

Climate-induced Migration and Infotainment. The Ultimate Edge of News Construction?

Abstract: Climate-induced migration is not an extensively studied issue, nevertheless it is one of the most interesting and socially widely-impacting types of migration. In this paper, climate-induced migration is discussed in relation to the rise of a number of news writing strategies. As Brands (1998) suggested, entertainment formats are increasingly acquiring importance as first-hand sources of information, and this may trigger a process of reduction in the quantity and quality of news the media offer, provided that the rules of entertainment do not necessarily comply with the rules of news construction. Besides other news writing strategies, the inverted pyramid paradigm seems to decline in favour of a more narrative style or of more technologically-rooted forms of texts such as hypertexts. From a description of infotainment and of other journalism styles, the paper moves on to present a contrastive analysis and the results of in-field research carried out to investigate what kind of narratives are at play and how news is constructed. For the contrastive analysis, a corpus of pictures (taken from .it and .uk web domains) and Italian and British newspaper articles were collected. Images were collected together with articles, given the importance that the visual level and imagery have gained in news construction.

Keywords: *migration, climate change, narratives, journalism, media, image*

1. Introduction

In a period in which exposure to information seems quicker and easier than ever before, it is difficult to understand how and why some news topics remain unknown. People are constantly connected with what happens in the world, news communications have become pervasive. Nevertheless, people seem to be less or differently informed, especially in regard to significant topics such as migration. It affects people's lives every day, yet people's scant involvement and knowledge are arguably linked to the modified nature of news construction, which increasingly focuses on elements other than the quality of information.¹ As Brants suggested, entertainment formats have increased as first-hand sources of information, and this may trigger a process of reduction in the quantity and quality of news the media offer, provided that the rules of entertainment do not necessarily comply with the rules of news construction.² In this light, the aim of the article is to investigate how climate-induced migration is dealt with in the news media in order to understand to what extent it is affected by 'infotainment' and what kind of news narratives are at play in such forms of news delivery. For the purposes of this study, a corpus of pictures (taken from .it and .uk web domains) and Italian and British newspaper articles was collected and categorized according to Monica Bednarek and Helen Caple's taxonomy "balance framework",³ and used as input for an in-field research questionnaire in order to verify the original

¹ The changed nature of news construction is linked to ongoing technological development and to the widespread use of the web as a source and as the best locus where news is looked for. Even though it would be interesting to investigate this aspect too, for consistency, it does not seem productive and will be studied as a follow-up.

² Kees Brants, "Who's Afraid of Infotainment?", *European Journal of Communication*, 13.3 (1998), 315-335.

³ Monika Bednarek and Helen Caple, *News Discourse* (London: Continuum, 2012).

claim that news construction increasingly draws on entertainment techniques as far as climate-induced migration is concerned.⁴

2. News Construction and Style Change

Infotainment first appeared in the 1980s as an “explicit genre-mix of ‘information’ and ‘entertainment’ in news and current affairs programming”.⁵ Broadly speaking, it was the outcome of the convergence of two different functions in one text: the entertaining and the informative ones. It was therefore tied to a change in the traditional division of information into hard and soft news, which had become less neatly demarcated. As Brants notes, although it was firstly evaluated in negative terms, it was considered as the only way for the news to survive: “Many authors ... claim that commercialization and competition in broadcasting lead to a downgrading of ... information and, even worse, to a crisis in ... communication highlighted by the increasing reliance of television news media on entertainment formats”.⁶ Infotainment soon became a portmanteau word to refer to “all that was wrong with contemporary television”,⁷ perhaps due to the influence of Neil Postman’s claim that US public discourse was turning into entertainment and that the ‘epistemology of television’ was not meant to provide in-depth knowledge because its main aim was to distract and communicate by means of entertainment only.⁸ Following the same line of thought, in 1992, Bernstein considered the increase in the quantity of news responsible for the decrease in its quality and accuracy, which corroborated a ‘sleazoid infotainment culture’ engaged in pandering to audiences instead of informing them.⁹ Similarly, in regard to the British context, Franklin noted a change in “journalism’s priorities”, which led to a growing interest for the trivial with respect to more serious issues.¹⁰

Today, we are witnessing a steady increase of infotainment, which is arguably due to a change in the audience. Readers have developed different needs due to the change in their daily routines and to the reduction of their spare time.¹¹ Accordingly, news production companies have modified their attitudes and requirements, including those related to the financial aspect.¹² Moreover, the increasing growth of news channels and online newspapers has entailed a fragmentation of the audience.¹³ The provision of a ‘mixed kind’ of news, which blends information and entertainment features, has been defined as productive, socially positive and target focused.¹⁴ However, the spread of such a mode of news construction is not as successful as it might seem. Numerous studies show how the number of

⁴ William Gamson et al., “Media Images and the Social Construction of Reality”, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 18 (1992), 373-393; Barbie Zelizer, *About to Die: How News Images Move the Public* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2010).

⁵ Daya K. Thussu, *News as Entertainment: The Rise of Global Infotainment* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2007).

⁶ Brants, “Who’s Afraid of Infotainment?”.

⁷ Thussu, *News as Entertainment*, 7.

⁸ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985).

⁹ Carl Bernstein, “The Idiot Culture”, *The New Republic* (8 June 1992), 22-28.

¹⁰ Bob Franklin, *Newszak and News Media* (London: Arnold, 1997).

¹¹ Bala A. Musa, “News as Infotainment: Industry and Audience Trends”, in Musa and Cindy Price, eds., *Emerging Issues in Contemporary Journalism, Infotainment, Internet, Libel, Censorship et Cetera* (Lewiston, Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 131-156.

¹² *Ibid.*; see also Doug Underwood, *When MBAs Rule the Newsroom: How the Marketers and Managers Are Reshaping Today’s Media* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1995); Harold Vogel, *Entertainment Industry Economics: A Guide for Financial Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2004).

¹³ James G. Webster and Thomas B. Ksiazek, “The Dynamics of Audience Fragmentation: Public Attention in an Age of Digital Media”, *Journal of Communication*, 62.1 (2012), 39-56; Philip M. Napoli, *Audience Evolution: New Technologies and the Transformation of Media Audiences* (New York: Columbia U.P., 2010); Elizabeth Bird, *The Audience in Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 2003); Ursula Rao, *News as Culture: Journalistic Practices and the Remaking of Indian Leadership Traditions* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).

¹⁴ Matthew A. Baum, *Soft News Goes to War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U.P., 2005); Thussu, *News as Entertainment*.

new readers (i.e., people who did not read before infotainment was proposed as a mode of writing and news delivery) does not increase remarkably nor does the number of those who choose infotainment instead of ‘more traditional’ forms of news.¹⁵ This means that, perhaps, infotainment might attract unprecedented readers, playing a social role, but it does not change the habits and sources of ‘older’ readers’.

Infotainment, as a form of news delivery, entails a different attitude on behalf of the practitioners in regard to the informative function they should satisfy.¹⁶ Unlike what happens in ‘more traditional’ definitions of hard news, according to which reliability, informativeness and truth are fundamental values, infotainment’s most sought attainments are to be more attentive to the audience’s response than to the quality of the news as a whole. It is a commonplace to consider entertainment as distant from ‘traditional’ hard news, as its ‘antonym’ so to say. Unlike traditional definitions of hard news, in fact, it does not have to abide by the truth- and reliability conditions, and for this reason, it has long been deemed inappropriate to deliver the news. Moreover, infotainment is primarily investigated contrastively with traditional definitions of hard news. Some of the differences between infotainment and ‘traditional’ hard news can be listed as follows in Table 1.¹⁷

Infotainment	Journalism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An entertaining presentation of the news; - A blend of entertainment and information in media products; - A catchphrase to discuss new developments in news making; - A rather unspecific way to signify a bundle of new influences on the journalists’ work; - The marginalisation of the important. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rejection of sensationalism; - Perception of infotainment a form of social criticism; - Perception of news as fact-finding: objectivity and completeness; - Perception of news as Creative invention. - Writing is inventing meaning.

Table 1. Features of infotainment and journalism

A further correlated trend is “the marginalisation of the important” in infotainment, which following Michael Tracey, may be described as a greater and unpredicted interest in what is transitory, unimportant and irrelevant.¹⁸ It may be regarded as the consequence of the readers’ reduced curiosity and capacity of autonomous reasoning, which, in turn, prevents them from distinguishing information from advertising.¹⁹ As Marr powerfully maintains: “The idea of news has altered. It stopped being essentially information and became something designed to produce – at all costs, always – an emotional reaction, the more extreme the better”.²⁰

As a result, the traditional inverted-pyramid technique, which is one of the “cornerstones” of journalism, left the floor to a more narrative-oriented style. The inverted-pyramid technique consists of presenting the most important or relevant issues immediately at the beginning of a news report, hence leaving details and context to later sections. It originated in the USA in the late XIX century, when news was spread through the telegraph. Since the telegraph was not a reliable means of communication

¹⁵ Ibid.; Bird, *The Audience in Everyday Life*; Michael Medved, “Television News: Information or Infotainment?”, *USA Today*, 12.8 (2000), 58-59; Musa, “News as Infotainment”.

¹⁶ Thussu, *News as Entertainment*; John Langer, *Tabloid TV, Popular Journalism and the “Other News”* (London: Routledge, 1998).

¹⁷ See Francesca Vigo, *Stories that Matter: A Socio-semiotic Approach to Contemporary Narratives of Migration* (Napoli: Iniziative Editoriali Loffredo, 2018).

¹⁸ Michael Tracey, *The Decline and Fall of Public Service Broadcasting* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1998), 264.

¹⁹ John B. Arden, *America’s Meltdown: The Lowest-common Denominator Society* (Westport, Conn: Praeger Publishers, 2003).

²⁰ Andrew Marr, *My Trade: A Short History of British Journalism* (London: Pan MacMillan, 2004), 381.

given the various technical problems it had to overcome, it was more successful and advisable to start from the core of the news and leave the less significant items in the ‘risky zone’. As João Canavilhas recounts, this strategy was “later to be labelled the ‘inverted pyramid’ technique by Edwin L. Shuman in his book *Practical Journalism*”.²¹ It was extremely effective but, in the long run it turned news writing into a routine, in which creativity was no longer at play and therefore, as DeSilva notes, by the 2000s the inverted pyramid was no longer a successful technique in news writing since it allowed for no happy ending perhaps as a result of infotainment.²²

The inception of infotainment has also been related by numerous scholars to the altered approach to news organisations, which was first developed in the 1980s.²³ The birth of commercial television turned news-making into a commodity and transformed all the procedures that ruled it. The consideration of the news as a product to be sold entailed the targeting of a financial aim, which was accomplished mainly when sales were fully satisfactory and to a much lesser degree when the piece of news was delivered. Hence, the news had to amuse and not to inform. From this perspective, the growth of infotainment is coherent. News managers wished to offer the audience something to enjoy effortlessly, rather than tiring them with more serious matters. It “diverts the attention of the masses from ‘real’ political issues, narcotizing them through soft stones and spectacle”.²⁴ A balance between interest, earnings and ‘information’ was the goal of news organizations which moved towards a more narrative style of news writing. As Conley and Lambie claim, “[w]ith the broadcast media having captured much of the day’s breaking news, newspapers are more likely to encourage reporters to write in narrative, storytelling formats than once was the case”.²⁵

Yet the change in the way newspapers were written and structured also occurred due to the growth of technology first, and the online versions of newspapers, later.²⁶ In the 1980s, editors started using electronically-aided techniques of newspaper writing and publishing. This allowed them to reduce the time of printing and made it possible to wait until late for more news to be ready. News texts were digitalised, but initially maintained a ‘traditional’ form, irrespective of the new digital tools. Between the 1990s and the new century, a larger number of readers started gaining access to the world wide web and the number of online versions of newspapers grew remarkably. In the beginning, however, journalists could not rely on advanced technological equipment on the readers’ part, hence the way texts were constructed did not exploit the digital potential and cared only for the readers’ easy access. In regard to textual construction, it led to online versions that mainly resembled the print versions.²⁷ In this surprisingly conservative process, the ‘inverted pyramid’ technique continued to be used. However, news reporters started noting its limitations and called for the emergence of new writing strategies or genres.

²¹ João Canavilhas, “Web Journalism: From the Inverted Pyramid to the Tumbled Pyramid”, *BOCC* (2007), 1-17, ISSN: 1646-3137, www.bocc.ubi.pt/pag/canavilhas-joao-inverted-pyramid.pdf.

²² Bruce DeSilva, “Endings”, in Mark Kramer and Wendy Call, eds., *Telling True Stories* (New York: Plume, 2007), 116-124.

²³ John Zaller, “A New Standard of News Quality: Burglar Alarms for the Monitorial Citizen”, *Political Communication*, 20.2 (2003), 109-130; Edwin C. Baker, *Media, Markets, and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2002); Baker, *Media Concentration and Democracy: Why Ownership Matters* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2007); Bonnie Anderson, *News Flash: Journalism, Infotainment and the Bottom-Line Business of Broadcast News* (New York: Jossey-Bass, 2004); Leonard Downie and Robert Kaiser, *The News About the News: American Journalism in Peril* (New York: Knopf, 2002); Todd Gitlin, *Media Unlimited: How the Torrents of Images and Sounds Overwhelms Our Lives* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002).

²⁴ Rao, *News as Culture*, 189.

²⁵ David Conley and Stephen Lambie, *The Daily Miracle* (Melbourne: Oxford U.P., 2006).

²⁶ Concha Edo, *Del papel a la pantalla: la prensa en Internet* (Sevilha: Comunicación Social Ediciones y Publicaciones, 2002); Canavilhas, “Web Journalism”.

²⁷ Edo, *Del papel a la pantalla*.

Most of the debate on online newspapers has focused on the neglected potentialities of hypertexts, which are not exploited by journalists.²⁸ Among the possible developments that reporters called for was the employment of what Canavilhas called ‘the tumbled pyramid’, in which layers of meanings are still present but the structure allows readers to follow each layer independently.²⁹ The suggestion of this modified pyramid model stemmed from a number of research projects investigating the readers’ responses to hypertexts. The main claim was that hypertexts offer infinite combinations of meaning-making, which would make articles far more informed than traditional texts.³⁰ Yet, hypertexts have not spread in news writing since the effort they require on behalf of the readers, who are so deeply accustomed to linear reading, is to dislike this kind of reading.³¹

On the other hand, the interest in a more narrative style in journalism has increased over the past years.³² The world wide web and its 24-hour activity have forced journalists towards more flexible strategies of news writing.³³ In this context, a more narrative style has been embraced in order to face the superdiversity of new media,³⁴ considering that “narrative is the dominant mode of communication in social life”.³⁵ The choice of a more narrative style may also be due to the fact that it attracts those readers who have opted for different new media as sources of information: “Anecdotally, we’re finding that excellence in narrative not only brings people back to newspapers but makes them loyal readers and encourages them to trust the writer”.³⁶ In regard to narrative and the dichotomy between ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ news, traditional definitions of journalism claimed that the former is more likely to include a narrative style, whereas the latter does not: “Soft news stories appear to be more obviously structured as narratives, with many of the features of fictional narratives”.³⁷ Yet as Bell reminded us as early as 1991 journalists do tell stories: “journalists do not write articles. They write stories. A story has structure, direction, point, viewpoint”.³⁸ Stretching his claim further, Johnston maintains that all news can be defined as ‘narrative’, including that constructed according to the inverted pyramid paradigm.³⁹ The difference between the two styles lies in the organization of the content: traditional narrative displays a beginning, middle and end order of events, whereas the inverted pyramid suggests we place the end at the beginning, which entails a different development of the text.⁴⁰ Johnston wisely argues

²⁸ Francis Pisani, “¿Y ahora qué?”, in Salvador Camarena et al., eds., *Explorando el ciberperiodismo iberoamericano* (México: C.E.C.S.A., 2002); Ramón Salaverria, *Redacción Periodística en Internet* (Pamplona: EUNSA, 2005); Yin Leng Theng et al., “HyperAT: HCI and Web Authoring”, in Harold Thimbleby et al., eds., *People and Computers XII* (London: Springer, 1997), 359-378.

²⁹ Canavilhas, “Web Journalism”.

³⁰ Theng, “HyperAT”; Salaverria, “De la pirámide invertida al hipertexto: hacia nuevos estándares de redacción para los periódicos digitales”, *Novática*, 142 (1999): 12-15; Angelika Storrer, “Coherence in Text and Hypertext”, *Document Design*, 3.2 (2002); Pisani, “¿Y ahora qué?”.

³¹ Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

³² Vin Ray, “News Storytelling in a Digital Landscape”, in Karen Fowler-Watt and Stuart Allan, eds., *Journalism: New Challenges* (Bournemouth: Centre for Journalism and Communication Research, Bournemouth University, 2013), 435-443.

³³ Brian McNair, “Journalism in the 21st Century – Evolution, Not Extinction”, *Journalism*, 10 (2009), 347-349.

³⁴ Sue Joseph, “Telling True Stories in Australia”, *Journalism Practice*, 4 (2010), 82-96; Sonja Merljak Zdovc, “More Stories, More Readers? Feature Writing in Slovene Newspapers”, *Journalism Practice*, 3 (2009), 319-334; Erik Neveu, “Revisiting Narrative Journalism as One of the Futures of Journalism”, *Journalism Studies*, 15 (2014), 533-542.

³⁵ For an up-to-date review of research on narrative journalism see Kobie van Kirken and José Sanders, “Framing Narrative Journalism as a New Genre: A Case Study of the Netherlands”, *Journalism*, 18.10 (2017), 1364-1380.

³⁶ Birks cit. in Liza Weisstuch, “Talking Stories, Nieman Hosts ‘Narrative Journalism’ Luminaries at Conference”, *Harvard University Gazette* (3 December 2001).

³⁷ Helen Fulton, “Print News as Narrative”, in Fulton, ed., *Narrative and Media* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2005), 226.

³⁸ Allan Bell, *The Language of News Media* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991).

³⁹ Jane Johnston, “Turning the Inverted Pyramid Upside Down: How Australian Print Media is Learning to Love the Narrative”, *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 18 (2007), 1-15, <http://ro.uow.edu.au/apme/vol1/iss18/2>.

⁴⁰ DeSilva, “Endings”.

that given the various layers of meaning, the inverted pyramid focuses on one single layer while other styles, including the narrative one, might involve more.⁴¹

As scholars in Critical Discourse Analysis have demonstrated, the power that the news media have on society is mainly exercised through discourse.⁴² More specifically, as social constructionists suggest, human beings interpret reality to generate meaning.⁴³ Interpreting reality and creating meaning are connected to assessing narratives against consistency and fidelity. “Narratives, or storytelling, contribute to the construction of reality because if the construction of reality occurs through interactions and if interactions can take the form of storytelling, then storytelling contributes to the construction of reality!”⁴⁴ Narratives are firmly linked to reality and reality construction. Narratives are then part of the meaning-making process and in modern times, this occurs through the news media, which play a role in the construction of reality because they reach a considerable number of people. It is understood that the more people the news media reach, the greater the influence on their thoughts and behaviours. Hence, if the news media greatly influence the construction of reality and people’s minds, then controlling them is equal to ruling reality. Interest in the media and on how they affect society is not new. Indeed, as early as 1968, Gerbner was already proposing his cultivation theory to understand the effects of television on audiences and maintained that exposure to television deeply influences the viewers’ perception of reality.⁴⁵ Later, Schudson claimed that news media seem to play a strategic role in the development of a modern society and for this reason it is vital to reflect upon how the media, narratives and power mutually influence one another.⁴⁶ “Media analysts from the functionalist perspective have emphasized the maintenance roles the media perform in society. ... the media are seen to disseminate information, educate the public, and entertain audiences”.⁴⁷

Focussing specifically on “the conditions under which it is possible for the media to cultivate an ideal identity for the spectator as a citizen of the world” and reflecting upon a possible ethical role of the media, Chouliaraki claims that media force the audience to reflect upon what occurs in the distance, most frequently other people’s suffering, and this generates tension since spectators realise they cannot act on the others’ pain as it would be ethically correct.⁴⁸ The way news discourse is constructed stems also from this tension, it aims at making the “spectacle of suffering ... ethically acceptable for the spectator” and manages to help the audience construct a new behaviour that shapes it as distant spectators and makes their position ethically more acceptable.⁴⁹

For this reason, if narratives shape discourse, interpretation and attitudes, and the media disseminate these narratives globally, then ‘holding’ the media equals influencing the masses.⁵⁰ If this is the case, in discussing how journalism has altered and acknowledging the existence of a hybrid mode

⁴¹ Johnston, “Turning the Inverted Pyramid Upside Down”.

⁴² Michi Messer et al., eds., *Migrations: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Berlin: Springer, 2012); Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, eds., *Analysis: Introducing Qualitative Methods* (London: Sage, 2009); Wodak and Paul Jones, *Identity, Belonging and Migration* (Liverpool: Liverpool U.P., 2008); Wodak and Teun A. van Dijk, eds., *Racism at the Top: Parliamentary Discourses on Ethnic Issues in Six European Countries* (Klagenfurt: Drava Verlag, 2000); Martin Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism* (London: Routledge, 2001); van Dijk, *Discourse and Power* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2008); Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*, Second Edition (London: Longman, 2001).

⁴³ Walter Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value and Action* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1987).

⁴⁴ Walter Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value and Action* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1987); Vigo, *Stories that Matter*, 122.

⁴⁵ George Gerbner, “Toward ‘Cultural Indicators’: The Analysis of Mass Mediated Message Systems”, *AV Communication Review*, 7.2 (1969), 137-148.

⁴⁶ Michael Schudson, *The Power of Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1996).

⁴⁷ Musa, “News as Infotainment”, 131.

⁴⁸ Lillie Chouliaraki, *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (London: Sage, 2006), 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962).

of news construction, it might be worth considering that some changes in news writing might have been caused by requirements other than those strictly related to the dissemination of information or the change in technology.

3. News Writing and Migration: An Investigation

Migration as a topic has recently gained greater exposure in the British and Italian news media. Yet strangely enough, the causes of migration, such as those connected to climate change and the environment, are not offered the same coverage.⁵¹ Scholars have defined people who are forced to move because of natural disasters deriving from climate change as ‘environmental refugees/migrants’ or ‘climate-induced refugees/migrants’, “people who have to leave their habitats (and home territory) immediately or in the near future because of sudden or gradual alterations in their natural environment related to at least one of three impacts of climate change: sea-level rise, extreme weather events, and drought and water scarcity.”⁵² Very little is known about environmental and climate-induced migrants and the relationship between climate change and migration is often misunderstood, due to contradicting research and evidence.⁵³ Moreover, empirical research suggests that environmental migration is mostly internal, some takes place between neighbouring countries, and just a little occurs over long distances. Hence, even though great numerical evidence is often quoted by scientists and news reporters,⁵⁴ climate change and the environment are still not classified as “a source of persecution, a dimension that is crucial to the definition of a refugee in the 1951 Refugee Convention. At present, there is no explicit mention of climate change being a contributory factor, thus, there appears to be no coherent legal or policy response to these victims of climate change”.⁵⁵

The greatest challenge to the acknowledgement of environmental factors and climate change affecting migration is that “Environmental migration is understood as a multicausal phenomenon, yet one in which environmental drivers play a significant and increasingly determinative role”.⁵⁶ Yet, as Vertovec proposes, the summary term ‘super-diversity’ may be used to address the changing nature of global migration affected by a multiplication of significant variables; new variables that show it is not enough to see ‘diversity’ only in terms of ethnicity, as is regularly the case in social science and in the wider public sphere.⁵⁷ He also maintains that, in order to understand and address the complex nature of contemporary, migration-driven diversity more fully, additional variables need to be better recognized and they must include those related to climate. These entail the increasing need to investigate adaptive capacity in relation to the strength of response strategies. Due to the complexity of the phenomenon, environmental migrants and climate-induced migrants may react differently to their changed life

⁵¹ Nina Venkataraman, “What’s Not in a Frame? Analysis of Media Representations of the Environmental Refugee”, in Melanie Schröter and Charlotte Taylor, eds., *Exploring Silence and Absence in Discourse: Empirical Approaches* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 241-279.

⁵² Frank Biermann and Ingrid Boas, “Preparing for a Warmer World: Toward a Global Governance System to Protect Climate Refugees”, *Global Environmental Politics*, 10.1 (2010), 67.

⁵³ Richard Black et al., “Migration and Climate Change: Toward an Integrated Assessment of Sensitivity”, in Thomas Faist and Jeanette Schade, eds., *Disentangling Migration and Climate Change: Methodologies, Political Discourses, and Human Rights* (Berlin: Springer Black, 2013), 29-53.

⁵⁴ Christian Aid, “Human Tide: The Real Migration Crisis”, Report (London, 2007), <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-08/human-tide-the-real-migration-crisis-may-2007.pdf>; Lester R. Brown, “Troubling New Flows of Environmental Refugees” (Earth Policy Institute, Rutgers University, 2004), http://www.earth-policy.org/plan_b_updates/2004/update33.

⁵⁵ Venkataraman, “What’s Not in a Frame?”, 244.

⁵⁶ International Organization for Migration, “World Migration Report 2010 – The Future of Migration: Building Capacities for Change 2011” (Geneva: IOM, 2010).

⁵⁷ Steven Vertovec, “Super-diversity and its Implications”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30.6 (2007), 1024-1054.

condition, which includes the awareness of experiencing a non-temporary situation. Adger *et al.* suggest focusing on a vulnerability-led approach rather than on an impacts-led approach, which means concentrating not on the dangers but on the underlying institutional and cultural factors “that determine how people respond to and cope with climate hazards”.⁵⁸ The environmental refugees response to their newly acquired condition, which is not only that of being a migrant but also that of being a new, static member of a new society, cannot be separated from those of the people/society they go to live with.

The presence of news reports on the issue, when present, arguably satisfies a different function from the informative one.⁵⁹ As Brants suggested, the entertainment formats are increasingly acquiring importance as first-hand sources of information, and this has triggered a decrease in the quality of news since the rules of entertainment do not comply with the rules of news construction. New media coverage of the phenomenon is of a more sensationalist nature, placing migrants within a ‘culture of alarm’, triggering feelings of anxiety, vulnerability and alarm.⁶⁰ News reports, TV reports, etc., present ‘predictable’ narratives, which depict of environmental-migrants as helpless, needy and passive. Climate-induced migrants strongly contrast this description of themselves and demand their active role to be acknowledged.⁶¹ Their awareness makes them plan their new life carefully to avoid being victims, since as Lewis claims, “If migration is undertaken willingly it can be an effective strategy It is essential that migration strategies are planned”.⁶² Yet, what the media offer is a repetitive pattern of “hegemonic negative labels and collocations”.⁶³ Sensationalism and familiarity, which are the main frame of climate migration-related discourse fail to inform.⁶⁴ Besides, if we consider the powerful role the news media play in society with reference to attitude-building, it is easy to realize how harmful these narratives, ‘silences’ and omissions can be.⁶⁵

4. Climate-migration Images in News Reports: An In-field Research on the Perception of Infotainment

The present investigation is part of a wider project with a twofold goal. On the one hand, it aims to disclose the way the news media deal with news topics such as migration, on the other, it intends to demonstrate how the quality of news construction is changing by relying on pre-existing narratives and patterns. In previous studies, I have dealt with narratives and discourse analysis,⁶⁶ while here I propose a multimodal analysis of news images by drawing on the main findings in the field of Multimodal

⁵⁸ W Neil Adger *et al.*, “New Indicators of Vulnerability and Adaptive Capacity”, Technical Report 7 (Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, 2004), 1-122, 6.

⁵⁹ Katherine E. Russo, “Floating Signifiers, Transnational Affect Flows”, in Andrew Baldwin and Giovanni Bettini, eds., *Life Adrift Climate Change, Migration, Critique* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2017), 196.

⁶⁰ Carol Farbotko, “Wishful Sinking: Disappearing Islands, Climate Refugees and Cosmopolitan Experimentation”, *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 51.1 (2010), 47-60; Russo, “Floating Signifiers”; Bettini, “Climate Barbarians at the Gate? A Critique of Apocalyptic Narratives on Climate Refugees”, *Geoforum*, 45 (2013), 63-72; Vigo, *Stories that Matter*.

⁶¹ Tanja Dreher and Michelle Voyer “Climate Refugees or Migrants? Contesting Media Frames on Climate Justice in the Pacific”, *Environmental Communication*, 9.1 (2014), 58-76.

⁶² Bridget Lewis, “Neighbourliness and Australia’s Contribution to Regional Migration Strategies for Climate Displacement in the Pacific”, *QUT Law Review*, 15.2 (2015), 86-87.

⁶³ Maria Grazia Sindoni, “‘The Semantics of Migration’. Translation as Transduction: Remaking Meanings Across Modes”, *Hermes – Journal of Language and Communication in Business*, 55 (2016), 27.

⁶⁴ Familiarity refers to the function repetition plays in constructing narratives, i.e. that of making some images or language patterns familiar. As Martin and White explain this construct is a discursive framework of empathy and connection. See J. R. Martin and P. R. R. White, *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005).

⁶⁵ Brants, “Who’s Afraid of Infotainment?”.

⁶⁶ Vigo, *Stories that Matter*.

Discourse and, more specifically, on Zelizer’s work on the role of images in newspaper articles.⁶⁷ As is widely known, images are a fundamental element in newspaper text construction, yet they are not easy to define and it is not simple to describe their role. Images are also important for the construction of the spectators’ stances and attitudes with regard to the other’s pain. Images succeed in creating a sort of emotional connection among the spectators and may trigger ethical behaviours since they turn spectators from mere witnesses to co-actors.⁶⁸ In order to analyse the images, I apply Bednarek and Caple’s taxonomy “balance framework” (Table 2 and Fig. 1, adapted from Bednarek and Caple),⁶⁹ which pays specific attention to entertainment by highlighting the aesthetic level of news images. Claiming that compositional rules are a key feature of every image in the press and that they very frequently obey aesthetic rules, Bednarek and Caple present the following key terminology, shown in Table 2.

Term	Explanation
Image Frame	For the purposes of the analyses presented here the image frame is the boundary of the image that the reader is working with. This means that the initial capturing of the event by the photographer and subsequent editing process is subsumed in this definition, since semioticians generally do not have access to the capturing and editing process but analyse what is finally presented as a photograph in the newspaper.
Elements	The elements of a photograph are the people (represented participants), places (circumstances) and activities depicted within the image frame and through their interactions with each other.
Visual Unit of Information (VUI)	The combination of these elements makes up the visual unit of information depicted in the image frame (e.g. an image of a man walking his dog in the park would be made up of one VUI; whereas an image of a man walking his dog in the park while six boys are playing soccer in the background would be made up of two VUIs). Generally, press photographs have only one VUI within an image, as they tend to single out one aspect of an event to represent the entire event (see Painter et al. 2011 on composition in children’s picture books).

Table 2. Key terminology for discussing composition, adapted from Bednarek and Caple (2012)

According to Bednarek and Caple’s taxonomy (Fig. 1),⁷⁰ images in newspaper articles can be analysed by means of a gradual series of dyadic choices. The first option concerns the characters in the picture and specifically whether they are shown as single (isolating) or whole (iterating). As for the isolating order, it can be further specified according to whether the participant occupies the centre or is placed along an axis and then according to whether s/he is with other participants or not. When more than one character is present, the focus is on how they interact, on whether the relationship is dividing or serializing. The former may develop into a matching, mirroring and facing relationship, the latter into a scattered one. This would mean that there is no hierarchy, and no one dominates the floor.

⁶⁷ Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 1996); Bednarek and Caple, *News Discourse*; Caple, *Photojournalism: A Social Semiotic Approach* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Barbie Zelizer, *About to Die: How News Images Move the Public* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2010).

⁶⁸ Chouliaraki, *Spectatorship*, 27.

⁶⁹ Bednarek and Caple, *News Discourse*, 164.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

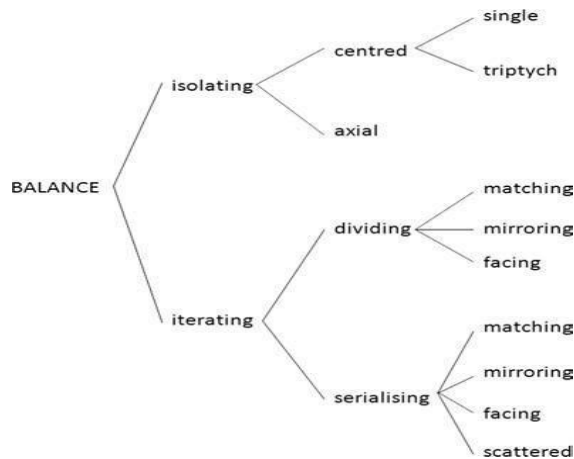


Fig. 1. Adapted from Bednarek and Caple's taxonomy

The images for this study were manually selected from *The Guardian* and *La Repubblica*, a British and an Italian newspaper respectively, by using 'climate-induced migration'/'migrazione climatica', 'environmental refugees'/'rifugiati ambientali' and 'climate-change migration'/'migrazione e cambiamento climatico' as search words to collect news reports which contained an image in 2015. The corpus consisted of 93 British reports and 54 Italian reports; the number divide is not significant given the nature and the spread of the two newspapers. Nearly all of the reports included an image, therefore the image collections comprise 80 and 50 images from the British and Italian newspapers respectively. Surprisingly enough, a first analysis revealed that more than half of the images were not directly connected to the article nor were they specifically picturing something related to climate change and migration. Most of them played a different role however, neither the informative nor the reinforcing one. They were instances of Bednarek and Caple's 'iconic image' (i.e., an image that satisfies a mere communicative function and is not an illustration).⁷¹

The following four pictures chosen as examples are instances of 'typical' and frequent images:

- Picture 1, The Korail area of Dhaka, photograph by Poppy McPherson, from "Dhaka: The City Where Climate Refugees Are Already a Reality", *The Guardian* (1/12/2015);
- Picture 2, Funafuti, the main island of the nation state of Tuvalu in the South Pacific, photograph by AP/Alastair Grant, from "Help Small Island States Win their Battle Against Climate Change", *The Guardian* (29/08/2014);
- Picture 3, "Rifugiati ambientali nel MONDO: Vittime ignorate del liberismo selvaggio", by anonymous photoreporter, *Cambialmondo.org* (3/01/2013);
- Picture 4, "I rifugiati ambientali: la situazione nel mondo", by anonymous photoreporter, *La Repubblica* (14/09/2016).

Out of 130 total images, in fact, 60% display people in devastated nature scenes mostly related to 'water' or drought, 20% show aerial pictures, 15% present graphs or diagrams, and the remaining 5%

⁷¹ Ibid., 116.

picture animal migration. Despite their being part of articles dealing with taxing topics, they are all very balanced texts, attractive and attention catching.⁷²



Fig. 2. Photograph from “Rifugiati ambientali nel MONDO: Vittime ignorate del liberismo selvaggio”, *Cambialmondo.org* (3/01/2013)

Picture 1 is an instance of scattered iterating. The characters are scattered in the picture, which may also be regarded as a quotation of the poster of 2012 disaster movie directed by Juan Antonio Bayona *The Impossible*:



Fig. 3. Still from Juan Antonio Bayona, *The Impossible* (Spain, 2012)

As Bednarek and Caple note, this could enhance the attractive power of the image for its winking force, which allows the reader, being able to make the connection between the two images, to feel

⁷² With reference to the soft-hard news opposition, climate-induced migration related news should be considered an example of hard news, due to the complexity of the topics, the same the way they are presented makes them more similar to soft news. This might lead us to think that the difference between soft and hard news is no longer at play as far as this semantic domain is concerned. For the aesthetic quality and the value of composition of press photograph as opposed to the preference for action, it would be worthy referring to Bednarek and Caple discussing Schirato and Webb. (See Bednarek and Caple, *News Discourse*, 175).

smart.⁷³ Moreover, the image is well constructed: shutter speed, lighting, colour saturation, brightness etc. were masterfully employed. The gaze of the represented participants is exploited to attract the reader. It conveys a sense of sadness which is balanced by some happier details, like the boys playing and chatting. The article which contains this picture reports on the frequent series of storms that affected the area destroying crops, roads and, at times, houses. No figures or other details are provided. It is a non-specific story which could have occurred in any place. Normally, reports on negative environmental events are considered hard news and are equipped with pictures accordingly. In the case of the photograph by McPherson, however, even though the topic could be apt for hard news, the way it is dealt with and the added picture turn it into soft news.

Picture 2 is also geared towards infotainment. It is part of a report which concerns the Maldives and how they are sinking. It provides figures but does not report on the immediate risks and it relies on laypeople talking about the issue with no specific knowledge of special information. The general tone is catastrophic, but the reader is never sure about the whys and wherefores. The reader learns about the people's lives there and worries, also from the way the environmental situation is described. It is an aerial shot from a plane to show what would no longer be there soon. The image is beautiful, all the components are balanced and the unusual and slightly faulty angle makes it attractive. The picture is iterating, serialising, and matching; it is a landscape picture with no participants, which follows the linear patterning. This visual text is construed to convey an aesthetically powerful image irrespective of the bitterness of the topic.

Picture 3 (Fig. 2) is part of an Italian article on environmental refugees in the world. The picture describes a possible migration but it is not linked to the article, it does not help the reader's understanding, nor adds new information. According to the "balance framework", the image is iterating, serializing and matching. From a technical point of view speaking, it is not as good as the others: the colour saturation and brightness are not satisfactory, nor is the general structure. The faceless, compassionless people, which are depicted, are a mere line in the water and convey a deep sense of recklessness in opposition to what the article informs us about.

Finally, Picture 4 is an instance of a smaller group of images related to climate-induced migration. It displays a bar chart which provides some numerical evidence of environmental migration. The graph is clear, the colours are bright, and the absence of participants means it cannot be analysed using the "balance framework". Yet, as I mentioned at the beginning of this article, omissions and absence are as meaningful as other elements of the text. In this case, a newspaper article presenting such a chart as an image acquires reliability, all the same, the choice of a graph and the consequent absence of an image make the article more attractive as a whole, especially since the chart added to the article has no connection at all with the article itself.⁷⁴ The topic of the article, in fact, is climate change and the risks connected to it. There is no mention to figures or numbers in general.

The analysis of the four images chosen as input for the questionnaire seems to corroborate the claim that newspaper articles on climate-induced migration are mainly constructed using narratives of entertainment as the attention to aesthetic-compositional rules, the replication of a few plots and the inconsistency between images and texts have shown. The repetition of very few types of images related to a large number of articles also confirms the repetition of the same discourses, rather than a focus on new information: environmental migrants are represented according to the same stereotype, that of helpless victims for whom there is no safety. Readers are entertained by pictures that are 'familiar' and by topics that are never difficult to follow nor surprising.

Yet, to verify the original claim that news construction increasingly draws on entertainment techniques as far as climate-induced migration is concerned, a questionnaire was administered to a

⁷³ See previous note about the aesthetic quality and value of composition of press photographs.

⁷⁴ David Machin and Andrea Mayr, *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Sage, 2012).

sample of 50 people of mixed age and education. Some were employed, others were not. The questionnaire aimed to assess the attitude readers have towards climate-induced migration and how they choose the articles they read. Besides the usual question concerning personal details (name and gender excluded) and reading habits, the questionnaire was made up of five questions and a task.

People were asked to:

- provide a definition or explanation of migration (question 1);
- provide a description of migrants (question 2);
- say whether they read newspapers (online versions included) and what sections they are normally interested in (question 3);
- look at the image and describe it in terms of attractiveness (question 4);
- look at the image and say what they expected from the article (question 5);
- read the article and say what it was about and whether it fulfilled the expectations triggered by the image (task).

The analysed sample was made up of 50 people even though the total number of respondents was larger. For convenience sake, all the respondents were Italian and thus, the article they had to read was in Italian. The questionnaire was administered online and by word of mouth thanks to the kind help of friends and relatives. As expected, online answers outnumbered the others. For this reason, to normalize the sample number, only 50 questionnaires were analysed.

As for the first question, 70% of respondents defined migration as an escape from danger, risk and war, while 20% linked it to climate, but as a consequence of natural disasters not as an outcome of on-going phenomena such as global warming or the rise in sea levels. The remaining answers were either some political comments or some attempt to define migration in relation to unspecified financial problems.

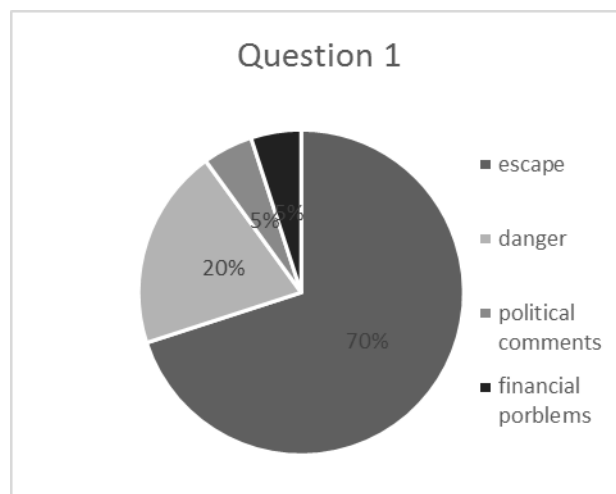


Fig. 4. Graphic showing the statistics for question 1

As for the description of migrants, more than 75% used terms relating to poverty, pain, suffering, hunger, help, family difficulties, violence, and danger. Violence and danger were seldom used to refer to the migrants but to ‘the others’ whom the migrants might affect. 20% of respondents described migrants as needy, poor, lonely and desperate. The remainder mentioned a will to improve on behalf of the migrants and also their good attitude and strong will.



Fig. 5. Graphic showing the statistics for question 2

All the respondents were also newspaper readers; however, I would add, ‘quick’ readers for the attitude they disclosed. 45% maintained they read the home affairs sections best, then those related to show business and in the end something from the international pages. They also claimed that they selected the articles according to the presence/absence of images. 30% reported they looked at the images and at the newspaper as a whole, then focused on some articles often guided by the images. 25% said they read the home affairs section first, then the local news and eventually the sections on culture or show business. They considered images significant especially as far as the culture and show business sections were concerned.

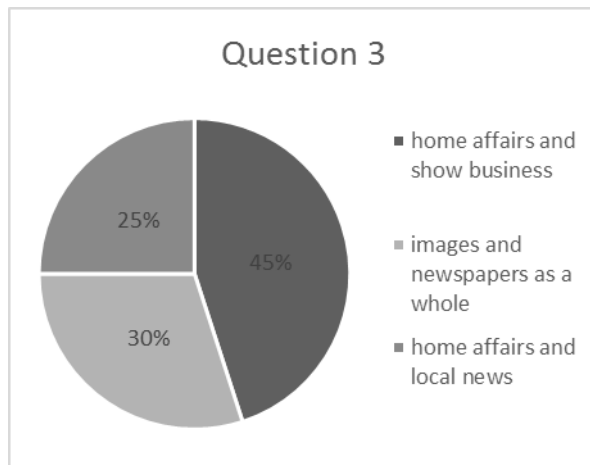


Fig. 6. Graphic showing the statistics for question 3

For the fourth question, two of the four images chosen as samples were used, namely Picture 1 and Picture 2. The sample was split into two halves, therefore 25 people were given the first picture and 25 the second one. As for Picture 1, 2, 75% described it as sad, well-structured and clear; most focused on the boy's eyes and gaze. They tried to go beyond the picture and construct a story, nearly all of them spoke about poverty and sadness and of a helpless condition. They did not mention climate problems or emergency, they did not wonder about the cause of the situation but described the situation as necessary and 'assumed'. 20% tried to place the image in a real geographical area and tried to link it to some known situation of poverty and desperation. They considered the image to be well constructed and shot (among the comments are: "it is bright", "it is clear", "you must look at it"). As far as Picture 2 is concerned, 40% complained it was shot from too far away where little could be seen. They reported on the colours and the curiosity it triggered for its shape. 30% said they were curious about the place and wanted to read the article to understand. They believed it was part of a tourist ad. The answer to what they expected from the articles according to the image, 80% of both subgroups did not refer to climate-induced migration nor to climate problems in general. As for Picture 1, 75% expected (and wanted) to read stories about poverty and desperation. They seemed ready to learn more about abandoned children left to cope on their own, about violence, but mostly about poverty. They were sure the article was about Asia, "*the poor areas*", as one respondent added. 15% expected to read about some natural disasters related to the sea or to water in general. They were eager to find some interviews with those people, especially the children, and were ready to read about desperation and hopelessness. The remaining readers referred inattentively to loneliness, deaths, and danger. The respondents who had to predict the content of the article related to Picture 2, mainly expected to find details and information concerning a place to visit. Only 5% mentioned climate problems relating to water. In both cases, no one mentioned migration or climate-induced migration or environmental refugees. For the last task they were asked to read the article connected to the picture they had commented.

The outcomes of the last questions proved to be more interesting. In both cases, the respondents were disappointed over the absence of "normal people's voices and stories" and very surprised to learn that climate-induced migration was such a big issue. They were also puzzled that it affects the whole world. As for the article relating to Picture 2, the readers/respondents found it disturbing to have such a beautiful image for such a challenging topic. They were very happy to learn directly from the actors involved but found the article boring when it shifted to a more informed and detailed level reporting

figures and international plans. Most of the respondents quit reading once the level of writing became more demanding.

The questionnaire was purposefully kept short; however, its outcomes are productive and a good starting point for further research. From the respondents' answers, it seems clear that climate-induced migration is not a well-known topic, at least as far as Italian general knowledge is concerned. It is also evident that the discourses constructed about migration or about natural disasters (not immediately linked to migration in Italy) are discourses of pain and desperation, which leave no relief or help in constructing a different attitude towards the actors involved. As for the way the news is constructed and information is conveyed, the in-field research seems to confirm that readers are more likely to choose reader-friendly articles with familiar images.

5. Conclusions

This investigation started from the awareness of the power of media in our society and the claim that 'traditional' news construction is changing to become either a kind of mixed genre, which combines information and entertainment, following what journalism and media studies highlighted with reference to the change in news management especially or simply more narrative oriented. Strictly related to this claim was the idea that images are key features of news construction as well as of a more ethical approach to the others' suffering on behalf of the audience, and that they obey aesthetic rules more than informative ones, thus corroborating the insight that the way information is provided pursues a more attractive and aesthetic function than informative one. This shift occurring in news construction is more important when it concerns fundamental topics such as climate-induced migration.

Drawing upon multimodal analysis frameworks, an investigation was carried out to assess the role of images in newspaper articles dealing with climate and migration, with a specific focus on the way they are constructed and on the role they play as far as the topic is concerned. An additional aim was also to verify what kinds of stories are told as far as climate-induced migration is concerned.

For the purpose of this investigation, two collections of images were created from two well-known newspapers, *The Guardian* and *La Repubblica*, an English and an Italian newspaper, to carry out a contrastive analysis. The images were analysed according to the "balance framework" proposed by Bednarek and Caple with the aim of verifying their compositional rules and their accomplishment of aesthetic requirements irrespective of the topic they were called to represent. To further understand what role images play in the articles with specific reference to expectation-building, a small in-field research was carried out through a questionnaire. This part of the research was not of a contrastive nature.

The results confirmed that the images that complete the articles are constructed to satisfy aesthetic values irrespective of the topic. Their high aesthetic quality makes them attractive and attention-catching, thus fulfilling a different need, more related to the commercial level of news construction. With specific reference to the content, the images do not seem to be part of the article specifically. They are not illustrations nor do they seem useful in helping comprehension.⁷⁵ They are iconic images that stand on their own and make readers create expectations. As far as climate-induced migration is concerned, the images do not seem to help in disseminating information on the issue. They perpetuate the general trend that places migration and migrants in discourses of desperation, alarmism and loneliness. The attitude is shared by the two analysed cultures.

As for the change in news construction concerning climate-induced migration, the investigation was not meant to provide general results but specific corroboration of some insights that were, in fact,

⁷⁵ Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*.

confirmed. Looking at how the images are constructed, their relationship (or non-relationship) with the articles and the respondents' reactions to them and to the articles, it is possible to say that infotainment, or a practice of mixed news construction, is at play in media discourse as well as a more narrative style of writing as far as climate-induced migration-related issues are concerned. For the key role the media play in society, and for their power in influencing people's knowledge and attitudes, it is extremely important to go on studying how the news is being constructed and, more importantly, what kind of stories are being told.

This investigation, which is part of a larger project, was meant as a kind of pilot study to assess some initial insights and the feasibility of the research itself. Among the results are the hints it has provided for further research, which will be followed and pursued since migration and climate-induced migration are key topics. They affect our times and, more importantly, they affect peoples in our time. Hence, the news media cannot exempt themselves from conveying the situation as a whole, plus they cannot place the related discourse in one frame only since there is never only one story.