

Too similar to be different? 'Syrian refugee' coverage in the Turkish and Norwegian popular media¹

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Huriye Toker

Yaşar University, Communication Faculty, Department of Public Relations and Advertising, TURKEY

Abstract: As the number of migrants and refugees continues to rise worldwide, so too has anti-immigrant and anti-refugee rhetoric become an increasingly alarming problem that politicizes the topic. This article analyzes and evaluates media representation on refugees/asylum-seekers in two different countries which have distinct media system as Norway and Turkey. The findings show that media coverage of migration is a salient theme. While the 'visibility' of migrants is not lacking, the voices that are heard in the news are still political actors after seven years of the 'crisis' in both countries. Unexpectedly, this persistent finding has triggered the politicization of this theme in both countries despite their great disparities.

Keywords: Syrian refugees, news, migration, content analysis, politicisation, moral panic

Introduction

Today in a globalized world, the media play a pivotal role in the increasingly complex elaboration and analysis of information about international and domestic issues. As Walter Lippmann explained in his seminal book "Public Opinion", we more than ever rely on media to explore and define the world around us to construct "mental images" and to form "our realities" (1922:18). The media play a fundamental role in bringing important issues to the attention of the community (Fourie, 2007: 202), constituting reality and representing the "other" in the coverage of international events (Jaber, 2016). In the contemporary world, issues such as the Arab Spring, terror in Middle East or Greece's economic crisis, which are perceived as international problems, suddenly become a domestic issue and hit countries at home, such as Syrian refugee flows, terror attacks in major European cities and Europe's economic crisis. The body of the three-year-old Syrian boy, Ayan Kurdi, pictured lifeless and face-down on the

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Address for Correspondence: Yaşar Üniversitesi, Ağaçalıyol, 35100 Bornova, İzmir, Turkey. Email: huriye.toker[at]yasar.edu.tr

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Turkish coast was a turning point to stop referring to refugees as ‘cockroaches’ or a ‘swarm’. This led to the domestication and mediatization of Syrian migration in many European countries whereby the distinction between international and national issues became increasingly blurred. The images of Ayan Kurdi caught global attention over just 12 hours, reaching 20 million people worldwide through 30,000 tweets (Vis and Goriunova, 2015: 5). However, the change was short-lived as researchers found no conclusive evidence for changes of attitudes or behaviour regarding the refugee issue (Parker et al., 2018).

The Syrian refugee flow has made the domestic suddenly international while international politics has become an integral part of domestic affairs. Therefore, knowledge about the world has become important, with the news media being a critical intermediary or “transmission belt” (Risse, 2015:18) that translates international politics into an understandable context for the wider public. People rely on news to get information through discussions in the public sphere, develop opinions, constitute their own judgments about the world and relate them to domestic politics.

This background regarding the media have also shaped theories of agenda setting in the literature since 1970s. According to these theories, “the public learns the relative importance of an issue from the amount of coverage in the news media” (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). The selection of topics, priming them – i.e. placing them on the front page, framing issues by covering them from particular perspectives (Entman, 1993), and using more and diverse sources for news stories can shape people’s perceptions and affect their judgements and opinions. Through its news coverage and framing, the media cause a “change in the standards that people use to make their evaluations” (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987: 63). There is consensus on the relationship between news coverage of current events and their impact in shaping public opinion (KhosraviNik, 2010; Kokkonen, 2017; Kolukirik, 2009; Doğanay et al., 2018, Toker, 2004), especially if a sparse ‘information environment’ presents a biased message that can easily cultivate certain attitudes and create expectations about a particular issue (Gerbner et al., 2002; Vergeer et al., 2000, Toker, 2015).

The ‘Syrian refugee crisis’² started in 2011 and peaked in 2015, when an increasing number of refugees and migrants, mostly Syrian, but also Afghan and Iraqi, began to seek asylum in European countries. Consequently, this issue became a prominent media event. As the flow of refugees and migrants has continued to rise worldwide, there has been increasing anti-immigrant/refugee rhetoric and negative attitudes in receiving countries, which has encouraged a new political populism since 2015 (Berry, 2015; EJM, 2015; Goodman et al., 2017).

The interchangeable use of the terms ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’ is one of the most common language errors in the media’s daily coverage (WACC Europe and CCME, 2017; EJM, 2015; Efe, 2015), according to United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), this politicizes the issue.³ This matter because the media have manipulated these terms to convey a political message

² Although we acknowledge that labelling refugee inflows as a ‘refugee crisis’ is problematic, the refugee flow and its surrounding events are commonly referred to as ‘refugee crisis’ to capture media and political attention globally. To be consistent with the way events have been framed in the media context, we used ‘refugee crisis’ for practical purposes (Krzyzanowski et al., 2018; Triandafyllidou, 2018). I would like to thank one of the reviewers for reminding of this crucial point.

³ According to the International Organisation for Migration’s definition, a migrant refers to someone who moves freely, temporarily, or permanently from one place or country to another. In contrast, a refugee is forced to move because of persecution, war, or a humanitarian disaster, so states are obliged to provide them with protection under international law. The third term, asylum seekers, refers to refugees seeking protection from war or persecution who apply for refugee status under international and national laws (IOM, 2004; EJM, 2015). The important point here is that there is no such concept in law as an “illegal” migrant. A more valid term would be “undocumented” migrant.

(Berry et al., 2015:12). The problem is that, if the media fail to represent the refugees and their struggle adequately, it “takes attention away from the specific legal protection refugees require and can undermine public support for refugees” (Edwards, 2015). For example, the ‘Syrian refugee crisis’ is not just the recent movement of the masses to the West, it is also part of a changing global migration debate.

This article analyzes and evaluates media representation of refugees/asylum seekers in two European countries with contrasting media systems: Norway and Turkey. The main aim is to determine if the portrayal of refugees in the two countries’ popular media is similar despite having different media systems. Two newspapers with similar ideological positions were selected for analyzing media coverage and the representation of Syrian refugee-related news items from January to June 2017.

These two countries have totally different media systems and levels of press freedom. Turkey has seen a substantial decline in press freedom over the past decade, which intensified after the 2016 coup attempt through aggressive use of the penal code, criminal defamation laws and antiterrorism legislation to jail many journalists and punish critical reporting of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). The Freedom House Report (2019) gave Turkey just 31 points and listed it among 50 countries that have been unfree since 2018. In Turkey’s case, this was because of deeply flawed constitutional referendum that centralized power in the presidency. The press was particularly affected by the crackdown, with more than 150 media outlets, including newspapers, television and radio channels, news agencies, magazines, publishing houses, and news websites, being forcibly shut down and having their assets seized. Meanwhile, 145 journalists have been detained, which made Turkey the world’s worst jailer of journalists for the second year in a row. More than 2,700 media workers were fired and 54 journalists had their property confiscated. Wikipedia remained blocked across Turkey in 2019 while the mainstream media, especially television, reflect government positions and routinely carry identical headlines.

The second country, Norway, has one of the world’s most open media environments. Freedoms of expression, media freedom, and the right to access government information are guaranteed under Article 100 of Norway’s constitution. The Norwegian media and journalists are free of censorship and political pressure in deciding their editorial policy. The 2006 Freedom of Information Act provides for access to government documents and data requests through an online portal. Hate speech can be punished with up to three years in prison. The Freedom House Report (2019) gave the country 100 points and labelled it as free. With more than 200 newspapers expressing a diversity of opinions, Norway also has one of the world’s highest rates of newspaper readership.

Although we are describing two distinctive European countries, they received the largest numbers of refugees in Europe in terms of the number of immigrants per inhabitant. In addition, while neither are EU members, they are part of the EU sphere and have received recent refugee flows. We would like to determine whether there is evidence regarding the general finding that popular newspapers generally follow similar representation patterns in conveying an us-and-them categorization making similar lexical choices to define Syrian refugees, covering their stories with similar themes. After 7 years of Syria’s civil war and the refugee flow, we wondered whether the refugee debate has evolved towards the integration of immigration or whether it is still covered as a humanitarian tragedy in itself or a threat to host countries’ way of life due to the significant economic burden. We hoped to find that the Syrian refugee flow has become a more mature, stabilized or naturalized issue with diversified information among NGOs, citizens and politicians in both countries.

With more than 3.5 million Syrians and another 365,000 refugees and asylum-seekers of various nationalities (DGMM 2019, UNHCR 2019), Turkey currently hosts the most Syrian refugees. Similarly, the number of immigrants per inhabitant in Norway is amongst the highest

in Europe due to the Syrian refugee flows (Brochmann and Kjelstadli, 2014). During 2015, the number of asylum seekers rose to 30,000, compared to 10,000 in 2014 (Øvrebye et al., 2016; UDI, 2015). Both countries are part of the EU sphere and have received recently increased refugee flow.

Turkey recently adopted legal norms and regulations, launched a registration database and plans to create a healthy public sphere with varied and diversified actors in the media. Regarding Norway and the other Nordic countries, however, some claim that their historical reputation as “the model of a tolerant, egalitarian, multicultural welfare state” is changing (Schierup and Alund, 2011). Norway is still a unique champion of humanitarian aid programmes, and always supports and defends human rights conventions (Borevi et al., 2017). Thus, it might be expected to cover the refugee issue and create a working public sphere for discussions as an example to the rest of the world. There are a few comparative studies in the literature regarding the Syrian refugee-related media coverage of countries with different media systems, cultures and political will. One recent study compared the Norwegian newspaper, *Verdens Gang* (VG), with the Spanish opinion daily *El Pais* (Franquet Santos Silva et al., 2018). This article examines how two major newspapers in Spain and Norway covered the ‘refugee crisis’ in Europe between October 2015 and March 2016. Based on a quantitative and comparative content analysis of the Spanish newspaper *El Pais* and the Norwegian newspaper VG, the study finds that more than 50 per cent of the stories in both newspapers on the ‘refugee crisis’ concern political and administrative issues. Moreover, both newspapers rely mainly on politicians and governmental institutions as sources in more than 50 per cent of all news stories. The article emphasizes the politicization of the issue and the need for further comparative country analyses to discuss its findings within a broader perspective. The relative invisibility of refugees (in *El Pais* 12.2 per cent and in VG only 6.2 per cent) in the news stories studied by Franquet Santos Silva et al. (2018) provoked our curiosity to compare another two contrasting countries that have hosted the most refugees recently.

This article is structured as follows. The next two parts explain the ‘Syrian refugee crisis’, with a special focus on media-related research and agenda setting theory. After describing the data and methodology, the last part presents the qualitative and quantitative results of the media analysis by comparing the country-specific findings before summarizing the differences and similarities in their coverage of the refugee issue.

The ‘refugee crisis’ in the media

Goodman et al. (2017:105) define a crisis as “a rarely occurring event which challenges the existing order”. Syria’s civil war and the sudden flow of refugees into neighbouring countries and Europe resulted “in a collapse in the legitimacy of existing ways of working and the production of new lenses for seeing social problems” (Habermas, 1975), which created currently the term of ‘refugee crisis’. As the definition of ‘crisis’ clearly expresses, this sudden, major movement of population from the Middle East had not been seen in recent history. It led to the politicization of the migration debate in Europe, to these people being called “a waste product of globalisation” (Bauman, 2004:66) or a control mechanism of political elites.

Countries varied in their reactions. Hungary closed Europe’s border to the refugees by building a razor-wire fence (Zoltan-Kekesi, 2017). Turkey built a 911-kilometre-long wall along its Syrian border. Lebanon imposed visa-like restrictions in 2015 while the Lebanese media have contributed to hate speech against refugees (EJN, 2015: 79). Estonia, Lithuania and Portugal declined all asylum applications in 2015 (Eurostat, 2019). A Bulgarian television channel used as a headline the Bulgarian prime minister’s statement that “Islamic State is flooding Europe with refugees” (EJC, 2015). The leading Turkish daily *Hürriyet*’s headline on

28th September 2014 was “Too many Syrians and no apartments for us” while another national daily, *Sözcü*, offered the extremely nationalist headline of “The man hunting the refugees with sticks” on 31st July 2014. This negative trend was also seen in Turkey’s social media in that the topic “Syrians back to home” was a trending topic on Twitter (Corabatır, 2016; Memisoglu and Ilgit, 2017), which signalled increasingly negative perceptions in Turkish society.⁴

Nationalist coverage was not only seen in neighbouring countries’, as the popular English daily the Sun published a column by Katie Hopkins on 17th April 2015 titled “Rescue boats? I’d use gunships to stop migrants”, which was clearly hate speech. 48 hours later, a mass drowning happened in the Mediterranean Sea. Besides hate speech in the media, political figures have capitalized on the global ‘refugee crisis’ electorally as there has been an undeniable rise in xenophobia and Islamophobia in Western countries (Deardorff Miller, 2018). In response, the Carta di Roma agreement in Italy urgently called for more responsible coverage of the recent ‘refugee crisis’ while the editors’ code at Ipsos in Britain also warned media practitioners to adopt better, more objective media coverage of refugees (EJC, 2015). Meanwhile, various panels, forums, migration reporting guidelines and an alternative course curriculum for journalism students has enabled more criticism and discussion of the role of the media in the ‘refugee crisis’.⁵

The first wave of research on Syrian refugees tried to map the issue, mostly dealing with the sudden flow of war refugees and the responses of host countries and their public (see Yazgan et al., 2015: 186-7). The second group mostly analyzed the situation in the refugee camps and refugees’ legal and bureaucratic obstacles. The third wave dealt with the rights of Syrian refugees and their difficulties to access facilities in education, healthcare, and employment in host countries (Kutlu-Tonak, 2016:130). As these diverse areas indicate, the Syrian refugee issue is a dynamic process and related to varied sub-themes and areas, including public opinion formation and the role of the media.

Media analysis in Turkey has revealed problematic and ideological coverage that signals the politicization of the refugee theme. Göktuna-Yaylaci and Karakuş (2015) applied content analysis to selected newspapers from 2014 and concluded that newspapers’ political stance and their attitude toward the government significantly affected their news content, specifically by making the coverage a political message with the humanitarian aspect of the crisis as a complimentary theme (Göktuna-Yaylaci and Karakuş, 2015:249). Instead of focusing on human disaster, their news coverage focused on the overcrowded of hospitals, streets, and schools with refugees. This clearly scapegoated refugees in Turkish society and encouraged people to forget the inhumane conditions of war faced by the refugees. Similarly, other researchers have highlighted problematic coverage in the Turkish media, including criminalizing, hegemonic language, and even hate speech (Ataman, 2014; Kolukırık, 2009; Doğanay et al., 2018).

Although these researchers have revealed negative media representations regarding refugees and the dominance of government sources in Turkey’s national media (Kolukırık, 2009; Doğanay et al., 2018; Pandır et al., 2015), there are also humanizing frames, varied sources representation, and positive coverage of Syrian refugees associated with the community journalism efforts of local media in Turkey (Kaya, 2017:365, Erdoğan et al., 2017). There are

⁴ According to a recent survey, 82% of the Turkish public had a negative perception of Syrians (Erdoğan, 2018). Similarly, a European Commission report in 2006 remarked that the “public perception of migration tends to be increasingly negative throughout Europe” (Beutin et al., 2006: 2).

⁵ The European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) organized a panel in 2016 that claimed that the refugee issue had increased distrust in the media, through accusations of biased reporting in Europe. In 2016, the World Forum for Media Development acknowledged that migration is one of the biggest challenges facing the news media, and called on the media to put ethics at the centre of their coverage. EJM has created news migration reporting guidelines for journalists while UNESCO created a new course curriculum for journalism and media institutions to equip journalism students with the new social journalism skills (Banda, 2015; Possetti, 2015: 81).

also a few researchers who read scarce news coverage as a sign of a positive perspective (Erdoğan et al. 2017:5), and who describe media representations as “precarious but with a high societal aspiration” (Tunc, 2015: 59). They underline the pivotal positive role of the Turkish media in not being an inflammatory factor in this controversial subject (Tunc, 2015). Pandir et al. (2015:1) also reached a similar conclusion that the Turkish media depict the issue ambivalently with positive or neutral news coverage through visual narratives that reproduce social regret in Turkish society.

When the refugees began crossing the Turkish border in 2011-2012, the media initially covered the issue from a supportive, humanitarian perspective. Aid to Syrian refugees has been affected – and sometimes exploited – in political struggles between Turkey’s governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) and CHP, which has called for a diplomatic solution to the Syrian conflict. As a result, the refugee issue has polarized Turkey’s population and political parties since 2015 (Ahmadoun, 2014). During 2015 and 2016, after failing the Turkey-EU deal and the possibility to give Turkish citizenship to Syrian refugees, their access to higher education became the main theme. This deal and President Erdoğan’s statement in a refugee camp on July 2nd, 2016, offering citizenship created an unsustainable naturalization policy (Atasü-Topçuoğlu, 2018) or ‘moral panic’ (Cohen, 1973) within society, which created an ‘us versus them’ perception that fuelled negative media framing and hostile public attitudes against the refugees. Different media groups in Turkey also represented the Syrian refugee issue according to their political affiliations (Atasü-Topçuoğlu, 2018). For pro-government media, the most preferred frame was Turkey’s sacrifice whereas it was short-sightedness for the opposition media (Erdoğan et al., 2017).

Media representation of refugees in the European media offer an even worse picture (Berry et. al, 2015). The most visible characteristics were to represent the refugees as a “unified faceless threat”, categorizing them as good or bad, dehumanizing, othering, giving less space to their views, using marginalizing language, associating them with negative themes, and using unfavourable lexical choices (KhosraviNik, 2010:23; Kokkonen, 2017; Goodman et al., 2017: 112). Philo et al. (2013) reported that the hostile nature of coverage of the refugees ignores the asylum seekers’ own voices, which again makes it difficult to see the problem as a human rights and equality issue. Although sympathy increased toward Syrian refugees after the drowning of the Syrian boy Ayan Kurdi on a Turkish beach, this changed following the terrorist attacks in Paris that killed 130 people in November 2015. There was a sudden change in refugee/minority-related rhetoric to present them in negative and problematic ways in the media.

A few broader studies have compared media coverage across different countries on the Syrian refugee theme, reporting biased, negative coverage that intensified after 2015 (Berry et al., 2015). The Ethical Journalism Network’s (EJN) report (2015) also accused the media of failing to raise the alarm about the refugee flow before 2015, letting politicians hijack media coverage with hate speech (Freedman, 2018), producing sensational news content and confusion regarding the terms, and allowing falling standards with unreliable or ill-informed news content.

To sum up, all the researchers discussed here emphasize the importance of examining how refugees are represented in media to reveal how the ‘Syrian refugee crisis’ has influenced public debates. Moreover, nearly every article emphasizes the need for comparative studies to expose how such representations vary between countries, areas, and political orientations. Therefore, the present study aims to analyze media coverage in two geographically, politically, and culturally different countries to identify any concrete coverage patterns or country-specific perspectives.

Turkey's newly written refugee story

The rights and obligations of individual asylum seekers and refugees are governed by the 1951 Geneva Convention and general international humanitarian law. Turkey is among the signatories of the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees. However, alongside a few other countries, it maintains a “geographical limitation” to the Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which means it does not grant refugee status to asylum seekers from outside Europe as part of a two-tiered asylum policy (Kirişçi, 2014). Following extensive preparations, Turkey's parliament approved the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (Yabancılar ve Uluslararası Koruma Kanunu– YUKK), which is the first comprehensive law to cover both foreigners and those who need international protection in Turkey (DGMM, 2019). However, Article 62 of the law retains the geographical limitation. Therefore, Turkey has not granted ‘refugee’ status to fleeing Syrians while non-Europeans can only obtain ‘conditional refugee’ status. It is important to underline that the conditional refugees’ residence in Turkey is temporary. They can only stay until their resettlement in a third country.

Towards the end of 2011, the Turkish government declared its support for the opposition in the Syrian civil war and adopted an open-door policy for those fleeing Syria by applying a temporary protection regime for incoming Syrians. When the first flow of Syrians occurred in 2011, the Turkish authorities welcomed them into Turkey without requiring a visa. Those with passports were allowed to stay for up to 90 days whereas those without documents were placed in so-called ‘guest camps’ (Gümüş and Eroğlu, 2015). Turkey currently hosts the most Syrian refugees globally, with approximately 8 % living in camps whereas the others mostly live in ten major cities spread across Turkey. They have no structured educational activities and only limited access to livelihood opportunities. Turkish society's attitude toward the Syrians is not as positive as the government's.

Recent research on Turkish opinion regarding Syrians indicates that most people have pessimistic and mostly negative attitudes. Thus, 82% of participants defined Syrians as either “trouble makers” (39%) or a “burden on the country” (43%) (Erdoğan, 2018). The issue has for the potential to create political and social controversies in both Turkey and Europe, as evidenced by the popularization of the issue by extremist political parties in many countries in their election campaigns. Newspaper headlines, news coverage, and thematization are all important data for analyzing this issue in the public sphere.

Within this framework, examining coverage of Syrian refugees in Turkey and Norway will help us to understand and compare the two societies’ perceptions, attitudes, and perspectives through media representation. This study therefore compares articles from newspapers in each country to discover whether there are differences in each country's representations of refugees.

Research design and method

The main objective of this study is to determine how the mainstream/popular media in Turkey and Norway, which represent two distinct European media models, represent and mediate their accounts of Syrian asylum seekers and refugees. We would like to determine whether there is evidence regarding the general finding that popular newspapers follow similar representation patterns in conveying an us-and-them categorization, making similar lexical choices, and giving less space and voice to the victims (KhosraviNik, 2010). This article analyzes and evaluates media language and the thematic representation of Syrian refugees/asylum seekers in two popular newspapers in Norway and Turkey - Verdens Gang (VG) and Hürriyet - to track

the differences and similarities of the media coverage and sourcing. The main hypothesis that the two countries' popular media portrayal of refugees is similar, despite having different media systems.

This study departs from the terminology and classification of Hallin & Mancini's media system approach (2004:143-145) to categorize the Norwegian media in the Democratic Corporatist model with a strong tradition of limits to state power alongside strong welfare state policies and other forms of active state intervention. In line with this classification, the Norwegian media show a high degree of political parallelism, which coexists with a high level of journalistic professionalization, a consensus on professional standards of conduct, and a strongly developed mass-circulation press. The notion of commitment to a common public interest is also high, alongside a high level of autonomy from other social powers. Norway's media forms are all to varying degrees shaped by free market forces while being harnessed, regulated, and supervised by state intervention (Nord, 2008).

The second country, Turkey, represents the southern European media system, described as the Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralistic model (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). The region's recent contested transition to democracy has established distinct patterns of a close relationship between the mass media and politics (2004: 89). Moreover, due to the weak development of the commercial media market and the concentration of ownership, Turkey's media is dependent on the state, political parties, religious institutions, and wealthy private patrons, which inhibits journalistic professionalization (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 90). Since its establishment, Turkey has had a complex political history that has always influenced the media environment. In particular, the state domination of the media has been particularly pronounced during military coups and states of emergency. Yavcan and Ongur (2016) show that the ruling AKP's increasing power during the last two decades has intensified threats to media criticism in collaboration with a neo-liberal economy, which have grown since the 1980 military coup.

The two countries received the most refugees in Europe in terms of the number of immigrants per inhabitant. Turkey currently hosts the most Syrian refugees globally, at more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees (DGMM 2019, UNHCR 2019). Like Turkey, the number of applicants tripled in Norway to reach to 30,470 persons (Øvrebye et al., 2016; UDI, 2015). While neither country is an EU member, they are both part of the EU sphere and have received increased refugee flows compared to recent history.

After high refugee flows to Europe and Turkey in 2015, the acute crisis ended. However, the situation has hardly normalized due to the high-stakes political crisis over refugees in 2017 related to populist and nativist politics in Europe and the U.S. Thus, the migration and asylum 'crisis' continue to dominate the public space and shape national and international politics. Politicians have focused on border controls while migration remains the top issue on the global agenda. As outlined earlier, the role of the media in shaping public opinion is significant here, according to many national and international studies. Hence, it is crucial to focus on media representation of immigrants to understand public perceptions.

To make comparisons and describe the general situation, we selected two newspapers based on their circulation (Pandir et al., 2014) and type (tabloid or quality) (Franquet Santos Silva et al., 2018). *Hürriyet* is a typical high-circulation mainstream/popular Turkish reference newspaper while *Verdens Gang* (VG)⁶ is Norwegian popular high-circulation newspaper. The analysis unit was the news content of the selected dailies with refugee or Syrian related news items published between January to June 2017. After 7 years of the refugee flow, we expected to find that the Syrian refugee crisis has become a more mature, stabilized, or naturalized issue with diversified information shared among NGOs, citizens, and politicians in both countries.

⁶ VG is an abbreviation for 'Verdens Gang', which means 'How the world goes on' or 'The course of the world'.

The LexisNexis database was used to gather ‘Syria’ and ‘refugee’ related news from both newspapers. In *Hürriyet*, 52,390 news items included the word ‘Syria’, of which 8,403 contained the word ‘refugee’. When we searched ‘Syrian’ and ‘refugees’ for the first half of 2017, we found 92 news articles. In VG, there were 7,941 ‘Syria’ and 2,380 ‘Syria’ and ‘refugee’ related news items. When we narrowed down the sample to news articles focusing on the situation of refugees that appeared in the first half of 2017, we found 36 news articles. Since the aim is to understand the media representation of Syrian refugees, we selected just news articles in two dailies focusing on stories centering the refugees. This narrowed down the sample to 128 news articles from the first half of 2017 (92 items in *Hürriyet* and 36 in VG). Due to its broadsheet format, *Hürriyet* had two times more articles than VG.

To monitor the representation of Syrian refugees in the news articles, we employed first quantitative then qualitative content analysis. We used the Yoshikoder (Lowe, 2006) open-source analysis system to categorize the news with categories dealing with Syrian-related topics (see Supplementary Table 7). The content categories were established from emerging coding after preliminary examination of the data (Wimmer and Dominick, 2014). The quantification was done at the nominal level by counting the frequency of units in each category. The news items mostly fell into three main categories, labeled as identity/definition of refugees, government and NGO projects for refugees, and issues debated within the refugee theme, such as democracy, racism, human rights, and elections. The analysis variables were the wording used to describe refugees/migrants, placement of the news, gender of the byline, patterns of sourcing (the first three actors in the news), and news items that centered Syrian refugees as the main topic or as a side theme within the news content. Negative or positive attribution in news/headlines (the tone of the article) was also coded, based on manifest positive or negative wording in the article’s headline using a three-point ‘tone’ scale (positive, negative, neutral). Negative terms included ‘misbehaviour’, ‘failure’, and ‘ingratitude’, ‘fugitives’, ‘criminal’, ‘smugglers’, ‘danger’, and ‘death’. Examples of positive wording were ‘success’, ‘guests’, and ‘help’. Articles with a neutral tone were factual pieces that avoided opinion or strong wording, personal statements, or anecdotes.

Because an objective, systematic research technique is needed to produce universal statements (Berelson, 1952:18), we found it more appropriate to employ quantitative data collection methods and apply both quantitative and qualitative content analysis to the research material. Since the subject matter, can be grasped better through both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied as complimentary.

Research findings

Of the 128 news articles analyzed for the investigation according to their relevance to refugee-related themes, there were 92 items in *Hürriyet* including the words ‘Syria’ and ‘refugee’, and 36 in VG. As expected, the Turkish newspaper devoted more coverage to the issue since Turkey is the country hosting the most Syrian refugees in the world.

One important finding was that, in 22% of *Hürriyet*’s coverage (20 news articles), the Syrian refugee issue was a complementary to another central theme, such as national elections, EU summits, or NATO meetings, whereas this was only found for 3 items in VG. The most interesting finding is that both Norwegian and Turkish dailies devoted half their news coverage and headlines to positive attributions regarding the Syrian crisis. The items were mostly covered by male journalists (45 male, 10 female journalists) in the Turkish daily but more by females in the Norwegian paper (15 female, 9 male journalists). Similarly, both dailies used refugee related articles from foreign coverage to support their articles.

According to the Yoshikoder analysis of *Hürriyet* (Table 1), the newspaper included 1,531 migration-related words out of a total of 44,178 words most of which tried to identify or define the refugees and their situation. The refugees became newsworthy if they were involved in a dramatic event, such as a boat accident, or had problems with getting financial or social aid. The refugee crisis was mostly covered from the perspective of the financial or social aid projects of national and international NGOs (15% of words were categorized under this theme). Although the crisis has lasted 7 years, still the least covered themes were democracy and human rights, with only 123 (8 %) words being identified under this category in *Hürriyet* (see Supplementary Table 7). Instead, the Turkish news environment was dominated by stories about the high service quality of the refugee camps and their achievements, or the refugees' escapes and boat accidents.

Table 1: Coding of *Hürriyet* and VG newspaper

	Hürriyet (Jan, Feb, March)	Hürriyet (Apr, May, June)	VG (Jan, Feb, March)	VG (Apr, May, June)	Total
Migration related words	501	1.030	522	180	2.233
Identity/definition	366	808	345	95	1.614
Project/help/activities	90	144	121	47	402
Democracy/Human rights	45	78	56	38	217
Total words	13.120	31.058	19.641	8.909	72.728

Interestingly, there were only 702 migration or refugee-related words out of 28,550 words in VG. As with *Hürriyet*, more than the half of the words were devoted to definition and identity in VG (Table 1) while 23% (168 words) were categorized under the project/activities theme. Also in line with the Turkish coverage, only 94 words (13%) related the refugee issue to the themes of democracy and human rights. Thus, the analysis suggests that newspaper coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis is still in a definition and identification phase in both countries' popular media.

When we further focus on the journalists' word choices of identification, which directly reflect how the situation is framed and influences readers' perceptions about refugees, there is some differences between the two dailies regarding identification. That is, in Turkey, it is mostly Syrian refugees who become news subjects, with the word 'Syrian' used 209 times in the 92 news articles, whereas refugees from other nationalities are rarely represented. In VG, however, 'Syria' the country is mentioned more often than the nationality of the refugees, with other nationalities also being less visible. Other researches have also identified the frequent use of the term 'Syrian' in news coverage in Turkey (Doğanay et al., 2018). This preference can be interpreted either as indicating that journalists ignore the rights of the refugees and adopt a neutral position or, on the contrary, that they marginalize Syrians as a general, faceless social category, which is also a consistent finding from many international studies (KhosraviNik, 2010:23; Philo et al., 2013; Goodman et al., 2017: 112).

The patterns of labelling in the Turkish and Norwegian dailies are very similar. The predominant word choice to define the refugees in both newspapers is 'refugee' (346 times in *Hürriyet* and 139 times in VG) followed by 'asylum seeker' (166 times in *Hürriyet* and 178 times in VG) and 'migrant' (85 times in *Hürriyet* but only 25 times in VG). Other marginalizing and othering words, such as 'smuggler' was preferred 21 times in *Hürriyet* but only 2 times in VG. An important positive finding to note was the low use of criminalizing wording in *Hürriyet*, such as 'fugitives' (only 6 times) and 'illegal immigrant' (2 times), which might signal an improvement in the journalistic approach to refugees in Turkey. Accurate terminology is

important because it can discredit and weaken credibility. Terms like ‘illegal immigrant’ or ‘foreign criminals’ are frequently applied to multiple categories of migrant without recognising the differences between a refugee, an asylum seeker, and an economic migrant, or where the status of the migrant is unknown. One of the biggest problems is the lack of knowledge about the legal aspects of migration, for example about the difference between migrant and refugee, or about these people’s legal rights. This is fundamental to avoid giving the wrong impression to the public.

Overall, the terms ‘refugee’ or ‘asylum seeker’ were the accepted labels used most frequently by journalists in the two newspapers, with no significant differences between labeling refugees in the two countries. Thus, it seems that the identity confusion in relation to the Syrian refugee issue has been settled in the media language in Turkey, although still there is a problem in depicting refugees on an inaccurate and misleading references as people in need and lacking agency, or as a possible threat in Turkey.

The placement of news is also an important variable that gives information regarding the internalization of the issue. In the Turkish daily, the Syrian refugee crisis was still mostly restricted to the national and international pages (Table 2). That is, the issue is equally represented in both local and national pages, and the problem has been internalized with local coverage after seven years. However, it remains barely represented in the education or economy sections. In the Norwegian daily, by contrast, the issue was only presented in the current affair pages without placing in any other sections in the daily.

Table 2: Placement of the news (Hürriyet)

Placement of the news (Hürriyet)	
News section	Number of News
Local news section	33
National/current news section	30
International news section	24
Economy section	2
Education section	1
Technology section	1
Magazine section	1
Total	92

The news items were also categorized under distinct themes and frames. Financial and social aid/helping refugees were the main theme, with 21 news items (22 %) in Hürriyet (Table 3). The second important news theme was human smuggling with 16.3% coverage. Democracy and human rights-related news formed the third theme with 13% coverage. Frequently covered issues included Syria’s civil war and terror, US president Trump and his migration law. Other infrequent themes were monitoring visits to refugee camps by international NGOs, and activity and celebration-related statements.

Table 3: Themes of the news coverage

Themes of the news coverage (Hürriyet and VG)			
	News (Hürriyet)	News (VG)	Total
	92	36	128
	%	%	%
Project/help/service	23,1	22,2	22,8

Democracy/human rights	13,2	19,4	15,0
Human smuggling	16,4	11,2	15,0
US Migration Law	11,0	25,0	15,0
Terror	12,1	13,9	12,6
Election/summit/conference	12,1	8,3	11,0
Monitoring visits	6,6	0,0	4,7
Activity/celebration	5,5	0,0	3,9
Total	100	100	100

The Norwegian newspaper VG has a quite different pattern. In its coverage, the Syrian refugee crisis was mostly associated with US president Donald Trump and US migration law (Table 3) (10 news items, 25%). As with the Turkish coverage, financial and social aid, and projects were also prominently featured themes, with 8 news items (22.2 %).

Like the Turkish coverage, in VG, the Syrian refugee crisis was only weakly associated with democracy and human rights (7 news items, 19.4 %). Human smuggling and crime were the least preferred news themes after election-related coverage (Table 3).

Besides the main items on the news agenda, the tone of the headlines is also an important factor in analyzing how the main actor in the article represents the refugee issue and how it is covered in the most critical parts of news reports, such as headlines. There was not a wide distribution of negative, positive, or neutral tones in the news headlines between the two newspapers (Table 4). Both covered the Syrian refugee issue with similar numbers of positive and negative headlines (39 negative and 43 positive headline in Hürriyet; 18 negative and 13 positive news headlines in VG). VG had slightly more negative coverage than positive news headlines.

Table 4: Tone of the Headlines

	Hürriyet	VG	Total
Negative	39	18	57
Positive	43	13	56
Neutral	10	5	15
Total	92	36	128

As Aeron Davis warns, “journalists can be all but captured by their sources” in their news reporting because they are already embedded in the “issue communities on which they report” (2007: 5). Therefore, the actors in the news coverage provide an important signifier to understand the coverage and its characteristics. Generally, “the range of significant sources and voices in migration news has tended to be rather narrow and often dominated by political elites and state officials” (Berry et al., 2015:127). In line with this, these actors were the most frequently identified out of 212 news sources in Hürriyet (Table 5).

Table 5: Actors in Turkish news coverage (Hürriyet)

Actors of Turkish news coverage (Hürriyet)				
Turkish actors	1st Actor	2nd Actor	3rd Actor	Total
National NGOs	16	9	5	30
European/international political actors	5	14	6	25
International NGOs /UN/ UNESCO	7	8	4	19
US actors (Trump, Obama, etc.)	5	11	1	17

R. T. Erdogan	12	2	2	16
AKP actors	7	4	5	16
Teror and crime actors (DAEŞ, smugglers)	6	3	6	15
Byreucrats (AFAD, Governors, etc.)	9	4	1	14
International institutions (EU, AGIT)	4	5	5	14
Syrian citizens	3	6	5	14
Non available and others (companies, etc.)	7	2	0	9
Security forces	4	4	0	8
Mayors	3	3	1	7
CHP actors	2	0	2	4
Turkish citizens	2	1	1	4
Total	92	76	44	212

The most frequent category was national NGO actors in 16 news articles out of 30. However, although national NGOs were the most frequent individual first actor category, President Erdoğan and other AKP politicians together make 32 actors in total, thereby exceeding the number of national NGOs. Erdoğan was also featured more frequently than any other political sources. The third most frequent actor category was European/international political actors followed by international NGOs. Finally, the low representation of Syrian refugees as first actor category (3 as first actor, 14 in total) was a problem. However, the invisibility of ordinary Turkish people in the coverage was a more alarming finding. Turkish citizens were the least represented actor category, with only 4 out of 212 actors (1.8% of total actor representation).

The Norwegian news coverage contained 88 actor sources (Table 6), with US President Trump being the most frequent first actor in 13 news articles (14.7%). Nearly the same number of actor coverage was devoted to national NGOs at 12 actors (13.6%), making it the second most frequent actor group.

Table 6: Actors of Norwegian news coverage (VG)

Actors of Norwegian News Coverage (VG)				
Actors	1st Actor	2nd Actor	3rd Actor	Total
US actors (Trump, Obama, etc.)	8	4	1	13
Syrian citizens	2	7	4	13
National NGOs	4	4	4	12
International NGOs /UN/ UNESCO	2	5	2	9
Byreucrats (UDI, etc)	6	0	2	8
Government actors	2	2	3	7
Citizens	2	1	4	7
Other political parties	3	1	1	5
Others (companies etc.)	2	2	1	5
European/international political actors	2	1	0	3
Prime minister	1	1	0	2
Security forces	1	0	1	2
International institutions (EU, AGIT)	1	0	0	1
Terror actors	0	1	0	1

Mayors	0	0	0	0
Total	36	29	23	88

Like the Turkish coverage, national and international NGOs were frequently represented, comprising 23.8 % of actors in VG news items (total political actors in VG). International institutions (e.g. the EU) and terror were the most infrequently covered actor categories in the Norwegian newspaper. There were only 2 representations of Syrian refugees as a first actor, although 13 Syrian actors appeared as the first three actors in total (14.7%). Although Syrian actors were not the most frequent as the first actor in the news, they were still more visible than the representation of Norwegian citizens (7 actors, 7.9%). The low representation of the host country's citizens makes coverage of the Syrian refugee problem more complicated without a healthy dialogue between host and guest communities.

Qualitative findings of the analysis

These results clearly indicate the dominance of national politicians (R. T. Erdoğan) regarding the refugee issue in Turkey and international politicians (e.g. Donald Trump) in Norway. In total, 25% of the actors in the Norwegian coverage were politicians or bureaucrats and close to 26.8% in Turkey. We did not find a disproportionate reliance on anti-immigration civil society voices in either country, although both the migrants themselves and citizens tended to be marginalized somewhat less in Norway⁷ and far more in Turkey.

Generally, both popular dailies had little reporting that related the 'Syrian migration crisis' with democracy and human rights themes (19 articles out of 128). These articles were shorter and less detailed, and relied on a limited number of sources. Although national and international NGOs were important actors in the news coverage in both countries, national and international politicians and bureaucrats dominated as sources for Syrian refugee related news. In Turkey, political actors, especially Erdoğan and other AKP actors, were an important political source. Turkish political actors dominated since, after nearly seven years of crisis, the Syrian refugee issue is primarily situated as a domestically relevant story in Turkey.

Generally, the headlines included similar amounts of negative and positive attribution in both popular dailies' headlines. Hürriyet's slightly more positive coverage may reflect the authoritarian character of the AKP government, which perceives its handling of the Syrian refugee issue as successful while strictly controlling refugee related information in Turkey and giving positive statements from AKP politicians.

In line with findings from the "coverage of migration to southern Europe called as a 'foreign news' story perspective" (Horsti, 2008), our study finds that the coverage presents the issue as foreign news in Norway while giving⁷ an opportunity for its readers to engage in the Syrian migration debate (VG, 1 February, 2017; VG, 20 March 2017). Moreover, in contrast to the Turkish coverage, in a few articles, VG covered the daily life of Syrians in Norway, including their integration efforts and cultural experiences (VG, 25 February, 2017; VG, 5 February, 2017). This kind of coverage was absent in Hürriyet, with refugees represented as a faceless group, which could easily create stereotypical images for Turkish society (Hürriyet, 1 June 2017; Hürriyet, 15 March 2017).

⁷ Unlike the Turkish papers, VG – even as a popular newspaper – tried to encourage its readers to participate in the debate regarding the Syrian refugees, to send e-mails or SMSs to participate in the newspaper's comment pages.

The crime and human smuggling themes were almost completely ignored in the Norwegian coverage whereas was an important issue for the Turkish media (Hürriyet, 27 February 2017; Hürriyet, 24 February 2017; Hürriyet, 23 February 2017).

The main qualitative finding is that the media coverage in both countries tries to show how much they are helping the refugees while other countries are ignoring the issue (VG, 5 January 2017; VG, 7 February 2017). There are currently 3.5 million refugees in Turkey, of whom only 8% live in camps, whereas the rest live in various cities. However, their inhuman conditions were not covered. Thus, the Norwegian daily, had only one news item in the first half of 2017 mentioning Turkey, which currently hosts the most Syrian refugees (VG, 24 April 2017). The struggle of all border countries regarding the Syrian crisis was also totally ignored in the Norwegian coverage. Instead, the refugee crisis was represented as a problem for Europe, focusing only on Greece.

Regarding the Turkish newspaper's refugee coverage, the main focus was criticism of EU refugee politics for not being accommodating enough while the humanitarian aspects of the crisis remained a side issue. The thoughts and perspectives of Turkish citizens were totally absent, with neither healthy debate nor adequate information available for creating a well functioning public sphere regarding this issue.

Conclusion

By producing more than 5 million refugees, Syria's civil war has caused enormous logistical, political, and financial challenges for the host countries, and created a general sense of instability and uncertainty in all involved countries. In the 'Syrian refugee crisis', given how much we learn about it through the mainstream media, it is important to determine how the media label, categorize, and frame the issue for the society. Through its agenda setting and framing functions, the mass media directly influence public and elite political attitudes towards asylum and migration. In this article, we discussed the media as a societal actor, with Turkey's Hürriyet and Norway's Verdens Gang chosen from the print media environment as two popular media outlets representing two distinct media models: the Democratic Corporatist model in Norway and the Polarized Pluralistic model in Turkey. Although the literature suggests that these two countries have totally different media models, we found no great differences in the two countries' popular media coverage of the Syrian refugee issue in the first half of 2017 regarding the sourcing, issue framing, and tones in article headlines.

The analysis shows a similar ranked acceptance of word choices to describe people arriving from Syria in the two dailies: firstly 'refugee', secondly 'asylum-seeker', and thirdly 'migrant'. Importantly, the variety of different sources reveals that the most frequent first actor was national NGOs in the Turkish newspaper but the international US actor, President Trump, in Norway. In Hürriyet, 85 statements across 92 articles were from politicians (40% of actors) while 40 statements across 36 articles were from politicians in VG (45% of actors). This hijacking of media visibility by political figures clearly demonstrates the overrepresentation of political sourcing, which could politicize the Syrian refugee crisis in both countries (WACC Europe and CCME, 2017).

The refugees' relative invisibility as the first actor category in both dailies (2 actors in VG, 3 actors in Hürriyet) shows the tendency to ignore the words of Syrian refugees in news coverage, while the very limited voice that both newspapers give to their own country's citizens is a significant threat to future integration of the refugees in these two host societies.

However, there are also positive findings, particularly the low level of criminalizing wording to describe refugees, positive attributions in half of the headlines in both newspapers,

and no alarming or negative framing in either newspaper associating Syrian immigration with threats, such as illegality, economic crisis, crime, or Islamic terror.

The findings show that migration is a salient theme in media coverage, although the ‘visibility’ of the migrants is lacking. Instead, the voices that are most frequently heard in the news are still political actors, 7 years after the crisis began. Out of 128 news articles, only a handful (19 articles in both countries) focused on the human rights perspective. However, coverage going beyond ‘scoreboard’ reporting is needed to encourage a deeper understanding of the crisis and a search for solutions.

With detailed guidelines and training, and codes of conduct including the basic principles for refugee coverage might help current journalists. Examples include the ‘Roma Charter’ of the Italian Council of Journalists’ Association and the Camden Principles on Freedom of Expression and Equality of Ethical Journalism Initiative (EJI). Although both Turkish (Basın İlan Kurumu, 1994) and Norwegian journalism initiatives have accepted codes of conduct (MediaWise, 2003), we found no reference in them to refugees; neither were there additional guidelines to ensure that reporting on asylum seekers, refugees, migrants, and victims of human trafficking is balanced and accurate.

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- VG (March 20, 2017) ‘Den norske muren må rives’ [The Norwegian wall must be demolished].

- VG (March 16, 2017) 'Rapport: Flere flyktningbarn i Hellas sliter med depresjoner og angst' [Report: Several refugee children in Greece are struggling with depression and anxiety].
- VG (February 25, 2017) 'En solskinnshistorie' [A sunshine story].
- VG (February 7, 2017) 'Norge med rekordbeløp til Syria-krisen' [Norway with record amounts for the Syria crisis].
- VG (February 5, 2017) 'Flyktet fra Aleppo – gjør suksess med syrisk mat i Oslo' [Escape from Aleppo - make success with Syrian food in Oslo].
- VG (February 1, 2017) 'Langsom integrering' [Slow integration].
- VG (January 5, 2017) '3.460 asylsøkere til Norge i fjor – rekordmange får bli' [3,460 asylum seekers to Norway last year - record number may be].
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Supplementary Table 7: Dictionary for coding

Turkish Dictionary	Norwegian Dictionary
Words for Categorisation	Words for Categorisation
Identity Related Words	Identity Related Words
Suriyeli	Syrian
Göçmen	Invandrer
Mülteci	Migranter
Muhacir	Smugler
Ensar	Asyl
Kardeş	Flyktninger
Komşu	Barn
Sığınmacı	Kvinne
Misafir	Junge
Kaçak	Arbeidsledige
Kaçakçı	Project/Help/Activities
Kadın	Prosjekt
Çocuk	Hjelp
Genç	Euro
İşsiz	Integrering
Project/Help/Activities	Utnytting
Proje	Human Rights/Democracy
Hizmet	Rasisme
Yardım	Populisme
Harcama	Demokrati
Entegrasyon	Mennesker rettigheter
Uyum	Frihet
İstismar	Flyktningskrisen i Europa
Human Rights/Democracy	Asyl-debatten
İrkçılık	Tyrkia
Popülizm	
Demokrasi	
İnsan hakları	
Özgürlük	
Kriz	