both lexical and visual components based on approaches and tools developed in theories of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989, 2003; Kress & Leeuwen, 2006). In this respect, Fairclough (2003) differentiates between five scenarios of orientation to difference in texts:

- a. an openness to, acceptance of, recognition of difference; an exploration of difference, as in 'dialogue' in the richest sense of the term;
- b. an accentuation of difference, conflict, polemic, a struggle over meaning, norms, power;
- c. an attempt to resolve or overcome difference;
- d. a bracketing of difference, a focus on commonality, solidarity;
- e. consensus, a normalization and acceptance of differences of power which brackets or suppresses differences of meaning and norms (p. 42).

Along with textual analysis, MCDA views other modes of communication as tools of meaning making and, more generally, of social construction. This makes visual communication, including images, an important way of producing meanings. Therefore, MCDA is not interested only in the semiotic choices that people can make, but more importantly it also highlights their role in the communication of power relations. In addition to the analyzed videos, other data including royal speeches and statements by government officials in Morocco were used for data thickening which is "an active engagement with the field of inquiry and the data itself" (Latzko-Toth et al., 2017, p. 203). This process of tracking the context in which the data was produced, the perspectives of the social actors in conveying meanings in texts, and detailed descriptions of their actions based on the purpose of the study allowed for deeper analysis of the representational strategies embedded in discourse.

### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1 State-run media outlets' representational strategies

Aloula and 2M media narratives constructed narratives that reproduced the same discourse of the state on reforms in health insurance systems merged with additional meanings in discussion programs and news reports. In this respect, participants' speech was reported by representational strategies which were characterized by motivated semiotic choices. At the lexical level, communication in the analyzed texts was characterized by a mixture of formal and informal lexicon. The discussion programs and news reports mostly used standard Arabic in media coverage concerning health reforms. Yet, reliance on Moroccan dialect (Darija) emerged only in some programs on health care practices during covid-19 specially in 2M channel. Furthermore, we found that one of the important ways of representing the speech of social actors in the news reports that were produced immediately after the announcement of new reforms in health insurance systems was the use of quoting verbs. The way in which journalists formulated their words in news reports informed the presentation of attitudes about participants and their ideas.

Journalists played important roles in conveying additional meanings when reporting the speeches of the King concerning new health reforms. The reports were characterized by their evaluation of thoughts by using specific lexical choices of quoting verbs. In this respect we found two types of quoting verbs in the analyzed news reports: neutral and metapositional verbs. The first type in the reports included verbs such as: "said", "called for", "pointed to", "outlines", "described", "addressed". These neutral verbs made the reports faithful to the meanings in the speeches and reproduced the same discourse of the state. On the other hand, the second type of quoting verbs was metapositional that the journalists opted for to add additional meanings in the reporting. As an example, the verbs, "praised", "stressed", "confirms", "diagnosed" were used in the news reports when representing the King's speeches as in Example 1:

1a. Journalist: it is time to launch a firm project of popularizing Social Protection to include all Moroccans for the five coming years, his majesty the King confirms.

Such verbs marked the journalists' evaluation of the speeches and in many cases implied additional emotional meanings in the news reports as opposed to the neutral verbs. The neutral verbs reproduced the same ideas advocated in the royal speeches, while the metapositional verbs implied emotional meanings by representing the King as being compassionate, caring, powerful and knowledgeable. Such lexical choices played two complementary roles; informing the audience about the ideas and projects that were addressed in the speeches while at the same time pushing the public to evaluate and form emotional attitudes with the aim of achieving a consensus on the reforms being taken in health insurance systems.

At the visual level, the media narratives on new health insurance made use of visual choices to legitimize the speech of social actors and foreground a positive image of health care reforms. The narratives showed high quality health care facilities in public hospitals. Aloula channel aired a videotape constructed by the advocates of new health insurance systems in its report on the opening ceremony of the implementation of social protection presided by the King. As shown in Figure 1 below, the image denotes the access of patients to high quality health care services.



Figure 1. From Aloula report of the opening ceremony of the implementation of social protection. Copyright 2021 by Aloula TV.

At the connotative meaning, the audience would expect that the new health insurance system is bringing about significant changes in health care services that would be accessible in public hospitals. Yet, what was absent in the media texts was scenes of overcrowded public hospitals in deteriorated conditions that did not ensure a high-quality service for citizens as opposed to what the chosen images in the state-run media narratives connoted to the audience. Furthermore, the classification of participants in the narratives was based on visual choices. Social actors were depicted by means of functionalization in the visual aspects of news reports and discussion programs. Participants, including the King, doctors, ministry of health officials, guests were visually represented based on their function as shown in Figure 2. The images that were chosen connoted additional meanings to the audience. All participants appeared in professional and formal appearances making the discourse of new health insurance systems much more official. It is worth noting that news reports after the announcement of new health insurance systems in royal speeches, the speeches themselves were aired again during the news reports. In this way, the representations of state-run media were characterized by a recontextualization of an aura of power and legitimacy surrounding royal political speeches and weaving it into news reports and discussion programs.

### **3.2 Orientation to difference in state-run media representations**

Both state-run media channels Aloula and 2M broadcasted two TV programs, *الأولى للصحة* (health first), *صحتنا جميعاً* (our health) respectively, in which they covered the process of popularizing Rameed as a new health insurance all over Morocco in 2012. This health insurance system was tested in one region before it was adopted in all Moroccan cities after a Royal speech during the thirtieth memory of Throne Day in Morocco. Both programs included voices that support the new insurance system. The direct quoting of statements by the minister of health, administrators in the ministry of health and doctors made the texts mostly dialogical in the sense that the programs were faithful to the original ideas of the social actors who were interviewed. Yet, other voices who criticized the health situation in



Morocco were absent from both programs. The orientation of the programs to difference suppressed any other critical voices to the health situation or failures of reforms in the health sector in Morocco. What we found in the reporting of events in both texts was a consensus on a foreseen success of Rameed health insurance in providing high quality health care to patients. A discussion program like *الأولى للصحة* (health first) would normally be a platform for other voices who bring another view to the discussion of health insurance systems in the country, but there was only the journalist and the guest was a doctor who is the head of Rameed department in the ministry of health. No other voices from civil society were present in the program. This suppressive orientation to difference in both programs shows that the media outlets Aloula and 2M only served the propaganda of the state concerning the new health insurance system by representing Rameed as a successful reform on which there was a consensus by all Moroccans. In fact, years later the state itself announced a new health insurance system called Social Protection that replaced Rameed as the later failed to insure a good quality health service for Moroccans.

Moving from one health insurance system to another was accompanied by biased representations on the new reform by both Aloula and 2M channels. It is worth noting that both channels never represented Rameed as a health insurance system that failed to guarantee good health care for Moroccans even if it was criticized by the King in his royal speech in which the new Social Protection system was announced during the twenty-first Throne Day memory. On the same Throne Day, 2M channel reproduced the content of the royal speech in media texts. A discussion program entitled *برنامج خاص* (special program) was aired specifically to discuss the royal speech as illustrated in Figure 2. In the same vein, the program's orientation of difference was similar to the programs that covered Rameed years ago. In addition to the journalist, the guests were three university teachers, one of them participated via video conferencing, and an editor of a daily Moroccan newspaper. All the guests reproduced and elaborated more on the same economic, political and social issues addressed by the King in his speech.



Figure 2. From 2M special program on King Mohamed VI speech. Copyright 2020 by 2M TV.

The program never gave space to other voices from the opposition for example who might have had other visions to reforms. In this respect, the new health insurance system of Social Protection was represented as being sophisticated not only locally but also at the international level. Although one of the guest points in a glimpse of a second to the lack of hospitals and laboratories during covid-19 pandemic, there were no discussions of the deteriorated infrastructure of public health hospitals, lack of human resources and financial assistance and investment in the public health care sector neither by the journalists nor the other guests in the program. In this way, the program suppressed difference in the public sphere as far as health care reforms are concerned and reproduced the state's optimistic views for reforms to shape public opinion accordingly without any reference to other views either at the national or international level.

### 3.3. Moroccan emigrants' participation in public sphere dialogue

Moroccan emigrants have played important roles in the circulation of counter hegemonic discourses on health care reform in their country of origin. Their voices, as it has been illustrated above, were not given space in state-run media as it was the case with other voices from civil society. The aim of such biased media content on any health insurance system reform was to set the state's agenda and form public opinion accordingly by suppressing

difference. Even though the social actors whose views do not go in line with the state's agenda were excluded in state-run media outlets, emigrant's access to social media platforms allowed them to participate in dialogue from overseas and raise new questions about the state's agenda in health care reforms. As Berriane et al. (2015) point out, "new generations of well-integrated Moroccans abroad have become more assertive in exercising their active political rights, no longer positioning themselves exclusively as political subjects, but also as political actors" (p. 511). Their representations of foreign health care were created within a struggle of opposing views on reforms in Morocco. In this way, social media platforms became a field of struggle on meaning between two opposing discourses: the emigrants' representations from different host countries and the discourse of the Moroccan state.

Each discourse was constructed to shape public opinion based on representational strategies. Emigrants' narratives shed light on the difference between health care in the host countries and the country of origin. Yet, their orientation to difference varied from one text to another. Some emigrants provided only information about the health care systems in many countries such as France, Spain, Italy and Canada as in Figure 3 from a video by a Moroccan emigrant living in Canada.



Figure 3. From a video by Vivre au Canada channel on YouTube. Copyright 2023 by YouTube®.

In most of those videos there was no direct reference to the official discourse of the state or the health care situation in Morocco even if comparisons could be made by the audience of such content. Other emigrants, however, were more critical in their videos. We could find even some patients or their visitors who recorded themselves in public hospitals and shared videos to show the big difference in health care quality services as in Figure 4. In such texts there was an accentuation of difference and criticism was often directed to the Moroccan government and officials in the ministry of health. Such videos were shared on social media platforms as a form of video activism that was highly reproduced and shared in other platforms by other social actors in Morocco.



Figure 4. From a video by a Moroccan emigrant being hospitalized in a public hospital in Spain that was shared on the YouTube channel 24 الجالية (Diaspora24). Copyright 2018 by YouTube®.

The analysis showed that there were specific lexical and visual choices that made such texts widely popular and influential on social media. The lexical choices that emigrants opted for were mainly informal lexicon. Using Moroccan dialect (Darija) to discuss matters of health care created what Fairclough (1989) calls ‘simulated equalization’. In this way, using informal language on health issues that Moroccans did not find in most state-run media narratives reduced the distance between emigrants and the public.

Thus, in addition to sharing the concerns of their fellow citizens in their country of origin they also spoke their daily life language in the videos. And this made the audience identify with their discourse. The lexical choices worked together with visual choices that were based on casual appearances of the emigrants as in Figure 3 as well as scenes from hospitals as in Figure 4 whose equipment and services were way better than the deteriorated conditions in public health hospitals that most Moroccans were familiar with.

In the analyzed texts some emigrants only foregrounded health care quality services in foreign countries while others highly downgraded the state's agenda in health care reforms in Morocco. These differences in emigrants' representations ranging between neutral and more critical accounts of health care in host countries and the country of origin showed that the efforts of the Moroccan state in its strategies towards the diaspora were not inclusive. Considering emigrants as only investors, agents of development and cultural ambassadors "may however run the risk of not being inclusive enough to maintain the country's attractiveness and political influence across different generations" (Sahraoui, p. 531). Even if the Moroccan state has made great efforts in its incorporation of the diaspora in political, economic and cultural reforms, their participation in the public sphere remains limited. Their online activism on health care reforms did not lead to policy change as long as their voices were suppressed and never taken into consideration at an institutional level. Manufacturing consensus on the Moroccan state's reforms in the health sector by state-run media outlets reinforced a hegemonic discourse of the state and suppressed difference in public sphere dialogue.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study has shown that Moroccan emigrants participated in public sphere dialogue in online platforms though state-run media suppressed difference in its narratives on reforms in health insurance systems. Both state-run media outlets 2M and Aloula reproduced the official discourse of the state and aimed at constructing a consensus on a foreseen success of

reforms without giving any chance for difference or dialogue on the strategies opted for to bring about change in the health care sector.

Still, the voice of emigrants found its way through social media platforms and represented health care issues either in their host countries or the country of origin in a way that made social media platforms a cross-cultural contact zone where their videos went viral on social media in Morocco. Social media users reproduced and distributed such content on various social media platforms. The analysis of the data revealed, however, differences in the narratives of emigrants. Some chose to use their platforms on social media to share only information on health care services in their countries without any direct criticism to the Moroccan state's agenda in the sector, others were more critical and their texts accentuated difference by directing their criticism to the government and the ministry of health officials. Without creating spaces and opportunities for the diaspora to voice their demands and views in a way that fosters cross-cultural dialogue and serves the interests of the country, the Moroccan state risks generating more radical voices on different matters in the future by suppressing critical voices to its policies in various sectors.

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# PERCEPTIONS OF OTHERNESS: VISUAL FRAMING OF SUB-SAHARAN MIGRANTS IN MOROCCAN ONLINE PRESS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

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**Abstract:** This article explores the effects of visual framing of Sub-Saharan immigrants and its impact on the perceptions of “otherness.” Few studies have focused on visual representations of immigration as part of the dynamic relationship between media and culture in Morocco. Through a visual framing analysis, we investigate the visual components, composition, and accompanying narratives used by Moroccan online press outlets when portraying Sub-Saharan immigrants. Study 1 employs visual content analysis to examine framing in news photographs about Sub-Saharan immigrants. Study 2’s experiment will determine the effects of these visuals on participants’ emotions and attitudes towards Sub-Saharan immigration. This examination not only unveils the implicit messages conveyed but also aims to elucidate how these visual framings can either foster cross-cultural understanding and empathy or reinforce perceptions of “otherness”. By shedding light on the emotional impact of these visual representations, we hope to encourage more inclusive and informed public discourse, and ultimately, nurturing intercultural understanding and cohesion within the Moroccan context.

**Keywords:** Media Framing, Sub-Saharan Immigrants, Otherness, Emotional Response, Cross-Cultural Understanding.

## 1. Introduction

Morocco has been the spotlight for most sub-Saharan migrants longing for better living conditions on the other side of the border. It is a destination considered the last step in the migrants' pursuit of better socio-economic opportunities (Lirola, 2016; Thorsen, 2017). Europe, being the dream destination for most Sub-Saharan migrants taking the maritime migration route, is possible only through Moroccan land (Figure 1). On the other hand, Morocco's diplomatic ties with European countries, especially Spain, have made its position detrimental in thwarting these transit migration operations. Morocco now is turned into a buffer zone to meet European needs (Khachani, 2008; Schapendonk, 2008). The geographical positioning of Morocco has also made its African allegiance come in between its role as either a "gatekeeper" for Europe or a humanist facilitator for sub-Saharan migrants. But, this does not, in fact, diminish Morocco's integrity and efforts in keeping both sides sheltered. Morocco is putting at risk both its human and capital resources in order to reinforce ties with all sides concerned.

More uncertainty for people trying to enter Europe has been brought about by a number of mutual agreements between Morocco and Spain that have been in place since the early 1990s, as well as recent attempts by the European Union to reduce irregular migration over the Mediterranean. The European Union committed 182 million euros to boost job development and other services, in addition to 148 million euros to manage irregular migration in Morocco. As a result, more and more migrants from sub-Saharan Africa end up stuck in different Moroccan cities. Many of them are in irregular status because they were unable or unwilling to travel back to their native countries or because they were unable to cross the borders into Europe. It is believed that over 700,000 migrants from sub-Saharan Africa are living in Morocco (El Ghazouani, 2019). Still, Morocco has also assumed a leading role. Its response to the unauthorized migration of sub-Saharan Africans from Morocco

to Europe has evolved beyond repression. It started a broad campaign of migration reform, which has granted legal status to about 50,000 migrants from sub-Saharan Africa. In addition to securing an agreement from the African Union to host a new African Observatory on Migration, which studies migration trends and coordinates government policy on the continent, King Mohammed VI was also granted a leading role on migration matters within the organization. Morocco's policy has changed to support a pan-African identity, with Mohammed VI rising as a leader on the continent, in contrast to other North African nations and its own recent history.



Figure 1. Map showing the basic migration routes for Sub-Saharan migrants towards Europe. Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) compilation based on International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Migrants and Cities: New Partnerships to Manage Mobility* (Geneva: IOM, 2015), available online.

Media plays a pivotal role in communicating the convoluted situation of Morocco regarding African migration. In modern society, public individuals rely heavily on media channels for their daily dose of both national and international news. However, the field of media studies has long claimed that the social construction of reality, shaping of public opinion and mending individuals' mental models are significant properties of media's portrayals of others, including immigrants (Martinez Lirola, 2016). Both legacy and online media channels follow an agenda compatible with the ideologies they propagate. Masked by their role of informing the public, the media shapes individuals' perception of the world as well as their near locative environments. Moroccan media discourse has always fostered an aggressive attitude towards sub-Saharan migrants stylizing them as "*the*" foreigners, and, at times, echoing them as criminals (Pian, 2009). Such a strategy adheres to a security-approach ensuring the construction of sub-Saharan migrants as "*Other*", beings that ought to never be considered as part of Moroccan society. Still, one cannot investigate the effect of Media discourse unless they consider the receiving end of media discourse. Moroccan citizens' opinions of Sub-Saharan migrants are sculptured by the media discourse they digest. Van Dijk (2006, 2008 & 2011) suggests that the rhetoric in the news perpetuates the social inequality that highlights the dominance of the majority population over minorities. This portrayal demonstrates the need for research projects such as this one, which focus on the framing aspect of immigration. While existing research has touched upon various aspects of immigration (Bosmajan 1983; Chilton 2005; Cisneros 2008; Hart 2010, 2011; Hawkins 2001; KhosraviNik 2010; Musolff 2012) there is a noticeable dearth in studies focusing on the visual representations of this dynamic correlation between media and culture in the Moroccan context.

The selection of images over text in the analysis of how visual framing affects Moroccans' perceptions of Sub-Saharan immigration is based on the understanding of the significant influence that visual components can have on influencing public opinion and attitudes. Images and photos are a potent form of visual communication that can elicit strong feelings, transmit

subliminal information, and play a major role in shaping social reality (Hall, 1997; Messaris, 1996). Images in the news are essential in their rhetoric and overall news narration. News photos play a crucial role in shaping the public narrative surrounding noteworthy occurrences. News photos clarify news details and elicit a more visceral response from a broad audience regarding social events by drawing attention to them in a way that words cannot readily accomplish (Adam, Quinn and Edmonds 2007).

In the following study, we intend to investigate the visual portrayal of sub-Saharan immigrants in Moroccan online press. We are interested, more specifically, in analyzing the visual components, composition and framing used by Moroccan online press when portraying news items concerned with sub-Saharan migration towards Morocco. Generally, reports about these immigrants typically focus either on their border-crossing attempts, confrontations with Moroccan border-patrol officials, or their sudden inclination to stay in Morocco. Instead of taking these events as an opportunity to advocate for cross-cultural understanding and push forward an inclusive public discourse, Moroccan online news media stylize these full-of-hope immigrants as foreigners and links “*Otherness*” to their identities.

This study uses a mixed-methods approach to present empirical data on how sub-Saharan migrants are portrayed visually in Moroccan online news media and how exposure to photos affects the views and feelings of viewers. Compelling images evoke strong feelings (Geise & Baden, 2015), feelings can moderate the effects of media framing (Lecheler, Schuck, & de Vreese, 2013), and feelings can encourage the sharing of content on other media platforms (Berger & Milkman, 2012), thus resulting in the mass dissemination of visuals. The following studies analyze images joined with news reports revolving around sub-Saharan migration in Moroccan online news outlets along with their emotional responses and attitudes among Moroccan citizens. The first study will consist of a visual semiotic analysis looking into the visual representation and framing of migrants in two prominent online news outlets in Morocco. Study 2 investigates the emotional effects of these images on the emotional responses and attitudes of Moroccan citizens

towards sub-Saharan migrants' images and the issue of migration in general. The analysis will test the following:

**RQ1:** How does the Social Construction of Otherness appear in Moroccan online press regarding sub-Saharan migrants?

**RQ2:** What frames manifest in the images that Moroccan online press outlets use to communicate information on sub-Saharan migrants?

**RQ3:** What are the Visual Components, Composition, and Framing Strategies employed by Moroccan online press in portraying Sub-Saharan migration news?

**RQ4:** What are the Emotional Responses and Attitudes of Moroccan Citizens towards Sub-Saharan Migrants in the Context of Media Exposure?

This chapter is organized into the following sections: Section 2 offers a literature review. The main objectives, data and methodology will be included in Section 3. The analysis along with the discussion and conclusions are in Sections 4, 5 and 6.

## **2. Literature review**

Boeva (2016) used CDA to analyze data from conservative and liberal sites in the UK and US, including The Daily Mail, The Guardian, Fox News, and Abc News. Searching for phrases like “refugee,” “migrant,” “asylum,” and “crisis” revealed that in September 2015, migrants’ identities were portrayed more positively than before. Their image was that of “someone who need[ed] help, support and assistance rather than an enormous group of perpetrators coming to steal Europeans’ jobs” (p. 57). Ukmar (2017) examined how migrants were portrayed in German and British publications during the 2016 ‘European Refugee Crisis’ using an iconographic-iconologic paradigm. Visual autoethnography revealed that the German newspaper showed migrants positively, highlighting their absorption into the host country, while the British daily portrayed them as hostile and largely criminal. The researcher acknowledged that his auto-ethnographic description

was impacted by contemporary media trends, which perpetuated the ‘frame of victimization’ (p. 49), highlighting the need for alternate readings. Chouliaraki and Zaborowski (2017) conducted a content analysis of 1200 news articles from eight European countries to examine how immigrants are represented in the media. Their findings suggest that linguistic practices for migrants limit their ability to express themselves publicly. Migrants’ voices are misrepresented at several levels, separating them from “communities of belonging” (p. 613). According to Georgiou & Zaborowski (2017), there is a change from sympathy to skepticism and animosity towards migrants as “voiceless others”. The study compares the portrayal of violence to empathy and vulnerability in East and Western media.

There has been discussion in the media about the unauthorized migration of sub-Saharan Africans to Spain and Italy (Ennaji, 2022). The term “illegal immigration” describes the movement of people across national boundaries in violation of the immigration regulations of the destination country in order to enter other nations without authorization (Newton, 2008). Though illegal immigrants are typically not the poorest in their countries of origin, it is a socio-political phenomenon that has occurred in recent decades, usually from a poorer to a richer one. However, the common perception is that undocumented immigrants are ignorant, displace natives from their new country of residence, and refuse to integrate (Bacon, 2008; Dauvergne, 2008; Guerra Salas and Gómez Sánchez, 2020). Unauthorized or illegal immigrants are typically seen as low-skilled laborers (Hanson 2009; Passel and D’Vera, 2009; Spener, 2009; Triandafyllidou, 2013). It “help[s] to reinforce their experience as victims in their host country” (Collins, 2007: 73). Martinez Lirola (2016) analyzed visual representations used by Spanish online press depicting sub-Saharan migrants at the moment of their arrival and their attempts of jumping the fence. Lirola’s analysis suggested that the mediatised discourse used by Spanish press highlights sub-Saharan migrants as wild invaders which ultimately reinforced the foreignization of the migrants, and thus rendering them as an impulsive “other”. What is worth mentioning concerning Lirola’s work is the focus on occurrences of human rights in the news items.

In the Moroccan context, however, only few studies tackled the issue of sub-Saharan migrants' visual representation in Moroccan media. Dib (2023), for example, conducted a study analyzing the images used to depict sub-Saharan migrants in Moroccan newspapers. The study concluded that sub-Saharan migrants are portrayed as a threat to the Moroccan community intentionally by employing stereotyped elements. Although this is a useful approach to investigate the discursive strategies regarding sub-Saharan migrants in the media, there is still a significant need not only for a meticulous analysis of the visual representation of migrants in the Moroccan context but also a study exploring the emotional responses and attitudes that come as a result of these techniques.

The following study will use Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2020) model for the visual portrayal of social actors to examine how sub-Saharan immigrants are portrayed. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) introduce the concept of the 'semiotic landscape', which emphasizes the role of context in describing the visual mode. This has distinct characteristics, a history, limits, and landmarks. They assert that the role of visual communication in a particular society cannot be understood until it is considered in the context of the range of public communication forms or modes available in that society, as well as their applications and assessments. Based on Michael Halliday's systemic functional linguistics (1978), Kress and van Leeuwen's approach to Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) demonstrates how many semiotic modalities (such as images, diagrams, photographs, and graphics) combine constructively to create implicit or indirect meanings communicated by texts. Significantly, the contemporary Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is used as the basis for key multimodal texts, particularly in the work of Kress and van Leeuwen, who argue that the analysis should begin with Halliday's meta-functions to establish the underlying system of any case of communication (Ledin & Machin, 2018, p. 2).

Therefore, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) suggest that all images perform three main meta-functions. Social actors can be referred to as individuals or groups, both orally and visually. To comprehend the portrayal of individuals



in visuals and their interactions with the viewer, one must consider social distance, social relationship, and social interaction (Van Leeuwen 2008:138). This paradigm can help identify how immigrants are portrayed, whether as groups, individuals, active or passive. Additionally, analyzing pictures in multimodal texts requires a framework. The theoretical foundation will be based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2020) visual grammar.

### **3. Objectives, Data and Methodology**

#### **Study 1**

In this study, a visual semiotic analysis was conducted on images depicting Sub-Saharan migrants, focusing on content from three prominent Moroccan online news outlets: *Hespress English*, *Maghreb Arabe Presse (MAP)*, and *Morocco World News (MWN)*. These outlets were specifically chosen due to their wide readership and substantial impact on public opinion in Morocco, which makes them critical sources for understanding how migrants are portrayed in the media landscape. These platforms are not only popular among Moroccan audiences but also influential in shaping discourse and public perception, thereby providing a strong basis for examining media representations. Another motive behind our choice is the news outlets' ranking among the first-page search results when searching for news in relation to Sub-Saharan Migrants in Morocco.

A curated selection of 80 images, along with accompanying news reports, was analyzed. This number of images was chosen to ensure a comprehensive examination while remaining manageable for detailed semiotic analysis. The images were selected based on their relevance to the portrayal of Sub-Saharan migrants, identified through a keyword search using terms such as “*Sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco*” This keyword-based approach ensured a focused retrieval of content that is directly relevant to the study's objectives. The criteria for selecting these images included the prominence of the image in migration news contexts, the diversity of portrayed situations (e.g., everyday life, conflict, integration scenes), and the publication

timeframe. These criteria were aimed at ensuring that the sample was representative of current portrayals and wide-ranging in the scenarios depicted, thereby providing a valuable understanding of the visual rhetoric used in these media outlets. This analysis leverages the theoretical framework of visual grammar as proposed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, highlighting the importance of visual elements in constructing and conveying meanings.

### **3.1. Kress and Van Leeuwen's Visual Metafunctions**

**3.1.1. Representational Metafunction:** This aspect investigates the content of the images, identifying the depicted actors and the nature of their actions and interactions. The analysis discerns between narrative representations, showing events and actions, and conceptual representations, which categorize and symbolize subjects and their characteristics (Forceville, 1999). This Metafunction helps in understanding how sub-Saharan migrants are visually framed, either as active participants in certain narratives or as symbolic figures within broader discourses.

**3.1.2. Interactive Metafunction:** This dimension explores the relationship established between the image and the viewer, particularly through the use of angle, distance, and gaze. It examines how these visual techniques are used to position the viewer in relation to the subjects, potentially creating a sense of power dynamics, empathy, or detachment. The analysis of this Metafunction reveals the intended emotional or psychological impact on the viewer and the implied stance towards the migrants. (Roberts & Philip, 2006).

**3.1.3. Compositional Metafunction:** The focus here is on the arrangement of visual elements within the image, including framing, salience, the balance between elements, and the use of color and contrast (Itti, Koch, & Niebur, 1998). This Metafunction addresses how the composition directs the viewer's attention, prioritizes certain elements over others, and

contributes to the overall interpretation of the image. It elucidates the visual strategies used to guide the viewer's perception and understanding of the migration issue.

## **Study 2**

To assess the emotional implications of the visual framing of sub-Saharan migrants, Study 2 will involve an experimental design with 80 Moroccan BA students from the English Studies department, chosen to accommodate the English language media content and questionnaire. These participants were specifically chosen to align with the language of the media content—English—ensuring that all participants have sufficient proficiency to understand the media content and respond accurately to the survey aiming to evaluate how the exposure to selected images from online press influences perceptions, emotions, and willingness to support migrants. The study employs a quasi-experimental design with a pre- and post-exposure survey to investigate changes in attitudes. The approach allows for the measurement of shifts in perception directly attributable to the media exposure. The questionnaire includes open ended questions along with a 5-point Likert Scale. It is divided into two main sections: pre-exposure and post-exposure, each serving distinct purposes. Each image presented in the study is also accompanied by specific 5-point Likert Scale questions designed to measure emotional responses.

The pre-exposure survey of the study collects baseline data on participants' initial attitudes towards sub-Saharan migrants, exploring various aspects such as the fairness of media representation in Moroccan media. For instance, to evaluate media representation, participants are asked, "*To what extent do you feel that sub-Saharan migrants are fairly represented in Moroccan media?*". This question seeks to uncover perceptions of fairness and accuracy in media portrayals. Similarly, to understand cultural impacts, the questionnaire includes items such as, "*How strongly do you agree with this statement? 'Sub-Saharan migrants pose a threat to Moroccan culture and values'*" which probes the perceived cultural integration or friction caused

by migrant populations. Further, the questionnaire explores empathy by assessing respondents' sensitivity towards the challenges faced by migrants, their willingness to support initiatives aimed at improving conditions for migrants, opinions on the positive contributions of migrants to society, and general feelings and personal experiences that shape views on migrants. Following this, participants are shown a series of images from online press articles depicting sub-Saharan migrants in various contexts, accompanied by a 5-point Likert Scale questions designed to elicit emotional responses, such as feelings of anger (e.g., *How much anger does this image provoke in you?*) fear (e.g., *To what extent does this image make you feel fearful*), warmth, or positivity (*To what extent does this image make you feel warmth or positivity towards the individuals depicted?*). The post-exposure survey then assesses changes in attitudes after this media exposure. For example, participants might be asked, *"Has your perception of the contribution of sub-Saharan migrants to Moroccan society changed after viewing the media content?"* and *"How likely are you to engage in or support actions that help improve the situation for sub-Saharan migrants after viewing the media content?"*. This structured approach allows the study to systematically measure the impact of media exposure on changing public perceptions and fostering greater empathy and support for sub-Saharan migrants.

#### **4. General Analysis of the Images**

The images and accompanying news reports chosen for this study were selected for their potential to frame sub-Saharan migrants in varying lights, influenced by the visual elements and narrative structures employed. Given the space constraints of this paper, the focus will only be on the visual components, which are pivotal in shaping the viewers' perceptions and emotional responses towards the depicted migrants.

The images collectively depict Sub-Saharan migrants in both active and passive roles (Figures 2 & 3). Passive representations are seen in images of rescue operations at sea, where migrants are depicted as victims in need of help, reinforcing a narrative of vulnerability and dependence (Figure 3).

These images often show migrants in overcrowded boats, highlighting the dangers and hardships associated with irregular migration. The repetition of such scenes can contribute to a perception of migrants as a homogenous group defined primarily by their plight, potentially overshadowing their individual stories and agency. Images within more urban settings or institutional contexts present migrants in more active roles. Scenes in a tram, at a marketplace, or within bureaucratic settings show migrants as part of the societal fabric, engaging in everyday activities (Figure 2). These images suggest a degree of agency and normalcy, challenging the singular narrative of vulnerability by showcasing migrants participating in social, economic, and administrative processes.



Figure 2. Morocco's Migration Policy Highlighted at Istanbul's Global Parliamentary Conference on Migration (MAP - 21/06/2022).



Figure 3. Moroccan Royal Navy Rescues 190 Sub-Saharan Migrants Near Dakhla (MWN - 22/10/2023).

Figure 4 captures a highly dramatic and emotive scene with a single person visible, using a life vest and appearing to struggle in the water. The representational function here is clear and strong, with the water acting as both setting and participant in the narrative. The person is depicted in a vulnerable and desperate situation, emphasizing a narrative of danger and the struggle for survival. The perspective of the viewer is from above the subject, which can create a sense of powerlessness on the part of the viewer to assist, as well as a sense of dominance over the subject. There is no eye contact, as the individual is not facing the viewer, reinforcing the impersonal nature of the situation and possibly evoking a feeling of detachment or helplessness from the viewer's perspective. The distance is also functional, close enough to discern the desperation, but possibly too far to provide immediate help, creating a tension within the viewer between proximity to the danger and inability to intervene. The composition is minimalistic, with vast water surrounding the person, which emphasizes the gravity of the situation and the person's isolation. The person is not centered but is placed off to the side, which may represent imbalance and instability, echoing the precariousness of their situation. The salience of the raised hands is striking against the monotonous background of the water, capturing the viewer's attention and symbolizing a plea for help.



Figure 4. Hesperess English with MAP. *Irregular migration: 8 people drowned in the Mediterranean (28/02/2024).*

Figure 5 depicts a group of individuals sitting on a wall by the sea. The group is primarily engaged in conversation and rest, which suggests a narrative process of social interaction. The participants are dressed in various colors, with some elements such as a bright yellow hat and a colorful blanket drawing attention. The individuals are portrayed in a passive state, resting or waiting, which might suggest a sense of liminality or transition. The shot is taken from a medium distance, allowing the viewer to observe the group without intruding on their personal space. There is no direct engagement with the viewer; the individuals do not make eye contact, focusing instead on each other or looking away, which positions the viewer as an observer rather than a participant in the scene. The angle is neutral, neither looking up nor down at the individuals, suggesting a form of equality in status between the viewer and the subjects. Compositionally, the group is centered in the frame against the backdrop of the sea, which suggests vastness and possibly the idea of a journey. The individuals are framed in such a way that they are the focal point, with the wall acting as a base and the sea and sky offering a sense of openness. There is a balance between the human element and the natural environment, but the separation from the viewer and the rest of the environment could indicate a sense of isolation or detachment. The use of color is significant. The bright clothing against the blue of the sea could imply a sense of hope or the desire for visibility, yet the blanket covering two individuals may symbolize a need for protection or anonymity. The overall composition, with the individuals grouped together and somewhat separated from their environment, could imply a sense of community among them but also a distinct separation from the viewer's world.





Figure 5. Hespresse “Will Morocco’s policy on dealing with “African migration” pose future challenges?”

Figures 6 and 7 show scenes of rescue at sea, with migrants being the primary subjects. In each, the migrants are shown in a passive state, reliant on the Moroccan navy for their safety. This portrayal situates the migrants as vulnerable and in need of intervention, aligning with the narrative that views them as “others” in a helpless situation. The angles and perspectives in both images distance the viewer. There is no direct engagement with the migrants. The navy personnel are shown as the agents of action, thus emphasizing the power dynamics between the rescuers and the migrants. Both images are similar in that they show the sea as a vast and potentially threatening backdrop, against which the rescue operation is foregrounded. The navy, represented by their boats and personnel, is visually dominant, reinforcing the notion of control and authority. The migrants are grouped together, which, while highlighting their collective experience, also potentially de-individualizes them, reinforcing their “otherness” and collective identity separate from the Moroccan society.





Figure 6. Moroccan Riyal Navy Rescues 62 Irregular Migrants (MWN-28/10/2023).



Figure 7. Moroccan Royal Navy Intercepts Two Irregular Migration Pirogues (MWN - 25/10/2023)

Both images reinforce the narrative of Morocco as a guardian, with the navy playing a pivotal role in managing the challenges associated with irregular migration. This portrayal strengthens the perception of migrants as a group that is “other” than the host community, in need of monitoring and rescue. However, one significant difference lies in the immediacy of the action. The first image shows a more active rescue scene with navy personnel in the midst of providing assistance. The second image, while also depicting

a rescue, seems to capture the aftermath or a moment of calm within the operation. This subtle difference can affect the viewer's perception of the urgency and nature of the intervention.

The images and narratives analyzed in this study offer a look into the complex portrayal of sub-Saharan migrants in the Moroccan online press. Through both passive and active depictions, the media frames migrants in ways that range from vulnerable and dependent to integrated and participatory within the societal context. Passive imagery, particularly in rescue operations, tends to reveal a narrative of helplessness, casting migrants as a uniform group in distress. This not only emphasizes their otherness but also risks diminishing their individual stories and autonomy. The analysis further elucidates how visual elements and compositional choices can evoke strong emotional responses and shape perceptions. Dramatic scenes of struggle and rescue at sea starkly portray the migrants' vulnerability and the perils of their journey, potentially fostering a sense of detachment or sympathy among viewers. On the other hand, images that capture migrants in moments of social interaction or in the midst of their daily lives can foster a sense of connection and empathy, emphasizing their humanity and individual experiences.

## **5. Assessing Moroccans' Emotional Responses of the Visual Framing of Sub-Saharan Migrants**

In analyzing the pre-exposure survey responses, a notable theme emerged regarding the perception of Sub-Saharan migrants as a potential threat or danger. 48% of respondents expressed concerns about cultural integration and societal impact, highlighting a perception of threat or unease towards Sub-Saharan migrants. Interestingly, this sentiment was often not backed by personal experiences; a notable 35% of those expressing such views acknowledged having limited or no direct personal interactions with Sub-Saharan migrants. This disconnect between perception and personal experience suggests a significant influence of external factors in shaping these views. The role of media framing becomes particularly relevant in

this context. The portrayal of Sub-Saharan migrants in media outlets can significantly influence public perception, especially when personal experiences are lacking. With 40% of respondents indicating media as a primary source of information on migration, the absence of direct personal experiences allows media narratives to potentially skew perceptions, creating views that may not align with the actual situation. In the absence of direct personal experiences, media narratives operate as a primary source of information, potentially leading to inaccurate perceptions that do not necessarily reflect reality. This will also be confirmed by the respondents' emotional responses towards the media images presented in the study.

The survey results showcase that the use of collectivization in images—depicting migrants *en masse*—tends to evoke stronger emotions of anger and a diminished sense of empathy. This response is supported by research indicating that visual framing in media can significantly affect viewers' emotions and attitudes towards immigrants and refugees. For instance, political framing in news photographs has been shown to increase negative emotions and lead to negative attitudes towards immigrants and refugees (Parrott et al., 2019). Moreover, the portrayal of large groups of immigrants, as opposed to individuals, can decrease support for immigration among viewers who are high in threat sensitivity, highlighting the role of fear and cultural threat in shaping attitudes about immigration (Madrigal & Soroka, 2023). This phenomenon can be attributed to the perception of large groups as less individualized and more as a monolithic entity, which can trigger defensive or adverse reactions due to perceived threats to social or cultural norms. The collective portrayal may lead to a reduction in perceived individuality, thereby diminishing empathy and increasing feelings of anger towards the depicted group. Conversely, images that focused on individual migrants or small, relatable groups elicited markedly different reactions, fostering feelings of sympathy and a deeper understanding. Such individualistic portrayals likely humanize the subjects, making their struggles and emotions more palpable and relatable to the viewers. This personal connection can bridge the gap between 'us' and 'them' encouraging viewers to empathize and identify with the migrants' experiences on a more personal level.

## 6. Discussion

The exploration into how Moroccan online press contributes to the social construction of otherness regarding Sub-Saharan migrants reveals notable insights. The depiction often oscillates between victimization and marginalization, where migrants are either shown in vulnerable, passive roles or as part of large, indistinct groups. This binary representation facilitates the construction of an ‘otherness’ that distinguishes migrants from the host community through a variety of means. In distressing contexts, the focus on vulnerability and need for rescue can portray migrants as perpetual outsiders, reliant on the host society for safety and survival. This can perpetuate a narrative in which migrants are seen not as individuals with the potential for contributing to society, but as a collective challenge to be managed. Conversely, images that show migrants integrating into society can serve to challenge these perceptions by highlighting the diverse roles that migrants occupy. However, even within these portrayals, there are nuances that maintain the distinction between migrants and the local population, whether through visual cues or contextual framing.

The frames that emerge in the Moroccan online press’s imagery of Sub-Saharan migrants predominantly oscillate between vulnerability and invisibility. Images often capture migrants in dire situations—such as overcrowded boats or in rescue operations—thereby framing them primarily as victims in need of help. The visual components, including composition and framing strategies, further amplify this narrative. Overcrowded scenes, passive postures, and the emphasis on danger and desperation in these images contribute to a homogenized portrayal of migrants, overshadowing individual identities and stories. The compositional elements of these images serve to either emphasize the migrants’ separation from or integration within the host society. Images of migrants at sea often use compositional techniques that highlight the scale of the environment and the migrants’ vulnerability within it. The use of space, color contrasts, and the positioning of subjects amplifies the dramatic nature of the migrants’ journey, portraying them as distinct from the viewer’s realm of experience.

However, images set in urban or everyday contexts that depict migrants in more active roles offer an alternative frame. Here, migrants are shown engaging in daily activities, integrating into society, and displaying agency. Such representations challenge the singular narrative of vulnerability, suggesting a more complex and nuanced understanding of migrant experiences. The emotional responses and attitudes of Moroccan citizens towards Sub-Saharan migrants, in the context of media exposure, highlight the impact of visual framing. Images that employ a collectivization strategy tend to evoke stronger emotions of anger and reduced empathy, aligning with the notion that large, faceless groups are more likely to be perceived as a monolithic threat. This response pattern suggests that such framing can exacerbate feelings of otherness and contribute to a more hostile perception of migrants. In contrast, individualistic portrayals that focus on personal stories and the human aspects of migration elicit more sympathetic and understanding responses. These findings indicate that media framing has the potential to either bridge or widen the gap between host communities and migrants. Dominant framing choices and visual resources offered by Moroccan online press can either reinforce stereotypes and otherness or promote a more inclusive cross-cultural understanding. A widely recognized view suggests that a substantial portion of the public forms their understanding of migration issues not from direct experiences, but through the lens of media portrayals. This holds true even for individuals residing in communities where migrants are present, as their perceptions can still be heavily influenced by media narratives about migration (Madrigal & Soroka, 2023). Consequently, the role of news imagery in shaping public opinions about migrants cannot be overstated. The study in question, utilizing authentic news photographs related to migration stories, highlights this point, especially given the frequent depiction of migrants in large groups within media reports.

## 7. Conclusions, limitations and implications

This study's exploration into the visual framing of Sub-Saharan migrants in Moroccan online press highlights the intricate ways media representations contribute to the social construction of 'otherness.' The findings reveal a dichotomous portrayal of migrants, oscillating between victimization and marginalization, which can either foster empathy or reinforce stereotypes within the Moroccan community. Images depicting migrants in vulnerable states tend to perpetuate narratives of dependency, portraying migrants as perpetual outsiders in need of rescue. Conversely, portrayals of migrants engaging in everyday activities challenge these singular narratives by showcasing their agency and potential for societal contribution. The emotional responses elicited by these portrayals, particularly the impact of collectivization strategies on evoking stronger negative emotions, underscore the significant role media plays in shaping public perceptions and attitudes toward migrants. There are, of course, some important limitations to the present study. The focus on Moroccan online press and a specific set of images may not fully encompass the breadth of media portrayals of Sub-Saharan migrants. Additionally, the emotional and attitudinal responses were measured within a controlled experimental setting, primarily among Moroccan BA students, which may not fully represent the broader Moroccan population's perspectives.

The study's findings have profound implications for media practitioners, policymakers, and advocacy groups. For media professionals, the study sheds light on the responsibility in choosing visual framing strategies that humanize rather than dehumanize migrants, emphasizing individual stories over collective portrayals that can lead to stereotyping and deindividuation. Policymakers can use these insights to guide public discourse on migration, promoting policies that foster inclusivity and cross-cultural understanding. The study also highlights the importance of counter-narratives that challenge prevailing stereotypes and encourage a more nuanced understanding of migration issues. Ultimately, fostering a more inclusive and informed public

discourse requires a concerted effort to highlight the diverse experiences of migrants, moving beyond simplistic narratives of victimhood or threat to recognize their multifaceted contributions to society.

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## Iconography

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|----------|-------------------|---|
| Figure 1 | Title:            | A Growing Destination for Sub-Saharan Africans, Morocco Wrestles with Immigrant Integration   |
|          | Publication Date: | 2 <sup>nd</sup> July 2019   |
|          | URL:              | <a href="https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/growing-destination-sub-saharan-africans-morocco">https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/growing-destination-sub-saharan-africans-morocco</a>   |
| Figure 2 | Title:            | Morocco's Migration Policy Highlighted at Istanbul's Global Parliamentary Conference on Migration   |
|          | Publication Date: | 21 <sup>st</sup> June 2022  |
|          | URL:              | <a href="https://www.mapnews.ma/en/actualites/social/moroccos-migration-olicy-highlighted-istanbuls-global-parliamentary-conference">https://www.mapnews.ma/en/actualites/social/moroccos-migration-olicy-highlighted-istanbuls-global-parliamentary-conference</a> |

- Figure 3 Title: Moroccan Royal Navy Rescues 190 Sub-Saharan Migrants Near Dakhla  
 Publication Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2023  
 URL: <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2023/08/357207/moroccan-royal-navy-rescues-190-sub-saharan-migrants-near-dakhla>
- Figure 4 Title: Irregular migration: 8 people drowned in the Mediterranean  
 Publication Date: 28<sup>th</sup> February 2024  
 URL: <https://en.hespress.com/80574-irregular-migration-8-people-drowned-in-the-mediterranean.html>
- Figure 5 Title: هل تستطيع السياسة البراعمانية مواجهة التحديات المستقبلية في إفريقيا؟  
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- Figure 6 Title: Moroccan Royal Navy Rescues 62 Irregular Migrants  
 Publication Date: 28<sup>th</sup> October 2023  
 URL: <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2023/10/358613/moroccan-royal-navy-rescues-62-irregular-migrants>
- Figure 7 Title: Moroccan Royal Navy Intercepts Two Irregular Migration Pirogues  
 Publication Date: 25<sup>th</sup> October 2023  
 URL: <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2023/10/358543/moroccan-royal-navy-intercepts-two-irregular-migration-pirogues>

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## **FACEBOOK - SETTING THE NEWS AND PUBLIC AGENDAS IN MOROCCO**

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**Abstract:** Having played catalytic roles in instigating what came to be known then as ‘The Arab Spring’, and successfully upheld the 2017 – boycott campaign, social media, especially Facebook, is gaining a new momentum in Morocco mainly during and after the Corona Virus eruption – accompanying lockdown. While it is documented that social media attendance has soared among citizens all over the world, FB, in Morocco, has become a virtual platform where Moroccans not only celebrate their successes, but also share their worries and speak out their woes. However, it seems that late events in the Kingdom have pushed large masses to rush into FB not only to denounce and condemn them, but also to form sort of pressure groups to enforce real-life changes. In this article, the researcher claims that FB is setting the public agenda on a variety of issues like execution, artists’ governmental financial support as well as parliamentarians’ pensions. The writer argues that Facebookers are using the network in novel ways that might and are, indeed, having political repercussions.

**Keywords:** Social media, Facebook, Facebookers, agenda-setting, media agenda, public agenda, public opinion.

## 1. Introduction

In Morocco, FB is taking on a new role. It is becoming a political platform as FB activists and bloggers have capitalized on the consecutive abduction and pedophilia acts the victims of which were both the kids Adnane in Tangiers and Naima in Zagoura. The latter acts have sparked an unprecedented virtual outcry over diverse social media platforms. These occurrences have caught the attention of facebookers who rode on this wave to open and renew a hot debate on key human rights and political issues.

FB seems to be setting the public agenda on execution as massive netizens turned into FB to condemn the kidnapping and sexual assault on children to claim the execution of the perpetrators of these heinous crimes. Netizen activists have also massively seized FB to disparage the Ministry of culture's generous distribution of financial support to some artists amid the height of Covid19 dissemination and its accompanying dearth of the state's budgetary resources. In addition, bloggers have also raised and excoriated parliamentarians' pensions. This immense FB campaign and condemnation on the part of facebookers has both set the public agenda and turned such events into public opinion issues.

Maghress website (January 5th, 2016), reproducing Almassae Newspaper (January 1st, 2016) admits that social networking sites, especially "Facebook", provided Moroccan youth, political, collective and union actors with an opportunity to spread their views, dig into the forbidden, criticize the political situation without restrictions, and defend fearlessly their political beliefs. Almassae also notes that FB activists have got an alarming ability to transform into a significant movement which leverages a content that almost exceeds what political parties can do.

The newspaper also admits that FB activists constitute a powerful pressure soft force that surpasses traditional actors. Thanks to this substantial virtual protest campaign, the paper continues, we witness the emergence of an influential lobby group that is endowed with an influential faculty of transferring such virtual content and complaints to the official institutions.

A case in point, the parliamentary finance commission is set to debate the controversial pensions on October 13th, 2020.

Accordingly, this article seeks to respond to these research questions, namely:

- What is agenda-setting? And
- What are both media and public agendas?, then
- How is FB setting the latter?

In accordance, a review of main literature in the field is due.

## **2. Conceptual Framework**

Gone is the time when Will Rogers, the American humorist, claimed “All I know is what I read in the newspapers” (quoted in McCombs 2014, p. 43). With the advent of the Internet and social networking sites, I think that Roger’s locution should, most preferably and more accurately perhaps, read as follows: “All I know is what I read over social media”. This way, it would be more accurate and relevant to 21st Century netizens.

Walter Lippmann (1922), quoted in Bryan and Zillmann (1994), formerly maintained that the news media structure and outline many of people’s perceptions or what he called “pictures in our heads” (p. 2). Lippmann stressed the power of the news media in informing audience members, explaining global issues and interpreting the external globe. Lippmann, cited in McCombs (2014) also assumed that a basic source of the pictures in our heads about the outer world are the news media thanks to whose depictions such world is no longer “out of reach, (or) out of sight” (p. 29). That is, thanks to news media’s accounts and characterizations, foreign environments turn out more accessible and quite familiar.

Likewise, Maxwell McCombs (1994) claims that “the mass media have the ability to transfer the salience of items on their news agendas to the public agendas” (p. 4). The media, especially the news media, impact people’s

concerns and worries about daily issues as well as their attention towards the world. In other words, the media, through their habitual depictions of social and political reality, control and guide the agenda of public matters.

As a consequence, media depictions and representations are the bases of modern men's knowledge about the world. McCombs (2014) concludes that "the result of this mediated view of the world is that the priorities of the media strongly influence the priorities of the public. Elements prominent on the media agenda become prominent in the public mind" (p. 2). That is, the media set the public agenda by focusing and drawing public attention to key public issues.

In other words, media consumers attach importance to issues which the media focus upon in their accounts. McCombs (2014) asserts that

"... readers and viewers also learn how much importance to attach to a topic on the basis of emphasis placed on it [in the news]. Newspapers provide a host of cues about the salience of the topics in the daily news – lead story on page one, other front pages display, large headlines, etc. Television news also offers numerous cues about salience – the opening story on the newscast, length of time devoted to the story, etc. these cues repeated day after day effectively communicate the importance of each topic" (p. 1).

In other words, because the news media focus repeatedly on certain issues, they would make such issues more salient and more prominent among large segments of the public. Besides acquiring issues' pertinence, Cohen (1963), cited in McCombs (1994), believes that media accounts and actors perform a significant part in molding audiences' pictures of the world. It is this ability of the media to shape audiences' representations and to impact existing perceptions that has been termed the agenda-setting faculty of mass communication. Hence, McCombs' (2014) illustration that agenda-setting refers to the "role of the [news] media in identifying the key issues and topics of the day and their ability to influence the salience of these issues and topics on the public agenda" (p. 44).



Moreover, McCombs (2000) took the media's agenda-setting potential a bit further. He contends that besides focusing public members' attention on particular issues, the media also impact such members' perception and outlook about these related matters (p. 5). He concludes that "the pictures in people's minds about the outside world are significantly influenced by the mass media, both what these pictures are about and what those pictures are" (p. 17). In other words, mass media do not only tell public members what to think about but also how to think about given issues.

In fact, the term 'agenda', as used here, is mainly descriptive and void of any derogatory implication. McCombs explains that a news organization would be believed to have an agenda when it constantly pursues and intentionally devotes a relentless coverage to an/some issue(s). The agenda of a news organization, McCombs assumes, is retrievable from its "pattern of coverage on public issues over some period of time, a week, a month, an entire year" (p. 2). Throughout any such period(s), regardless of its duration, some issues are insisted upon, some are slightly covered, while many others are most often overlooked.

In other words, not all issues are cast on the news. This is why, the public is often presented with a media agenda that is resultant from an incalculable round-the-clock decisions on the part of different actors, namely journalists and their supervisors about the news or issues of the moment. Whereas, the public agenda is usually "the focus of public attention" (Ibid.). That is, the issues that preoccupy the public and the matters that get public members' attention constitute the public agenda.

According to McCombs (1994), the media agenda is operationalized as the amount of coverage, which is measured in terms of air time or column inches that were allotted to a particular issue. But, the public agenda is assessed by agglomerate opinion polls that allegedly expressed issues' prominence. And agenda-setting effects would be present when the two agendas, i. e., the media and public agendas, meaningfully correlate.

Nevertheless, the arrival of the Internet and a hodgepodge of communication technologies shook up the media scene all over the globe and cut across former boundaries between various media. This enabled unprecedented convergence of their content. Maxwell McCombs (2014) stresses that these new networks redefine mass communication and widen its agenda-setting function in society. He also asserts that the new communication channels, such as FB, Twitter, and blogs are mass since sizeable social masses utilize them.

### **3. Implications**

Clearly, facebookers' massive outcry and condemnation of late acts of abduction and pederosis do certainly reinvigorate FB and enrich its content. However, these also transform FB not only into a digital platform for political online protest but also into a key political player in the kingdom. And this is obviously not without any implications for traditional political players in the field. Unions, associations, and mainly political parties have to attend to such public virtual campaigns so as to learn about issues of public concern other than those that usually get political parties' attention. The latter have to have an eye on these novel forms of expression and online protest in order to gain a sound grasp and insight into the true worries of the public if they are to enlarge their electoral base, especially that the country is poised to hold parliamentary elections in 2021.

These legislative elections, it is expected, shall hopefully give birth to a strong representative government with a strong electoral reference and popular credibility and essentially bear the consensus of public opinion. The latter seems to have found in the virtual world ample room for expressing its opinions and concerns after it was forcibly absented from the spaces of public debate.

In Morocco, and I guess in other countries as well, each time there is a noteworthy issue, FB as a virtual social media platform, has always been overwhelmingly swamped by different sorts of messages, videos,

caricatures, comments and various mockery depictions. These seek to make fun of, ridicule, criticize and ironize related agents or just to laugh at one's contradictory and ironical happenings.

Virtual protests over FB started with a sustained coverage of the Rif Hirak, then social protests in Jrada. Then, what was termed as academy- teacher executives culminated such protests or followed in. However, the situation this time is rather different. Facebookers seem to have hit hard by taking advantage of the pandemic-related economic crisis and the already-heated social tensions among various social and political stakeholders.

As a result, facebookers' relentless online campaign has managed to have a successful follow up. The court in Larache has sentenced the husband and step-mother who have committed an act of filicide. These killed, tore and threw the body parts of their kid in a landfill. In accordance, the judge sentenced them to execution last September.

Facebookers' incessant virtual contestation has also held the culture Ministry's generous financial support to some artists and the latter's insatiable greed in question. This unrelenting online dissent has resulted in some honorable artists, namely Noäman Lahlou, to renounce and decline this contested support "if it were to deprive me of public backup", he wrote over his FB account. This campaign of derision and scorn has prompted other artists, such as Saeed Moskir, to voluntarily give up this controversial support and direct it to Corona virus confrontation fund.

In the same way, a penis-like fish sculpture in Mehdia city has agitated public opinion and enraged social media users. No sooner had the phallic-shaped statues gone viral on various social media networks that comments and criticism poured in on social media laughing at the city council and criticizing the waste of public money. Amid this intensive social media campaign of complaints, disdain and mockery, the local government had to give in and "demolition began on Thursday following a barrage of complaints, disdain and amusement from locals" (§, 3) writes Charlotte Michelle of Daily mail on September 18th, 2020.

In fact, social media platforms, and FB in particular has witnessed a similar online contestation wave when a member of the cabinet, the Minister of justice and liberties, issued the 20-20 law proposal. The latter, which is related to the use of social media, reinstated the debate over freedom of opinion and expression in Morocco. In accordance, facebookers poured out huge amounts of anger and wrath at such law which was famously qualified among social media users as the 'law on gagging-mouths' and a cheap abuse of the state of emergency and lockdown to pass on such law. Alaraby website relates that social networking activists strongly opposed this law project considering that it curtails social media users' freedom of expression (§, 3).

Facing this massive FB anger and outcry, and fearing unforeseen scenarios, the government decided to abandon this controversial bill and amend it later. Accordingly, social media users interpreted such abandonment not only as a success of their virtual protest, but as revelation of the cabinet's weakness before online opposition campaigns that proved more useful. Benkirane, the Ex-Head of the Moroccan government, relates Alyaoum<sup>24</sup> (April 25th, 2016), admits that social media, especially FB, are turning out to be key pressure group in the political scene in the kingdom. This success has led social media users to both reckon the utility of virtual protest movements and widen the scope of their expectations.

Some FB activists have ridden on this wave of online protests and have renewed the ever more contested issue of parliamentary members' and ministers' benefit from retirement pensions at the end of their delegation. Will this issue receive identical attention on the part of facebookers in the same way the other issues did? Will it ever succeed to have any pragmatic follow up? Will it ever impel related public officials to decline these contested pensions? Will it hold public officials accountable and stop exhausting the already-exhausted pension fund? Only the upcoming days, years or future elections will bring an answer to these burning questions that haunt facebookers' minds and occupy public opinion. Lo and behold! We will watch to the end!

It seems that the results of this campaign have already paid off, after some parties were forced to go along with the Facebook activists by proposing laws to review these pensions as Ibtissam Elazzaoui, an MP from the authenticity and modernity political party, proposed cancelling such pension fund on Radio 2M evening show. She said that this proposal is set for debate before the parliamentary finance commission on October 13th, 2020. This commission had no other alternative but to give in before this long and unparalleled FB gigantic campaign and has decided to definitely liquidate the fund in question. The success of this virtual protest threatens not only to empower the FB community of users, but also to reinvigorate online dissents and convince reluctant facebookers of the usefulness of virtual disapproval. This is also a formal, albeit implicit, recognition of facebookers' ability to transfer the salience of virtual issues to official institutions and of FB's public agenda-setting potential.

However, the most important FB agenda-setting instance is that of the abundant calls that mushroomed over FB for arresting an authority-assistant who was filmed violently beating contractual teachers while protesting in Rabat. These incessant calls appeared first over social media, FB in particular, when an activist of the contractual teachers posted related pictures and videos documenting various scenes of violent interventions of such authority-assistant against the protestors before they went viral on other social media platforms. As a consequence, these massive social media calls were equally echoed among a variety of newspapers.

In this respect, Hesperess (March 18th, 2021) relates that the state of Rabat – Salé – Kénitra region decided to investigate into the aforementioned fact as a result of the wide circulation on social media networks of photos and videos showing the recourse to violence on the part of the man in civilian dress during the dispersal of the contractual teachers' protests. Likewise, Maghress.com (March 18th, 2021) issues an analogous account. In the following day, Hesperess (March 19th, 2021) writes that the judicial police in Rabat managed to arrest the suspect that appeared over different social media platforms in video clips violently beating protestors. Similarly, Al3omk

magazine (March 21st, 2021) relays the decision of the public prosecution to charge the man at stake for abusing, beating contractual teachers as well as impersonation.

This incident clearly shows a reversed flow of the news and a significant weight of FB posts to set both the news and public agendas. While the news used to, though some still do, emerge firstly on leading newspapers and formal sources before making their way onto social media sites. Nowadays, however, we witness a reversed flow of the news which are posted over some social media, liked and shared as well as uploaded onto other social media networks. Upon going viral, these pieces of news would then make the headlines of established papers and magazines.

Similarly, other instances document that FB undertakes key roles in setting both the news and public agendas. In this regards, the tragic fall of the Moroccan kid Rayan set both agendas not only nationally but also internationally. No sooner had the video of the kid Rayan lying at the bottom of the well been uploaded onto FB that waves of follow-ups from different parts of the world poured in and hundreds of enthusiasts flocked to the scene of the event to extend a helping hand and follow the stages of the rescue operation that held the breaths of millions of followers and viewers worldwide. Indeed, thanks to FB, live broadcasts and footages of the unfolding of the saving both captivated the world's attention along five days and put the sad mishap on the headlines of major domestic and foreign newspapers.

In accordance, [bbc.com](http://bbc.com) (February 5th, 2022) writes that “Moroccan rescuers inch nearer to boy stuck in well for days”. Similarly, [aljazeera.com](http://aljazeera.com) (February 4th, 2022) comments that “Moroccan rescue workers edge closer to child trapped in well”. A similar headline entitled “Boy pulled out of well in morocco dies after four days in rescue mission that transfixed the world” reads on [washingtonpost.com](http://washingtonpost.com) (February 5th, 2022). [Dailymail.co.uk](http://dailymail.co.uk) (February 5th, 2022) also features that “ morocco well rescue ends in tragedy as five-year-old Rayan is brought out dead after five days underground breaking the hearts of workers who had dug for days to reach him

and people around the world". The Spanish paper *El Pais* (February 7th, 2022) commented on the incident, showed admiration of Moroccans' solidarity and entitled its headline "Rescue mission to save Moroccan child Rayan from a well brings out the best of his countrymen". Clearly, the story of the kid Rayan started with video uploaded onto FB, but landed on dominant newspapers' headlines across the world.

Identically, leading local newspapers also reacted to the traumatic misfortune and their websites display an analogous related content. In this regard, *Hespress* (February 3rd, 2022) writes that "the accident of the child Rayan mobilizes the government whose spokesperson reveals the rescue scenario". *Hibapress* (February 3rd, 2022) equally relates the government's mouthpiece "we are all in pain, and everyone is conscripted to save him". In the same way, *moroccoworldnews.com* (February 5th, 2022) features a headline entitled "World breathlessly watches rescue of 5-year old Rayan". *Alyaoum24* (February 3rd, 2022) also mentions that "Moroccans' hearts sympathize with the child Rayan while their eyes are fixed on the well".

In short, several other domestic papers, such as *anfaspress* or *noonpress* would depict a similar content. Indeed, as soon as Rayan's video had been uploaded onto FB, many journalists, TV and radio reporters rushed to the scene to cover the misfortunate incident more closely and counter fakebookers and citizen journalists. Some radio channels, like *Chada FM*, devoted a relentless coverage to the mishap that seems to have gripped not only prominent media outlets, but also plenty of social activists who drew Rayan's portrait on many wall paintings in numerous high streets across city avenues of the kingdom.

It is also worth mentioning that this painful mishap caused many governments, especially in Morocco, Algeria and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to issue instructions to burry abandoned wells. In this regard, *Aamari Oussama* (*moroccoworldnews.com*, February 9th, 2022) writes that "Morocco and Arab countries mobilize to secure abandoned wells after Rayan's tragedy". The objective is to prevent comparable tragedies from

occurring again. Africanews.com (February 7th, 2022) also mentions that “Algeria covers all wells following Ryan’s death in Morocco”. The same network Africanews.com (February 11th, 2022) stresses that Moroccan authorities plan to survey all abandoned wells in the country after the tragic fall and demise of the kid Rayan.

In sum, Rayan’s influential story began with a video shared over FB, then dominated media coverage all over the world. Currently, Rayan’s storyline is reproduced by a religious cleric named Yassine Al Omari who uploaded on the same platform FB a video in which he criticizes a popular serial aired on the national TV channel 2M wherein the female protagonist Donia Boutazot plays and celebrates the character of the female singer and dancer (shikha in Moroccan Arabic), what the cleric considers as a normalization of an unethical behavior.

No sooner had the cleric’s video been shared on FB that it not only engrossed the attention of multiple FB pages as Maroc Insolite or Scopus Atlas, but also triggered a heated debate among intellectuals that support the female dancer as Ahmed Assid and others that back up the cleric viz. Jamal Maätouq. This video is nowadays trendy and is remarkably setting both the news and public agendas. Alongside the reaction of these members over FB, several newspapers such as achkayen and anfaspress, joined this controversy. This confirms our claim of reversal flow of news and issues that emerge initially over FB before making headlines of major papers.

In this regard, after having triggered a heated debate among facebookers, the cleric’s video further fuels the dialectic amidst major newspapers, which oscillate between criticism and support. In accordance, achkayen.com (April 19th, 2022) writes that the Salafist Al Omari incites sedition among Moroccans due to the Maktob serial. Hespess (April 20th, 2022) also comments on this issue and issues a headline entitled “Religious and cultural contention accompany the ‘sheikha’ (dancer)’s ascension to Ramadan’s viewing platform”. On the other side, Siham El Baroudi (goud.ma, April 19th, 2022) chose to respond to the cleric with an article entitled in Moroccan



Arabic assuming that “Shikhat are more honorable than you are”. In the same vein, *belpresse.com* (April 20th, 2022) contributes into this controversy by bringing up another more lenient cleric who attacks the Salafist Al Omari and features an article titled “The preacher Abu Hafis bombarded Al Omari and described his supporters as schizophrenic.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Before social media networks got widespread, traditional media outlets, such as the daily newspapers and terrestrial then satellite TV were the main agents that conveyed the news to readers and viewers. The flow of information was mainly unilateral and top-down with such traditional media avenues at the exporting end. However, the situation is nowadays different. The wide spread of social media and the new communication technologies has subverted the traditional information power flows. Nowadays, issues are mentioned, liked and shared by bloggers and facebookers over FB. Then, once they go viral on the web, they would attract the attention of traditional media organizations and journalists. Such issues would then make the news and headlines. In accordance, journalists and leading news agencies would put them in their main news stories, lead stories and other front page displays.

*Hespress* (September 12th, 2020) entitled its headline by a phrase that bears the Facebook bloggers’ prints “a wave of comments demand the execution of Adnan’s rapist and murderer”. Likewise, the same electronic paper (September 10th, 2020) writes that the disappearance of Adnan turns into a public opinion issue. *Barlamane.com* (September 12th, 2020), *alhayatalyaoumia*, besides several other electronic papers such as *belpresse*, *alaraby*, etc., reproduced the same headline one day after. Similarly, *Consonews* writes that aid to singers creates controversy in Morocco. *Medias24* (September 30th, 2002) raises the same issue. *Hespress* (September 30th, 2020) also brings up singer Noäman Lahlou’s abstention from the culture Ministry extraordinary support. Even international electronic papers, viz. the daily mail joined such trend. In accordance, the *daily mail* (September 18th, 2020)

mentions that the city council in Mehdiya demolished the “penis-shaped” statues after a fierce media outcry over social media.

So, it is the social media bloggers and facebookers who would place emphasis on an/some issue(s) over FB, as a leading social media organization that acquired other networks, and transfer the salience of emphasized topics into traditional media outlets. In other words, the latter are no longer the sole information provider as FB relegated them into secondary positions regarding information flows. That is, such traditional media avenues no longer set neither the media, nor the public agendas. Social media, FB in particular, has overturned old media networks monopoly of information flows which used to be top-down, but is increasingly getting bottom-up since bloggers’ and facebookers’ issues and dispatches are more prominent over social media first. These bloggers and facebookers transmit such prominence and salience onto the virtual public agenda, which subsequently impacts old avenues’ agendas. In sum, issues (must be) are on FB first long before they are in the press or on TV.

While it is the contention of this article that FB posts bear a notable promise of setting the news and public agendas, especially if these posts entice the interest of facebookers who might like or dislike, download or upload them onto other social media platforms or share them with other users, we would like to stress that not all FB posts bear such potential. FB is but a platform over which users share and expose various messages. Only lucky messages whose content interests the large facebookers’ community are entitled to become top trendy and grip the attention of prominent papers. These are the messages that are the focal point of this article and their content is most likely to set the news and public agendas. So, it is how people use FB, their reactions of like and dislike, downloading and uploading towards the content they are exposed to on FB which set the former agendas. FB is only a mere but a popular platform that enables these interactions among disparate netizens. FB’s weight resides in its popularity.

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This book offers a compelling exploration of how media shape cross-cultural communication in an increasingly globalized world. It covers diverse cultural contexts, examining indigenous perspectives through Māori narrations in New Zealand's Otago region, European political cartoons critiquing the refugee crisis, and urban art in Mexico confronting social issues. The narrative extends to language and cultural dynamics, shedding light on Telugu cinema in India, coffee culture in Indonesia, and the critical need for cultural sensitivity in cross-cultural interactions. It also investigates the evolving role of new media, such as feminist advertising in Portugal, media framing of geopolitical conflicts, and ethical dilemmas posed by AI technology, with illustrative examples from global contexts, including Japan. Further, the book analyzes media representations of healthcare, immigration, and social media activism in Morocco, revealing how media influence public opinion and drive social change. Ultimately, this book provides profound insights into the power of media as a catalyst for global inclusivity and cross-cultural understanding, making it a valuable resource for scholars, practitioners, and anyone interested in the intersections of media, culture, and communication.