

Migration narratives in media and social media

The case of Italy

Marcello Maneri
Andrea Pogliano
Flavio Piccoli
Guido Anselmi

BRIDGES Working Papers

#08 May 2023

BRIDGES

Assessing the production and impact of migration narratives

This publication is part of a project that has received funding
from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation
programme under grant agreement No. 101004564.



Authors

Marcello Maneri is a Research Affiliate at FIERI and Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Milano Bicocca, where he teaches Media and Cultural Sociology. After obtaining a PhD in Sociology at the University of Trento in 1995, he was involved in several national and EU-funded projects on migration, security, and racism. He is or has been a member of the Editorial/Scientific Board of several journals such as *Contemporary Sociology*, *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa*, *Asylon(s)*, *Cartografie Sociali*, and *Conflitti Globali*. His research focuses on news and migration, racism, public discourse on crime and security, and moral panics. He has recently published a book with Ann Morning on the notions of genealogical groups' essentialised difference in Italy and the United States.

Andrea Pogliano is Associate Professor of Sociology of Culture and Communication at the University of Piemonte Orientale. He is also Research Affiliate at FIERI and member of the Editorial Board of *Sociologica*. *International Journal for Sociological Debate*. He obtained his PhD in Sociology by the University of Milan in 2008 and his main research interests include media representations and production, migration and communication. He has been involved in several EU-funded projects on migration, such as *Concordia Discors* and *AMICALL*, and he has also worked on the politicisation on refugees for the H2020 *CEASAVAL* project.

Flavio Piccoli Flavio Piccoli is a Research Affiliate at FIERI and a PhD candidate at the Programme in Sustainable Development and Climate Change (SDC) at IUSS Pavia – University of Insubria. He has been involved in a Research Project of National relevance (PRIN) on media and terrorism studies, which has led to the publication of a book chapter. His research interests include the production and framing of news in media events; intermediality and media ecosystems; populism, collective identity and political communication; as well as the representation and communication on natural disasters and climate change.

Guido Anselmi is a senior lecturer at the University of Catania, where he teaches Cultural sociology. He obtained his PhD in Urban Studies at the University of Milano-Bicocca in 2014. His research interests focus on the area between political economy and digital platforms, including digital methods and computational sociology. In recent years he has been a working partner for three different transnational projects dealing with digital platforms, information, social capital, and the sharing economy. Over the course of the last ten years he has also lectured in several Italian universities, teaching courses in computational social science and digital humanities.

Reviewers

Blanca Garcés-Mascreñas and Ferruccio Pastore.

Acknowledgements

We thank the reviewers for their constructive feedback that helped improve this report, and Ferruccio Pastore, in particular, for his helpful and constant advice.

Contents

Abstract.....	5
1. Introduction	6
1.1 The Italian case	6
1.2 Research design and methodology.....	7
2. The Sea Watch 3 forbidden landing.....	9
2.1 Representation: Main, collateral, and counter-narratives in traditional and social media	10
a) Narratives in traditional media	10
b) Characters, emotions, and settings	14
c) Voices	20
d) Frames	21
e) Narratives and commentary in the social media	24
f) Frames and voices in the social media.....	25
2.2 Narrative making and success	28
a) Who: successful storytellers and issues of access.....	28
b) Where: narratives travelling across platforms.....	32
c) What: ‘good’ and ‘bad’ narratives	32
3. Italy’s Citizenship Law: the reform debate	35
3.1 Representation: Main, collateral, and counter-narratives in traditional and social media	36
a) Narratives in traditional media	36
b) Characters, labels, emotions and processes.....	39
c) Voices	43
d) Frames	45
e) Voices and engagement in the social media	46
f) Narratives and frames in the social media.....	48
3.2 Narrative making and success	50
a) Who: successful storytellers and issues of access.....	50
b) Where: narratives travelling across platforms.....	51
c) What: ‘good’ and ‘bad’ narratives	53
4. The attempted supremacist massacre in Macerata	56
4.1 Making sense of trauma: Main, collateral, and counter-narratives in traditional and social media	57
a) Narratives and debates in traditional media.....	57
b) Characters, emotions, and settings	61
c) Voices	64
d) Frames	65
e) Narratives and commentary in the social media	66
f) Frames and voices in the social media.....	68
4.2 Narrative making and success	71
a) Who: successful storytellers and issues of access.....	71
b) Where: narratives travelling across platforms.....	73
c) What: ‘good’ and ‘bad’ narratives	74

5. Conclusion.....	76
5.1 Who: issues of strategy and access	76
a) Hierarchies of access to the legacy media.....	76
b) Strategies for gaining media visibility.....	77
c) Framing and distinction.....	78
d) Persistence	79
5.2 Where: legacy and new media distinctive features and re-mediations	80
a) Twitter's distinctiveness	80
b) Representing social media conversation	81
c) Cross-platform flows and re-mediations.....	81
d) Strategies that make some Twitter accounts influent	81
5.3 What: successful narratives.....	82
a) Medium-specific factors	82
b) Commercial factors	83
c) Political factors.....	83
d) Cultural factors.....	84
e) Structural factors.....	85
References	87
Appendix. List of interviewees	89

Abstract

This BRIDGES national report analyses the main narratives developed in traditional and social media around three different case studies in Italy: the Sea Watch 3 landing to Lampedusa (2019), which was the first challenge of the new ‘populist’ government’s ‘closed ports’ policy; the debate on *Ius soli* (2017), charged with identity issues in clashing political and cultural narratives; and the attempted supremacist massacre in Macerata (2018), occurred during the election campaign and characterised by a debate conveying implicit ideas about deserving and non-deserving victims. Following WP3 main objectives, the report addresses four interrelated questions: who accesses the public arena and shapes prevailing narratives; where these narratives emerge and how do they travel across different media and platforms; what the main features of successful narratives are; and in which contexts and circumstances (thus when) certain narratives obtain a competitive edge. Each event is analysed considering the news published during the peak period by three major newspapers and two prime-time news broadcasts, as well as using meta and textual data from Twitter. Interviews with relevant stakeholders involved in each event are also used to improve interpretation. The analysis of three case studies very different in nature shows the extreme polarisation of the political debate on immigration in Italy, the almost total exclusion of migrants’ voices from the public sphere, and the different – successful or unsuccessful – strategies employed by the two major political sides.

Keywords: migration, narratives, media, social media, Italy, Sea Watch 3, Italian Citizenship Law, *Ius soli*, Macerata shooting, election campaign

1. Introduction

1.1 The Italian case

The Italian case is characterised by strong parallelism between politics and mainstream journalism. This close link applies to print journalism – with the historical affiliations between newspapers and political parties and an almost absolute absence of ‘pure editors’ (Gozzini 2011) – and, since the 1960s, to the three public television networks, always been the subject of political allotment (Mancini 2009; Hallin and Mancini 2004). The most significant change came in the 1980s, with the entry of commercial television channels, particularly the Mediaset networks owned by Silvio Berlusconi. With the collapse of the First Republic and Berlusconi’s entry into politics in the 1990s, the context only partially changed. Despite the commercial vocation of the media, the relationship between media and politics remained tight, and the Mediaset channels have been a propaganda tool for Berlusconi’s party, Forza Italia, and its allies.

On the issue of immigration, this parallelism between media and politics translates into a predominance of right-wing positions (Berlusconi’s TVs and newspaper) and a tendency to narrate migration through the

Historically, the narrative of migration in the Italian media originated in the 1980s, a decade characterised by a predominantly pietistic, paternalistic and solidarity-based narrative. The criminalisation of migration exploded in the Italian media in the 1990s.

point of view of political actors. In addition, Italy is also characterised by a low generational turnover, which leads to little innovation. Historically, the narrative of migration in the Italian media originated in the 1980s, a decade characterised by a predominantly pietistic, paternalistic and solidarity-based narrative revolving around the imagery of the ‘Third World,’ shaped by the strong presence of Catholic morality (Pogliano and Zanini 2010). The criminalisation of migration exploded in the Italian media in the 1990s (Maneri 2019; Binotto and Martino 2004), at the same time as the mass arrivals from Albania and the birth of the Northern League (now the Lega Nord), which started continuing propaganda about migrant crimes and the Islam threat. Since those years, many local and national election debates centred on migrant crimes, which rose to the top of the political-electoral agenda via the propaganda of right-wing parties and the salience that such news assumed in the

mainstream media. Over time, many centre-left parties have also adopted a rhetoric of security regarding migration to compete with the right. The paternalistic solidarism of the 1980s was later articulated into a humanitarian morality that was partly adopted by the centre-left and today constitutes the second most widespread frame in the media (the humanitarian victim frame). However, the securitarian frame is still dominant (Bruno, Binotto and Lai 2012).

The period in which the events chosen for this research take place is characterised by a return of politicisation (salience and polarisation) of the migration issue, after the years of latency marked by economic-financial concerns and the technical government of Mario Monti, in office until 2013. The following legislature (March 2013 to March 2018) had the Democratic Party as the main party, which led three different governments. However, these years have witnessed the steady growth of Matteo Salvini’s Lega, which has changed its strategy, targeting the electorate of the centre and south (it has reconstituted itself from Lega Nord into Lega), developing a narrative and propaganda turn centred on nativism. Picking up on various formulas already used by Marine Le Pen in France and Trump in the United States, the League represented itself as a political force close to the impoverished white middle class adopting strong anti-EU rhetoric and some conspiracy theories, including that of ethnic substitution. In parallel, the 5 Star Movement, in government with the League since 2018, has started attacking NGOs active in the Mediterranean.

1.2 Research design and methodology

In this study, we are set to examine why some narratives about migration become dominant over others and what makes them more successful, compelling, or enduring. Specifically, we try to understand at what conditions certain contents make their way across the media arena at the expense of others. To this end, we aim to explore the following questions:

- Who are the voices that gain access to the public arena and which structural positions and strategies allow them to shape prevailing narratives;
- Where narratives emerge and what is their path across different social actors, media, and platforms;
- What are the features behind the relative success of competing narratives, whether in the realm of news-making routines, commercial considerations, political opportunities, or story qualities;
- When, that is in which contexts and circumstances, certain narratives obtain a competitive edge.¹

We investigated our research questions selecting three case studies:²

1. The Sea Watch 3 crisis in Lampedusa in the end of June 2019, which was the first test of the new ‘populist’ government’s ‘closed ports’ policy, and one that would receive an exceptional challenge by the Captain Carola Rackete, who decided to break the Italian blockade and land. This confrontation sparked a heated controversy both with the Opposition and European authorities.
2. The debate on *ius soli* in its most recent peak, in June 2017. As in most debates over citizenship, this law proposal was charged with identity issues inscribed in political and cultural narratives and was characterized by a very polarised discussion.
3. The February 2018 attempted supremacist massacre in Macerata, which occurred during, and affected the election campaign. At stake there was the very definition of what is a terrorist and a racist attack and often implicit ideas about deserving and non-deserving victims.

In each case study, we gathered and analysed all the pertinent news-stories published during the peak period by three major newspapers and two prime-time newscasts, totalling 306 news stories and trying to represent different political leanings and property models. Our choice converged on:

- *Corriere della Sera*, founded in 1876, the oldest Italian newspaper, the one with the highest diffusion, and the moderate-conservative newspaper of the Northern, especially Lombard, bourgeoisie. After the Second World War, many of its prominent columnists were affiliated with the Christian Democrats. During the protests of the 1970s, it was one of the most conservative and ‘law and order’ newspapers and, in the years following the World Trade Center terrorist attack, Magdi Allam, an Italian of Egyptian origin, Christian fundamentalist and deeply anti-Islamic, was hired as deputy editor.
- *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, a newspaper established in 2009 by journalists that are its owners, whose declared editorial line is ‘pro-Constitution,’ meaning that it is a watchdog of political corruption and unconstitutional drift. Of the three, it is undoubtedly the most independent newspaper. Its current director has gained notoriety for his books and articles on Berlusconi’s corruption during his years as head of government. However, his financial independence does not preclude cultural dependence. Its main editors-in-chief and many journalists are historically affiliated with the left and centre-left. At the same time, the director has imposed a line of great proximity to the 5 Star Movement, with obvious propaganda traits. This newspaper tends to be attentive to migration issues and uses sometimes alternative sources.

1. Our research question about when – that is the contextual and circumstantial factors – could not be easily separated from considering what – the features behind narratives’ success, therefore the two issues are addressed together.
 2. The logic behind the choice of case studies is detailed in the WP3 comparative report.

- *Il Giornale*, founded in 1974, the right-wing newspaper owned by the Berlusconi family that openly supports Forza Italia and its right-wing allies. It had as its first director Indro Montanelli, a brilliant journalist and former fascist, who resigned when Berlusconi entered politics, complaining that it was impossible to maintain a free and independent approach.
- *TG1*, broadcasted since 1952, the first channel of *RAI*, the State-owned broadcast company, the one with the widest audience and generally moderate and pro-government.
- *TG5*, on air since 1992, the most watched and balanced of the three news programmes of the private media company Mediaset, again controlled by the political leader Silvio Berlusconi whose political line it follows.

In addition, for each case study, we analysed the 100 most retweeted messages written on Twitter in the same time frame chosen for newspapers and TV, retrieved using keywords that matched the text or the hashtag. We chose Twitter for two reasons. First, it is the platform most integrated with mainstream media, as politicians, journalists, writers, bloggers, and social media teams use Twitter to promote their views and impose them on newspapers and TV news programmes, making it one of the main backbones of the hybrid media system (Chadwick 2013). Second, Twitter hosts a politically active part of society, as hashtags are mobilising devices used by social movements, influencers, and politicians alike. This makes it interesting for the analysis of grassroots mobilisation and alternative points of view. It must be remembered that Twitter is an 'elite' platform that does not represent the wider society, but none is. In addition, more popular platforms such as Facebook are also more difficult to study, as access for researchers is restricted and limited to public pages and verified accounts that significantly skew the sample used. Besides the in-depth analysis of the most retweeted messages, we also performed a quantitative analysis using indicators of engagement over a much longer period.

With the exception of the long-term analysis of engagement, we content-analysed the selected news-items and tweets using two different coding sheets. In this way, we built a database that could be used to quantify formats, genres, journalist's origin and gender, salience, engagement, topics, frames, narratives, characters, labels, types of processes, voices and their treatment, emotions, and visuals. Using the same database, we could also perform more in-depth analyses and go back to the original articles and TV-news recordings with a recursive approach.

Finally, for each case study, we collected 11 semi-structured interviews from stakeholders who had been involved in the events, in the related debates, or in their reporting. In order to have different and complementary roles, perspectives, and points of entry into the media arena, we tried to diversify our choice as much as possible, but still among those who played a crucial part in the conversation or its coverage and who accepted our request. For a list of the interviewees, see the Appendix.

This report is organised in three main parts each dedicated to a case study. For each case study, we make an analysis of the media production and then, in a separate section, return to our research questions with the help of interviews with stakeholders. In a concluding section, based on the case studies, we try to explore the most important factors behind migration narratives' diffusion.

2. The Sea Watch 3 forbidden landing

From the moment he became Interior Minister in 2018, Matteo Salvini, leader of the xenophobic *Lega* party (hereon League), inaugurated the ‘closed ports’ policy, that is a strategy consisting of denying access to ports to ships carrying migrants rescued at sea. With the help of two successive ‘security decrees,’ the Minister began a long battle against NGOs rescuing migrants. The ‘Sea Watch affair’ was the first test of the newly enacted decree (*Decreto sicurezza bis*, 14 June 2019, n. 53).

In this context, on 12 June 2019, a German NGO ship, Sea Watch 3, flying the Dutch flag, reported that it had rescued 53 people in an inflatable boat about 47 miles off the Libyan coast. After the rescue, the NGO refused to disembark the shipwrecked people in the town indicated by the Libyan authorities because Libya ‘is not a safe port.’ However, Minister Salvini warned that if the NGO did not bring the migrants back to Libya, it would be deemed fully responsible. Sea Watch communicated that, ‘having received as only indication the port of a country at war,’ it was heading towards ‘the safe port closest to the location of the rescue: Lampedusa.’³ European Commission spokeswoman Natasha Bertaud confirmed that Libya was not a safe place.

After more than ten days at sea with no indication of a safe port, some shipwrecked sailors appealed to the European Court of Human Rights to denounce a ‘serious violation of human rights’ by the Italian government and request provisional measures to allow them to disembark. They also stated: ‘We are tired, we are exhausted. Let us get off.’ However, the Minister of the Interior maintained his position: ‘I await the Strasbourg sentence with full respect, but whatever it may be, my attitude does not change one inch. The Sea Watch is not arriving in Italy; it can stay at sea until Christmas and New Year’s Eve.’⁴

In this context, on 12 June 2019, a German NGO ship, Sea Watch 3, flying the Dutch flag, reported that it had rescued 53 people in an inflatable boat about 47 miles off the Libyan coast.

On 25 June, the Strasbourg Court announced its decision to reject the appeal on grounds of ‘no immediate risk of irreparable damage for the applicants.’ So, after 14 days at sea, on 26 June, the NGO announced its decision to enter Italian territorial waters ‘not out of provocation but out of necessity,’ despite the ban imposed by the League-5 Stars Movement government. Salvini called the NGO’s action ‘a provocation’ and ‘a hostile act,’ accused the Netherlands of not taking in the refugees, warned that the migrants would not disembark, that he would deploy ‘public force,’ and called for the seizure of the ship and the arrest of the captain and crew.

On the same day, however, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatovic, called for ‘Sea Watch to be allowed to disembark without consequences for the captain, the crew and the shipowner.’ The European Commissioner for Migration, Dimitris Avramopoulos, on his part, said that the EU was working to relocate the shipwrecked people to some Member States that had made themselves available. However, he warned that this solution ‘is only possible once they have disembarked. This is why I hope that Italy, in this case, will contribute to a quick solution for those on board.’

3. “Sea Watch: i 16 giorni in mare, il porto vicino più sicuro, l’impatto con la GdF, la decisione del Gip di liberare la comandante.” *Valigia Blu*, July 3, 2019. <https://www.valigiablu.it/sea-watch-carola-rackete-salvini/>.

4. “Sea Watch: i 16 giorni in mare, il porto vicino più sicuro, l’impatto con la GdF, la decisione del Gip di liberare la comandante.” *Valigia Blu*, July 3, 2019. <https://www.valigiablu.it/sea-watch-carola-rackete-salvini/>.

On the night of 29 June, Sea Watch decided to enter the port of Lampedusa. At this point, Carola Rackete was arrested in flagrante delicto for ‘violence against a warship’ and for resisting a public official. She was placed under house arrest while the ship was seized. The Minister of the Interior rejoiced at the arrest and seizure and announced that a deportation decree for Germany was being prepared if Rackete’s custody was not confirmed. In the meantime, various representatives of member states, including Germany’s Foreign Minister, were calling for the commander to be released. Several fundraisings were also launched to support the German NGO, exceeding one million euros within a few days.

On 2 July, the Judge for Preliminary Investigations (GIP, by its Italian acronym) of Agrigento decided: the arrest was not validated, and no preventive measures were ordered against the commander of Sea Watch 3. In his order, the GIP excluded the crime of resistance and violence to a warship and considered the crime of resistance to a public official justified by acting while performing a duty. Carola Rackete would be later acquitted of all charges.

2.1 Representation: Main, collateral, and counter-narratives in traditional and social media

a) Narratives in traditional media

For this case study, we selected all the pertinent newspaper articles and TV news focused on the events as they unfolded in the period of maximum media coverage,⁵ between 25 and 30 June. In the days we studied, each of the five news organisations published an average of 3.6 reports per day,⁶ placing one on first page almost every day (Table 2.1). In fact, two thirds of newspaper articles appeared on the first three pages, and more than that share were among the three opening news on TV, where both *TG1* and *TG5* always used edited footage or live reporting, signalling the topicality of what was going on (not in the table).

TABLE 2.1. Coverage dedicated to the Sea Watch 3 affair by news outlet, 25-30 June 2019. Absolute values

OUTLET	NEWS ITEMS	FIRST PAGES	OPENING NEWS OR TITLES	AIRTIME IN SECONDS
<i>Il Giornale</i>	24	5		
<i>Il Fatto Quotidiano</i>	20	3		
<i>Corriere della Sera</i>	19	5		
<i>TG1</i>	16		2	1483
<i>TG5</i>	11		2	1449
TOTAL	90	13	4	2932

In the traditional media coverage of these six crucial days, we can distinguish four narrative stages determined by events that acted as turning points. After days at sea awaiting for Italian authorities’

5. As ascertained with the tool made available by Media Cloud: <https://mediacloud.org/>.

6. In order to cover the same events, we examined newspapers published in the period 26-30 June and TV news aired between 25 and 29 June.

permission to disembark, the news about the Strasbourg Court's decision to reject the migrants' appeal, because there was 'no immediate risk,' triggered a first narrative stage, in which TV news, on 25 June, and newspapers, on 26, covered the judicial ruling and its consequences. On the right wing of the political spectrum, this was interpreted as the demonstration that there were other safe ports and Italy had no reception obligations. The Court 'confirms Italy's choice of order, common sense, legality and justice,' said Salvini (*Il Giornale*, June 29, 2019, 11). A triumphant Minister of Interior added that the German NGO's ship 'will not arrive in Italy, they can stay there until Christmas.' *Il Giornale* introduced another narrative, regarding the hidden backgrounds of NGOs, with an article titled 'The Taliban of reception' dedicated to the costs incurred by the NGO, where its endeavour, based on 'tricks' and 'moves,' was qualified as undue political pressure.

A second narrative stage was triggered the day after by the decision taken by the Sea Watch 3 captain, Carola Rackete, to break the bloc imposed by Italian Guardia di Finanza (GdF, by its Italian acronym) and enter national waters to approach Lampedusa. From that moment, the narrative focused on two main opponents: the 'captain Carola,' labelled as 'little braggart' by Salvini (*Corriere della Sera*, June 27, 2019, 2) but 'brave' by others, and to which many news began to dedicate journalistic portraits, and the already well-known Minister, dubbed by *Il Fatto Quotidiano* 'Minister of Evil [*ministro della cattiveria*].' A growing number of statements began to be released, proposing a set of interpretations that would last until the end of the story. On one side, we find the justification of Rackete's action, in the name of humanitarian reason, of the unwillingness to submit oneself to the Government's cynical political strategy, or of the primacy of international law over the second Italian Security Decree that granted the Minister of Interior the right to deny passing through Italian waters or landing for reasons of security and public order. We find these interpretations in public statements from the Opposition, the Sea Watch, European (government) authorities and mainstream media's editorialists. On the other side, there is criticism of the position of Dutch, German, and European governments, accused of abandoning Italy in the face of migrants' invasion. Other two important themes, which will grow in importance in the following days, are the sovereignty of the state, rule of law and security, and the deceptiveness or instrumentality of the humanitarian posture, voiced by the right and sometimes the 5 Stars Movement, at the time Salvini's government partner, and their supporters. A couple of collateral narratives, namely the possibility of building a wall between Italy and Slovenia to stop the Balkan route (another quote from Salvini) and assessments of new migrant smugglers' strategies (on the part of *Il Fatto Quotidiano*), add to the representation of the Government strategy as a defensive bastion against illegal migrants' invasion.

A third narrative stage, as the Sea Watch 3 is now in front of Lampedusa, at a distance of about 500 metres from land, halted by Guardia di Finanza as the Government is not granting permission to land. This phase of awaiting sees the heating of the political clash.

On days three and four we have a third narrative stage, as the Sea Watch 3 is now in front of Lampedusa, at a distance of about 500 metres from land, halted by Guardia di Finanza as the Government is not granting permission to land. This phase of awaiting sees the heating of the political clash, with five Members of Parliament from the Opposition boarding the ship.

The objectives were twofold: to manifest an institutional opposition to the violations of the rule of law, and to facilitate with [our] physical presence the solution and therefore the disembarkation of the people. [...] there were reporters who rented small boats, who went around the Sea Watch because they wanted to have an image, something... so the thing mounted a lot in those days. I tried to communicate as objectively and institutionally as possible, giving an account of what was happening. [...] we were starting from a disproportion of the narrators, let's say, that faced each other. (Member of Parliament, *+Europa*, IT_I_4)

MPs additional objectives were to assess migrants' health conditions and, as we may infer from this extract and from the ongoing debate, to give more voice to the need of disembarking people in strong distress. 'The situation on board is no longer sustainable,' one of them tweeted. In reaction, statements and journalistic comments polemic against the MPs on board, who 'take selfies on the Sea Watch' (*Il Giornale*, June, 29, 2019, 1), against Europe not taking side with the Italian government and, above all, arguments questioning the humanitarian nature of Rackete's action grew in number. The bulk of them was provided by the right-wing *Il Giornale* that contested the definition of civil disobedience for the choice of this 'outlaw [*fuorilegge*]' and attributed a double standard to her supporters in politics and the media who do not care for Italy and other types of victim. To give strength to these arguments, there is the news that Carola Rackete is investigated by Agrigento Public Prosecutor's Office for aiding and abetting illegal immigration and violating the Navigation Code—for having entered Italian territorial waters despite being ordered to stop by the authorities. She will be interrogated, while the GdF is already searching the ship. This criminal investigation is mentioned in the headline of 12 news items, while a specular event, this time seeing the Minister of Interior in the part of the culprit, is mentioned in only one news headline, by *Il Fatto Quotidiano*: Rome Public Prosecutor's Office opened a file on the possibility of the crime of kidnapping migrants in the Sea Watch 3 in response to the complaint by the Ombudsman for Prisoners' Rights. This different coverage may be explained considering both the sources routinely used by journalists and the inner logic of the emerging narrative (more on this in section 2.2.c).

I didn't remember this investigation on Salvini and Sea Watch in Rome. When you follow a landing, you constantly dialogue with the prefecture, the police station, which will then organise the landing. You're in constant dialogue with the Red Cross, you're in dialogue with the NGO people themselves. So in the case of Rackete [...] when they cross the line and therefore enter Italian waters, they violate the decree. So we pay a lot of attention to the work of the Agrigento public prosecutor's office, because it had territorial jurisdiction. That's why we pay a lot of attention to its work. (Journalist, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, IT_1_2)

Retrospectively, at least one journalist seems to recognize the newsworthiness of the investigation on Salvini: 'I honestly don't remember, otherwise we would have written about it, also because Salvini had two similar trials later, the Gregoretti one and the Open Arms one, so if he had been investigated for the Sea Watch...' (Journalist, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, IT_1_2)

During this stage, a collateral narrative was more prominent than others: the short reference to this or that 'ghost landing,' that is migrants that were making for hundreds of undisturbed arrivals at the same time when Italy was erecting a maritime wall in a symbolic fight to the death between the two main contenders. This paradoxical situation was noticed in a few news stories, but it was never the core of a reflection about what kind of 'emergency' the media and the political arena are actually dealing with.

The fourth and last stage in the narrative progression we are examining was triggered, again, by a Carola Rackete's initiative. On 29 June, with a rapid manoeuvre, she circumvented the GdF blockade for a second time and arrived at the dock. A Guardia di Finanza patrol boat tried to block the Sea Watch (weighing 600 tons) by getting between the ship and the quay during the manoeuvre to approach the pier. When the officers saw that the Sea Watch was not stopping, they quickly moved their boat away. They would later say that they had feared for their lives. Several people present applauded the arrival at the dock, while others showered the crew with insults. Rackete was arrested, her organization fined and the ship confiscated.

The episode was served in the news together with two competing narratives: in one of these Rackete, backed by other religious, civil society and political voices, explained her choice with the need to avoid suicides and apologised to the GdF Commander for the risky docking. In the other, the Sea Watch 3 Captain was accused for a pirate action that put the lives of five men on the small GdF patrol boat at risk. While opinions were split between those supporting and those critical of her action, the chronicle put the 'dangerous' (*TG1, Corriere della Sera*) 'reckless' (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*), 'risky' (*TG5, Corriere della Sera*), 'pirate-like' (*TG5*) manoeuvre

centre stage. According to *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, the financiers could have been ‘smashed,’ and the ‘ramming’ (in the words of *Corriere della Sera* and *Il Giornale*) was not a ‘massacre by a whisker’ (*Il Giornale*) (the video available on the Internet only shows the side of the Sea Watch leaning against the other boat). News publications that had been on opposite sides when it came to commenting the NGO’s initiatives, were somewhat aligned in regard to the definition of the fact, as it came from the GdF, an institutional source that is hardly questioned by newspapers such as *Corriere della Sera* e *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, both with good contacts within institutions that are valuable sources for crime and court reporting.

Overall, while the narrative stages were triggered by decisions on the part of the Sea Watch, the Government, or judicial bodies, the news did not just follow events but, and perhaps most importantly, reported statements, comments and opinions. Commentary and facts are, in fact, hardly distinguishable, as in such a polarised situation hard facts were enlisted in the service of pre-established positions. Apart from factual updates about the situation on the ship or at the port, breaking news reporting the opening of an investigation on the NGO or the decision of the Strasbourg Court, and apart from journalistic portraits of Carola Rackete, in the other news facts and comments were practically inseparable. A decision by the government or the NGO – a ‘fact’ – would usually come together with a declaration that announced and justified it. Alternatively, the news was all about a political representative’s or other opinion makers’ critique or approval of such decision. As a consequence, we can summarise the main narratives that characterised the coverage of the crisis only using, in some cases, categories that mix facts and positioning towards them. Besides, being TV and, especially, newspapers news composed of multiple facts, declarations and comments, we had to attribute each news item to more than one class and to elaborate categories so wide that they regroup various narratives and claims into ample topics (Table 2.2).

TABLE 2.2. Topics in the coverage of the Sea Watch 3 crisis, 25-30 June, 2019. Absolute values⁷

Humanitarian action and/or justification	30
Critique of humanitarian action and/or justification	23
Critique of government’s action and/or justification	22
(Comments on) EU institutions’s and governments’ position	22
The situation on the Sea Watch 3 and at the port	15
Judicial investigation	17
Judicial decision	11
Government’s action and/or justification	11
Portrait of Rackete	7
TOTAL	158

In the table, we see that humanitarian actions and their announcements, including comments supporting those actions, received a good share of coverage, while Government’s actions and/or justifications much less. In part, this is explained by the fact that Governments’ decisions had been taken well before the peak of the crisis, so that the initiative was mainly on the part of the NGO. Its agency, though often criticised, and the related communication provided its perspective ample space. For another part, we should consider that the Government’s point of view was not limited to its actions and announcements concerning the implementation of its deliberations, but was present in the many reprovals of the stances manifested by European governments and also in the many news critical of the humanitarian position, often inspired by Salvini’s comments.

7. The number of narratives is higher than the number of news items (90) as each news could include up to three narratives.

The coverage described above varied along political lines. On one side, *Il Giornale* published, alone, half of all the news critical of humanitarian actions and/or justifications, 7 out of 11 news about the decision of the Strasbourg court to reject migrants' appeal, and remained almost silent about critiques of government's actions. The arguments that we find in the newspaper's commentary, and in that of the voices it gives more space to, draw on longstanding master narratives. To begin with, the left follows a policy of open doors to immigration. In order to give the right of citizenship to irregular foreigners, it supports NGOs and smugglers and has knowingly decided to circumvent the laws, not caring about its fellow citizens in difficulty. Besides, the left has ceded sovereignty to the EU, which has abandoned us and now defends Rackete. Finally, migrants and NGOs want to arrive right *here*, attracted by weak and permissive policies.

On the other side, *Corriere della Sera* and *Il Fatto Quotidiano* gave the most space to humanitarian actions, two thirds of all the news items in this category. They, and especially the latter, had a similar share of news that are critical of government's actions. *Corriere della Sera* dedicated also, alone, half of the news regarding the situation on the Sea Watch or at the Port and half of the portraits of Carola Rackete, whom it called 'Carola' in an attempt to make her 'one of us.' We can detect some longstanding master narratives in their coverage too. The most cited is the speculation that these standoffs on the part of Salvini are just ways to achieve political gain, so much so that phantom landings are tolerated and more migrants are arriving than during the time of the centre-left government. Both newspapers, however, share the narrative about EU's neglect of Italy's legitimate calls for more support and international solidarity.

Both *TG1* and *TG5* were somewhat in-between, with the former leaning a little toward the model provided by *Corriere della Sera* and *Il Fatto Quotidiano* and the latter bending towards *Il Giornale*.

b) Characters, emotions, and settings

The analysis of the characters portrayed by Italian news media clearly shows that the clash between the Italian Minister of the Interior Matteo Salvini and the captain of the Sea Watch 3 Carola Rackete was the main story. Together, these two characters cover the 34.5% of the characters we have pinpointed. Looking at general categories (Table 2.3), the prevailing character is NGOs: 89 times out of 259 (34%). It is followed by political actors (25.4 %) and by migrants (20.8%). This ranking is maintained in every news outlet analysed, with a clear prevalence of NGOs in the press, and a slight prevalence of political actors in TV news.

TABLE 2.3. Types of characters by news outlet, 25-30 June, 2019. Absolute values⁸

OUTLET	NGO	POLITICAL ACTORS	MIGRANTS	OTHER	TOTAL
<i>Il Giornale</i>	25	18	12	14	69
<i>Il Fatto Quotidiano</i>	19	15	13	11	58
<i>Corriere della Sera</i>	23	13	12	7	55
<i>TG1</i>	14	14	10	6	44
<i>TG5</i>	8	11	7	4	30
TOTAL	89	71	54	42	256

8. The number of characters is higher than the number of news items (90) as each news could include up to three main characters.

Migrants systematically represented the third character of the story. One of the clearest demonstrations of the secondary role occupied by migrants comes from images. The day after the disembarkation, newspapers published pictures of Rackete getting off the Sea Watch and of her arrest, but they did not publish pictures of migrants. Only in one photograph two migrants are barely visible on the gangway as they disembark (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*, Image 2.1).

IMAGE 2.1. The disembarkation



Source: *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, June 30, 2019, 2.

How are these characters described and labelled and who are they exactly? Starting from the most represented, NGOs, the main distinction is about stories that take the boat or the non-governmental Organisation itself as the character, and stories that focus on people. There's a clear trend in personifying NGOs through the choice of a human character that amount to 69% of the instances. The character personified is Carola Rackete 56 times out of 59, while two times is Carola's father, and only one time it is another member of the crew. This trend is particularly strong in the press and the *Corriere della Sera* takes the lead here, narrating the NGO through a personalizing strategy 20 times out of 23. On the contrary, *TG1* is the only news outlet analysed that reversed the ordinary trend, using the boat or the organization as lead character.

Labels go from simply naming the boat, the NGO or Rackete, to judgments, heroisations and denigrations. The German nationality of the NGO and of the captain is often mentioned, and the insistence on this aspect (that includes the Dutch flag) looks like a sign of indulgence with the narrative of Italy left alone by other EU countries. Why insist on mentioning the 'other' nationality of the rescuers if not to distance them from the Italian public and systematically allude to an Us vs. Them scenario that sees European institutions and European countries – rather than migrants themselves – as the 'others'? It is worth remembering that the *Mare Nostrum* operation (2013-2014), which had been over for five years, gave rise to a patriotic narrative of search and rescue in the Italian media, with a great emphasis on the human qualities of 'our rescuers,' compared to other countries that left Italy alone in search and rescue operations, also failing to relocate refugees. In this line, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, a newspaper that clearly rejected Salvini's propaganda, was however particularly active in identifying NGOs through the use of national labels.

The derogatory language is produced through several labels such as ‘delinquent,’ ‘criminal,’ ‘humanitarian pirate,’ ‘reception’s Talibans,’ ‘little braggart,’ etc. Indeed, these and other epithets mostly come from Salvini’s declarations, and are used by all the outlets analysed, with the only exception of *TG1*, but – from a qualitative point of view – they’re used with different intentions. *Il Giornale* used them directly, adding some epithets to those quoted by Salvini’s declarations and social media communication, showing a total agreement with him, while *Il Fatto Quotidiano* repeated these labels with the clear intention of showing Salvini’s political and moral weakness. *Corriere della Sera* quoted Salvini’s videos and speeches without further comments. Finally, *TG5* stayed middle way between the ‘neutral’ strategy of *Corriere della Sera* and the pro-Salvini coverage of *Il Giornale*. An example comes from the 26 June coverage: the TV-news outlet showed a video delivered by Sea Watch in which we see and hear Rackete explaining her decision to enter in the Lampedusa port. It is a respectful speech and she never mentions Salvini, but the journalist comments saying: ‘You just saw the young, 31 year old captain of the Sea Watch that so hard faces the Minister of the Interior, Salvini, to land the 42 migrants.’

IMAGE 2.2. ‘Mare Mostro’: the cartoon plays on the expression Mare Nostrum, which was the name of the Italian-led search and rescue operation, turning it into ‘monster sea’



Source: *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, June 30, 2019, 10.

Other interesting labels used for Rackete convey generation, gender, race, nation and class. Here again there are important differences. While some stress the fact she’s a young female (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*, *Corriere della Sera*), others (*Il Giornale*) use preferably race, nation, gender and class, following Salvini’s populist propaganda that describes Rackete as a rich and bored white German girl that follows a leftist ideology. What is interesting to remark here is that while building either the portrait of the hero or that of the villain, the press exploits the axes of difference and plays with symbolic and social boundaries. For some, the fact she’s a woman looks key. Others see this captain as a white privileged rich German girl who ‘uses’ migrants against the Italian population.

While in TV news the characters seemed to represent a State issue and State borders (a legal question personified by a Minister and a NGO), on the press the personification of characters serves social and sometimes national issues and speaks about social boundaries (a cultural-political question personified by a powerful male and a less powerful female, or by the Italian people and a rich white foreigner bringing us poor blacks, or a cultured, cosmopolitan girl clashing with a conservative Italian adult). The ideological weaponisation of race, class, gender, and generation nurtures different discourses that suggest different ideas of the nation and its values.

On Twitter, Rackete is described as a hero or a villain more for what she did than for what she is. The messages mostly refer to the fact that she has saved lives, they recall the theme of solidarity and sometimes Christian charity. It is through the reference to the action carried out that the heroisation of Rackete is created on Twitter, but even in constructing the character of the enemy, Twitter messages refer more often to action (here interpreted as illegal) than to identity.

What about politicians? As seen above, the main character here is Matteo Salvini. He makes for 49.3% of total representations of political characters. Other European governments follow with a 26.7%, and the Italian political opposition is the third category (14.1%). It is worth noticing that, among members of the Italian government, Salvini is the only character on which the media narratives focus, with the marginal exception of Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte who appears three times and only on *TG1*. In fact, with the partial exclusion of *TG1*, we can say that Salvini monopolised representations of the government in the media narratives.

However, we also noticed that this replacement is a consequence of distinct strategies in different news outlets. While for some it is a way to give strength to its role as a government leader, for others the characterisation of Salvini and the non-characterisation of other members of the government allows to better separate Salvini's acts from those of the other party that formed the government, the M5S. These distinctive strategies become visible if we compare the ways Salvini is labelled in different outlets. While *TG5* and *Il Giornale* describe Salvini through his institutional role, others – and especially *Il Fatto Quotidiano* – never mention his role, and describe Salvini's actions by labelling the man ironically, by often using the nickname 'the captain' that his social media team created for him. The Minister of the Interior becomes here a sort of fake captain who attacks the (real) captain Carola Rackete, while the opposite happens on *Il Giornale* (Images 2.3 and 2.4).

IMAGE 2.3. 'Go on captain' in male – *Il Giornale* – vs. female – *La Repubblica*, centre-left – grammatical form



Source: *Il Giornale*, June 28, 2019, 1.

IMAGE 2.4. 'The anti-Italian left exalts and finances captain Carola'

Source: *Il Giornale*, June 28, 2019, 2.

Along with (other) members of the Government, also the Italian political opposition is rarely raised to a significant narrative role. Indeed, it never becomes a character in three news outlets: *TG1*, *TG5* and *Corriere della Sera*. Even when it happens, in the other two outlets, its role in the story is not that of a strong opponent to Salvini's political actions. *Il Giornale* represents the Democratic Party, lead party of the centre-left coalition, as a loser who is desperately seeking a hero to follow and who accidentally finds it in Carola Rackete, the newspaper's story's villain. In addition, the representation of European governments and their members only produces weak characters. They just become characters by reacting to Salvini's claims or by commenting on the opportunity of relocating the migrants elsewhere in the EU.

We could speculate that the absence of a political figure who clearly contested the actions taken by the Minister of the Interior led to Rackete's overexposure and to the news media insistence of a Salvini vs. Rackete storyline. However, one might also wonder whether things have gone the other way around. Having already found the two contenders of the story, media stopped looking for other characters. Whatever the causes, the main consequence is relevant. Salvini's propaganda succeeded in setting the storyline: an Italian politician alone facing a foreign NGO, its boat and its foreign captain.

Quantitatively speaking, migrants are the third more prominent character. But who are the migrants described by the Italian news media in the coverage of this event? When migrants are treated as a character in the story, this character is very often rendered as an indistinct group. This is the way the rescued migrants are portrayed in all the cases by *TG1*, *TG5* and *Il Giornale*. All these three news outlets do not make any effort to inform on who are the people on the boat, while *Corriere della Sera* and *Il Fatto Quotidiano* often mention the presence of minors, women, pregnant women and people in distress or sick.

Looking at labels and settings, TV news only mention one setting each ('under a blazing sun' and 'a prison' – a metaphor for the boat – and use mainly the label 'migrants,' together with 'human lives,' 'human beings,' 'passengers' and 'people on board'). The press shows more complexity. The settings are both more frequent and richer in details, letting the public imagine scenes of their daily life on the boat ('a cramped environment,' 'mattresses and blankets soaked in saltwater,' 'long queue for the toilet,' 'short in mineral water and food,' etc). *Il Giornale* is an exception: it only uses one setting, the same of *TG1* ('a prison').

The press also uses more labels than TV news, and these labels have a clear humanitarian intention ('wretches,' 'desperate,' 'poor,' 'exhausted,' etc.). However, the three newspapers show again important differences on this point. While *Corriere della Sera* uses lots of humanitarian labels but no political/legal labels, *Il Fatto Quotidiano* and *il Giornale* frequently use political/legal labels: to stress their rights in the first case ('asylum seekers'), to stress their alleged illegality in the second ('Illegal migrants' – *clandestini*). This point is crucial: migrants as a character are either very vague (these people are migrants), either victimised (these people are suffering, there are minors, there are pregnant women, they're short in food and water, etc.), either illegalized (they are illegal migrants). With the exception of *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, their rights are out of the frame. They are the background in the Salvini-Rackete clash, or the humanitarian emergency that led to the clash, but they are not treated as social and political actors.

Coherently, the representation of social action shows that migrants are acted upon much more than actors and that their agency is mainly limited to the will to land, while in a few occasions they also 'ask,' 'take' and 'appeal' (for landing). In sum, the processes in which they are involved are mainly material, behavioural, or semiotic (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). There are a few mental processes (perceptions, emotions, thoughts), mostly associated to the feeling of exhaustion they are proving. Other possible mental processes (i.e., desire, feel, hope) are not mentioned.

In addition, the analysis of migrants' emotions reinforces this argument. The emotion attributed to migrants is 'sadness' 28 times out of 32, two times are 'compassion,' one 'fear' and one 'happiness.' *Corriere della Sera* and *Il Fatto Quotidiano* use this emotion (and in general talk of migrant emotions) more than TV news outlets, and particularly *il Giornale* and *TG1* make a very little use of migrants' emotions.

In general terms, there are no references to other emotions felt by migrants, such as anger, further confirming a journalistic attitude oriented towards pity or indifference. As, most of the time, there were no journalists on the ship and information came only from Sea Watch sources, media outlets marked their differences mainly by emphasising a compassionate and humanitarian narrative, or by a prevalent indifference to migrants' conditions. However, an almost total absence of the use of the label 'asylum seekers' and a fundamental indifference to migrants' trajectories after disembarkation emerge as a general attitude from all investigated outlets.

Nevertheless, migrants' sadness was used to generate a feeling of compassion in the audience. In fact, of all the emotions that analysed news aimed at inspiring in the audience, compassion ranks second (23 times). Anger comes first, with 50 occurrences out of 94. Here again, *Corriere della Sera* and *Il Fatto Quotidiano* were more willing to use the register of compassion: 18 times out of 23; 9 times each; as opposed to none out of 17 for *il Giornale*, 3 out of 7 for *TG5*, and 3 out of 5 for *TG1*.

Although this might have been an expected result at this point, it is still impressive that *il Giornale* did not once use emotions of compassion or sadness to address his audience. It preferred to mobilise anger (17 times, always against the NGO, Rackete and her supporters). It also mobilised happiness 6 times, which is more than all the other news outlets taken together, but only in two very specific moments, that is to show satisfaction for the Strasbourg Court decision to reject the shipwrecked sailors appeal and to rejoice in Rackete's arrest (Image 2.5).

Migrants as a character are either very vague (these people are migrants), either victimised (these people are suffering, there are minors, there are pregnant women, they're short in food and water, etc.), either illegalized (they are illegal migrants). With the exception of *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, their rights are out of the frame.

IMAGE 2.5. 'She helped illegal immigrants and put the lives of financiers at risk, but Europe defends her'

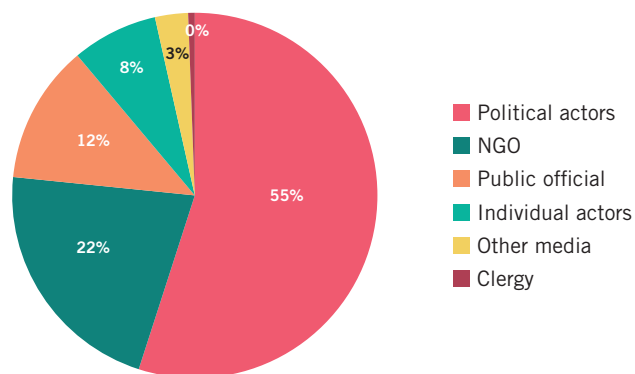


Source: *Il Giornale*, June 30, 2019, 1.

c) Voices

Verbal reactions reported by newspapers and TV news show a clear preponderance of political actors. These cover 55% of the statements made by actors other than journalists (Graph 2.1). 21% of all the statements comes from the League party (almost exclusively from party leader Matteo Salvini). Another 16% of the claims comes from Italian opposition parties, 12% from other EU Countries, and 5% are made by other government Italian actors (i.e., Prime Minister, other Ministers).

GRAPH 2.1. Types of verbal reactions reported by mainstream media. N=171



Matteo Salvini alone covered 20% of all verbal reactions reported by the five news outlets, while Carola Rackete 17%. This means that all the different voices that fall into the category of the Italian political opposition are less represented than Rackete's, and of course Salvini's as well. This fact provides a further snapshot of the personified duel-like narrative adopted by the media for this event.

Differences among news outlets are significant. *TG1* gave voice to political actors in 72.4% of the cases in which it reproduced verbal reactions but it was also the one that offered a more composite picture of political voices. *TG5* devoted 63% of its reactions to political voices. In short, TV news proportionally give more space to political claims than newspapers do (the average is 55%).

News organisations, on the other hand, gave a similar space to little more room migrants' verbal reactions: one interview each, mainly provided by the same video produced by the NGO while it was still off Lampedusa. However, news media lack of interest in migrants is shown also by the fact that they did not collect any interview after the disembarkation, as we illustrated about pictures portraying them. In addition to these five entries from rescued migrants, only three more came from non-white actors: one from Maryan Ismail, an Italian-Somali anthropologist, quoted by *Il Giornale* for her critical stance towards the actions taken by Rackete; and twice from Valentina Mazzacurati, an Italian woman with a migration background from Rwanda and also a member of the League, who attacked Rackete in a popular radio programme. In the speech, she accused Rackete of lack of femininity, through phrases like the following: 'She doesn't represent women; I don't feel represented by a woman dressed like a slob.' Both *Corriere della Sera* and *Il Fatto Quotidiano* devoted space to the statement.

The gender distribution of these verbal reactions is interesting. Out of 94 political voices, 88 were voices of men. Even the public officials who appeared in news media were men, and a man was also Rackete's lawyer who had been interviewed several times. Even among Rackete's family, media only interviewed the father.

Journalists' attitudes towards these statements were mainly neutral (143 out of 171), as were the portrayals of those making them. Reliability was also rarely questioned. TV news was never critical or supportive, but always neutral. Among newspapers, the attitude was critical in 18 cases, while supportive in 10 cases. *Corriere della Sera* and *Il Fatto Quotidiano* shared an equal number of critical and supportive attitudes, followed by an equal number of negative and positive portrayals. *Il Giornale* stands out with an unbalanced ratio towards a critical attitude. The critical attitudes of the former were mainly directed towards Salvini for his disrespectful communication, while they were supportive towards Rackete and her choice to force the blockade. Criticisms and negative portraits by *Il Giornale* were instead addressed to NGOs, Italian opposition politicians, left-wing media and to Emmanuel Macron, while the supportive attitude was addressed to Salvini.

We can call these frames Neutral, Sovereignty, and Humanity, a very frequent typology in the study of discourse on migration, although it sometimes comes with different labels (Van Gorp 2005).

d) Frames

We can better grasp the political inflection given by the different news outlets to the case considering how they framed the story. By this we mean how they highlighted some aspects from the ongoing events promoting a particular problem definition (Entman 1993). We decided to distinguish between three frames, where the legitimisation of actions and statements and their implicit moral evaluation was at stake. This has been an inductive process: we focused on legitimisation because this was the most prominent transversal feature in the news considered. We can call these frames Neutral, Sovereignty, and Humanity, a very frequent typology in the study of discourse on migration, although it sometimes comes with different labels (Van Gorp 2005). In the Neutral frame we classified straight, fact-based news depicting a conflict between two opposite sides (Government vs. Sea Watch; Italy vs. Europe) or with a balanced presentation of humanitarian and sovereignty arguments, which was sometimes exemplified with the metaphor of the 'tug-of-war' between Salvini and Rackete (*TG5*, June 26, 2019). News stories in this frame, while giving an angle to the story, for example defining

the issue as a clash between opposing sides, do not (de)-legitimise any particular action. In the Sovereignty frame, we classified news emphasising the primacy of the state's rule of law and the illegitimate nature of any challenge to it, which was expressed with metaphors about piracy or war, and with expressions such as 'sly move [*mossa furbesca*]' (*Il Giornale*, June 26, 2019). Finally, in the Humanitarian frame, we categorised stories highlighting the preeminence of human rights over other considerations, sometimes describing the Sea Watch 3 adventure as an 'Odyssey' (*TG5*, June 26, 2019), and drawing attention to the suffering of migrants on board, to the point of speaking of a 'ship of despair' (*TG1*, June 28, 2019). However, considering the different characters made more prominent and their narrative function, regularly actualized presenting them as being on the 'right' ('Helper') or on the 'bad' ('Opponent') side, we could distinguish three sub-frames in the Human and four in the Sovereignty domains (Table 2.4).

TABLE 2.4. Frames in the coverage of the Sea Watch 3 crisis, 25-30 June, 2019. Percentages. N=90⁹

NEUTRAL		30.0
SOVEREIGNTY, OF WHICH:		37.1
Opponent: NGO	14.0	
Helper: Government	9.9	
Opponent: Europe	7.4	
Opponent: Opposition	5.8	
HUMANITY, OF WHICH:		32.9
Helper: NGO	17.3	
Opponent: Government	12.3	
Helper: Europe	3.3	
TOTAL		100

From this table, we can draw some conclusions. In terms of overall bias, there was an almost even distribution between the various frames, with a slight prevalence of the Sovereignty frame. In this, we can see four protagonists at centre stage, of which the Sea Watch, as a challenge to the Government's deliberations, is particularly prominent. In addition, European governments and institutions, in their conflict with Italian authorities, and to a lesser extent the Opposition, play the same role, while the Italian government plays the part of the hero, or Helper. News in this frame have been nurtured by the legal framework put in place by the Government and the political and judicial decisions that followed, which could only but construct Sea Watch's actions as an illegal defiance. Sure enough, Salvini used the metaphor of the sacred borders and developed the similarity between the imminent forcing of the naval blockade by the ship and the traffic offence committed by any citizen in a car, to fuel indignation through the idea that rules must be respected by everyone.

In the field of the Humanity frame, the Sea Watch is even more prominent, being the positive hero in half of that news. The government is the opponent of the hero but still plays a major role. Europe is much less prominent, despite making the news especially during the last day, and the Opposition is absent.

9. Each news item could be classified using up to two frames. However, percentages have been calculated out of the number of news items, in order to maintain the right proportion between news with a neutral frame (that was always the only one) and news in the Sovereignty or Humanity frame, that could have two different frames (almost always different combinations of helper and opponent inside the same frame).

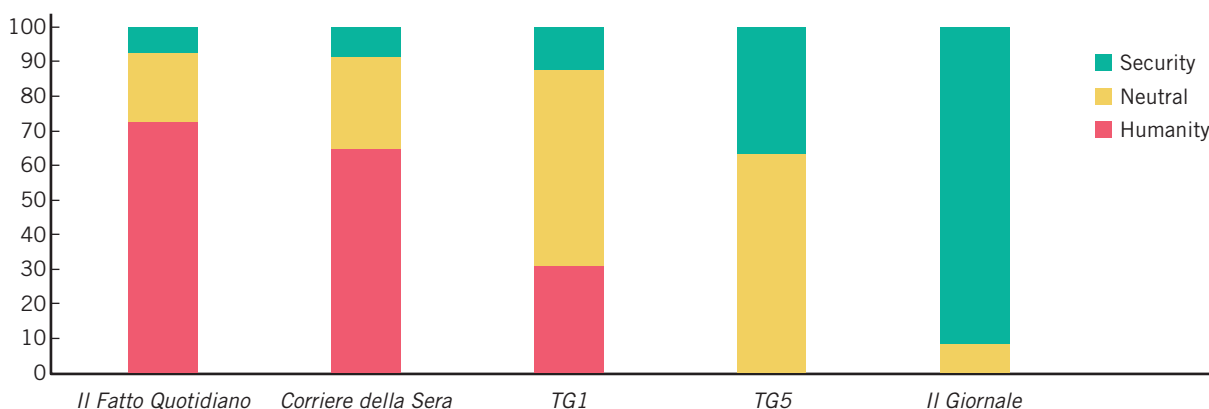
In other words, the participation of European governments and the Italian parliamentary opposition to the humanitarian side was the reason to attack them on the part of the enemy side (they both appear often as opponents in the Sovereignty frame) but was not sufficient to enrol them as heroes in the Humanity frame. Newspapers taking the humanitarian side had just one hero, Carola Rackete. Her helpers were seen with some suspicion, being perceived as showing their ‘humanity’ only when it was not their business (in the case of Europe) or for their own political gains (in the case of centre-left political representatives, to which none of the news outlets considered is particularly close).

This overall description of the various frames levels a reality that is, instead, heavily differentiated. We can see in Graph 2.2 the distribution of frames within each news publication. The highest number of news in the Sovereignty frame was published by two news organization (*Il Giornale* and *TG5*) owned by Silvio Berlusconi’s media empire, itself a political ally of Salvini’s League. On the other side, we see two newspapers that, for different reasons, were sceptical of the government’s political line. In particular, *Il Fatto Quotidiano* was positioned in a slightly contradictory way, as its pro-government line was contrasted by an ‘anti-sovereignist’ stance and by journalists and editors-in-chief who had left-wing political leanings.

... even though it is recognised from the outside as a very ‘grillino’ [pro-5 Stars Movement] newspaper, in some respects it is not so [...] having brought in many people who were at L’Unità, at il Manifesto, it has a very strong left-wing soul. So the beatings that were given to Salvini were because most of the editors of the interior were centre-left, so to speak, and therefore in favour of the NGOs. This captain was saying ‘no’ to Salvini: for us, who were a newspaper against the sovereignists, it was going very well. (Journalist, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, IT_1_2)

That newspaper was very polarized. They may have opened the newspaper in one way and then Massari’s [journalist at *Il Fatto Quotidiano*] pieces were in another. They were defending the government, but likely Massari would have put Salvini on the ship too. It was a political affair. (*Corriere della Sera*)

GRAPH 2.2. Frames in the coverage of the Sea Watch 3 crisis by news publication, 25-30 June, 2019. Percentages. N=90



The politicisation of the coverage, especially on the part of newspapers, is clear also from the news genres they used. 43% of newspapers news were either news analyses, interviews, or, mostly, editorials. Together, these three genres were not much less than news reports. In the case of *Il Giornale*, one third of all the news could be characterized as editorial, despite the blurred status of some of them, where chronicle and political comments were hardly distinguishable.

e) *Narratives and commentary in the social media*

In addition to the 90 news items appeared in newspapers and TV, we considered the 100 most retweeted messages on the Twitter platform that had the keyword ‘Rackete,’ ‘Carola,’ ‘SeaWatch,’ ‘Sea Watch,’ ‘Lampedusa,’ or ‘Salvini’¹⁰ in the hashtag or in the text in the same period. In the six days considered for qualitative analysis, the engagement – measured considering each message’s number of retweets – ranged between 5,025 retweets (and 15,622 likes) for the top message and 443 (and 1,473 likes) for the bottom one. The most retweeted messages were (96 out of 100) concentrated on 29 June 2019, the day the Sea Watch 3 forced the blockade and landed at Lampedusa, and on 30 June, when comments on the episode continued. For many reasons, this was the climax of the affair. The decision to enter the port, the dramatic moments of the landing, the sexist insults addressed at the ship captain were all triggers of passions that had been building up for several days. The conversation on Twitter was a commentary on: a) the events, b) the political reactions that the events solicited, and c) the portraits and the comments provided by everyday people (for example at the port), journalists and social media users. Hence, for each tweet, it has been easy to distinguish between the user’s comment and the target (event or utterance) against which that comment was directed. They are reported on Table 2.5.

TABLE 2.5. Target events and utterances (rows) and comments (columns) on Twitter, 26-30 June 2019. Absolute values¹¹

TARGET NARRATIVES	POSITIVE COMMENTS	NEGATIVE COMMENTS	TOTAL
Events: Rackete’s action	10 Approval	9 Critique	20
Events: Judicial measure	2 Approval	9 Critique	13
Events: Situation on SeaWatch and at the port	6 Rackete hero	1 Humanity instrumental	7
Events: Lampedusa crisis	1 Rackete hero	7 Salvini cynical 2 Shame on Europe 1 Shame on Rackete	11
Reactions: Humanitarian	1 Approval	4 Critique	6
Reactions: Sovereignty	1 Approval	18 Critique	19
Reactions: Foreign country		3 Critique 1 Salvini cynical	4
Commentary: Sexist insults at Rackete		13 Critique	13
Commentary: Portrait of Rackete	3 Rackete hero	2 Shame on Rackete 1 Critique	6
Other			1
TOTAL			100

In the case of comments over Rackete’s action – her entry in the port of Lampedusa – the stake was the supposed criminal nature of her behaviour, and we see ‘innocent’ narratives – based on the premise that lives come first – and ‘guilty’ narratives – based on the predominance of the rule of law or on accusations of having out other lives at risk. On judicial measures, which in most tweets correspond to Rackete’s arrest, the opposition is between critics and supporters of the procedure. The first rely on the narrative of the League’s own crimes, the second are simply expressions of satisfaction. The situation on the Sea Watch 3 or at the

10. We kept only the messages related to the Sea Watch issue.

11. The raw totals are not always the sum of the positive and negative comments as some tweets did not comment on their target narrative. Given the simple structure of Twitter texts, for each Tweet we only classified one target narrative, one comment, and one frame.

port is the occasion to promote or put in question the NGO motivation about the necessity to land migrants on Lampedusa. Comments by critics use narratives that depict the will to land at Lampedusa as whimsical wishes, either because their health and conditions on the ship are fine or because they had other options. On the whole *Lampedusa crisis*, we see different approaches to making sense of the whole issue. On the humanitarian side, many comments point at what is really going on behind the scenes: Salvini's instrumental or diversionary strategies or Europe washes its hands of it. On the Sovereignty side the prevailing narrative is that the solution would be simple, if only Sea Watch was not obsessed at landing at Lampedusa.

'Comments over reactions' in the Humanitarian, Sovereignty and European side are generally caustic remarks about their protagonist's alleged double standards. In this example, we find the use of narratives totally unrelated to the issue of immigration, but still useful for rhetorical purposes, like those about a case of misappropriation of public funds on the part of the League and about an investigation on the crime of child abduction by social workers in a town administered by a centre-left coalition.

Finally, tweets about sexist epithets addressed at Rackete and about her figure, as the media portrayed it, are outraged analyses of the moral abyss into which those responsible for those insults have fallen and heartfelt statements about which side to be on.

As the table shows, comments in the right column, which were critical about the target episode, statement or opinion were three times more numerous than comments of approval (in the left column). Twitter has been used more for the expression of outrage, anger, criticism, sarcasm, or irony than for supporting one's heroes, although that has not been infrequent, with a prevalence of emotions of hope, gratefulness, appreciation, and solidarity (to Carola Rackete and Sea Watch).

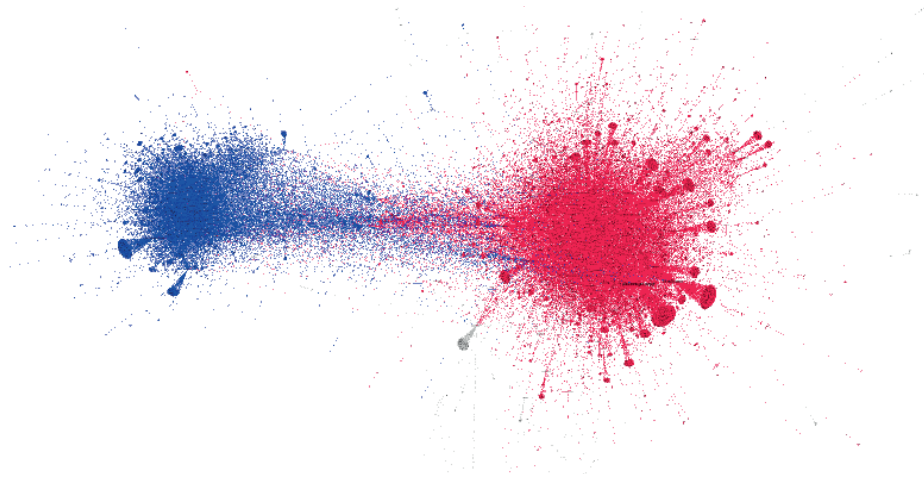
Twitter has been used more for the expression of outrage, anger, criticism, sarcasm, or irony than for supporting one's heroes, although that has not been infrequent, with a prevalence of emotions of hope, gratefulness, appreciation, and solidarity (to Carola Rackete and Sea Watch).

The narratives targeted were practically the same of those covered by the traditional media, even though with a focus on the last days' news. On Twitter, the remarks concerning political reactions and media and political commentary were about as frequent as the ones dedicated to actual events. Half of the Tweets can be qualified as comments over comments (and statements). In particular, outraged comments on the insults addressed at Carola Rackete during her arrival in Lampedusa have been the subject of 13 tweets.

f) Frames and voices in the social media

The distribution of frames in this corpus is quite different from the one regarding mainstream media. Neutral frames are almost absent, as the conversation is very polarized. In Graph 2.3 we can see the network of retweets between users,¹² where nodes (i.e., accounts) inside the blue (Sovereignty) and the red (Humanity) bubbles have a quite endogamic conversation.

12. In the graph representation each node stands for a user and each bridge stands for a retweet relationship linking user A to user B. The graph has been spatially organized with a Force Atlas 2 algorithm, in our case that means that groups of nodes retweeting each other tend to cluster together, while groups of nodes that have little or no contact tend to be pushed apart. The colour of clusters represents different retweet communities. Communities have been calculated with the modularity maximizing approach, but in this specific instance we have increased the resolution to 5 to capture the two main communities.

GRAPH 2.3. Network of retweets on Twitter, 25-30 June 2019**TABLE 2.6. Frames on Twitter, 29-30 June, 2019. Absolute values**

HUMANITY, OF WHICH:		71
Opponent: Government	37	
Opponent: Racists	16	
Helper: NGO	11	
Opponent: Europe	4	
Opponent: Media	2	
Helper: Antiracists	1	
SOVEREIGNTY, OF WHICH:		23
Opponent: NGO	11	
Opponent: Opposition	7	
Opponent: Europe	4	
Helper: Courts	1	
ECONOMY (OPPONENT: GOVERNMENT)		3
NEUTRAL		3
TOTAL		100

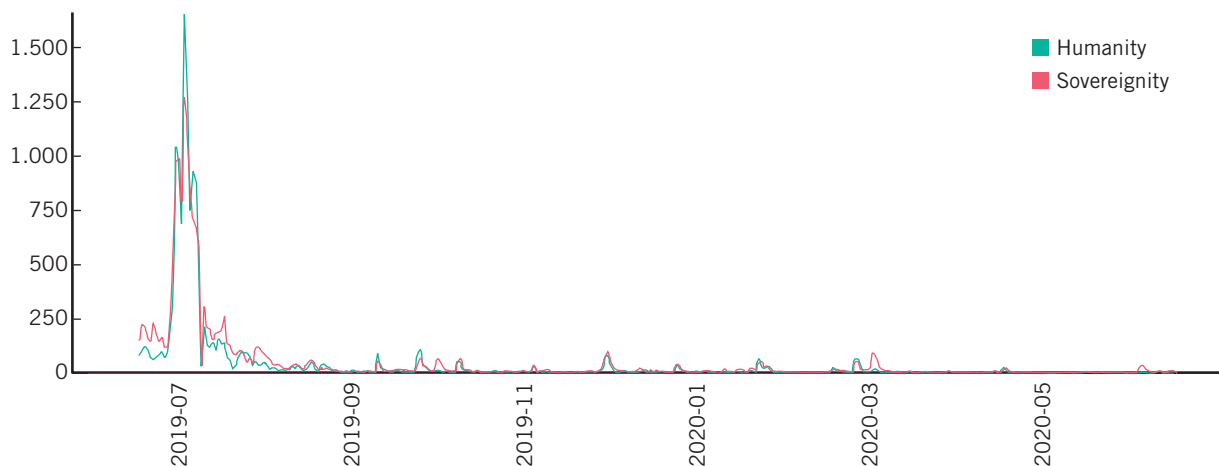
The frame distribution is not only polarised, but also very unbalanced (Table 2.6). The percentage of messages in the Sovereignty frame – stigmatising the Sea Watch and Italian and European politicians who stood up for her – is rather low, making just less than one fourth of the most retweeted messages. Seventy-one per cent of the Twitter commentary, instead, is framed in the humanitarian field – consisting especially of criticism of the government position and of racist comments, but also of support to Rackete’s actions. In addition, three messages criticised the Government’s alleged instrumental strategy using an economy frame.

In terms of engagement, the distribution is even more skewed, as messages in the Humanity frame (plus Economy) amount to a total number of retweets – that is, of intentional actions to spread the message – which is 4.6 times the number regarding messages in the Sovereignty frame (99,179 vs. 21,628). In addition, the appreciation of the tweets in the Humanity and Economy frame taken together is higher than in the Sovereignty frame in the same proportion (348,888 vs. 76,152 likes).

It is not only a question of number of messages and magnitude of engagement, but also of degree of mobilization in each ‘fan base,’ that is among followers of each Twitter account. The followers of tweeters in the Sovereignty frame seem to have engaged with the latter tweets much less than in the other field: only an average of 1.4‰ of followers decided to retweet the messages coming from accounts in this frame. For comparison, an average of 4.4‰ followers retweeted messages in the Humanity or Economic frame.¹³ In other words, the criminalization of the behaviour of the Sea Watch does not seem to have thrilled the supporters of those who carried it forward as much as the resistance to it mobilized followers on the other side.

However, this mobilization did not last beyond the dramatic days of the approaching and landing of the Sea Watch 3. If we extend the analysis to the messages tweeted over one year¹⁴ since the beginning of the crisis, we find a different picture. In Graph 2.4 we can see an estimate¹⁵ of the trend of the two dominant frames. The Humanity frame, in blue, reigned during the peak period and in a few other moments, but after the peak, it was the Sovereignty frame (in yellow) that prevailed most often.

GRAPH 2.4. Estimate of the one-year trend of the humanity and sovereignty frame on twitter



We can understand why looking at the most retweeted accounts. If we consider the kingmakers of the conversation, that is the 10 most retweeted usernames, during the peak days Salvini was alone in the Sovereignty frame. All the other nine were clearly aligned with the Humanity frame (apart from the Sea Watch press office, we find a composite coalition of writers, professionals, one journalist and one politician). Salvini’s Twitter account, powered by a very active social media team and counting on almost 1.5 million followers, succeeded in pushing ten among our sample’s one hundred most retweeted messages. Notwithstanding, with a few allies – mainly politicians, right-wing journalists and a few influencers – he could not compete with less resourced but very active, numerous, and varied

-
13. We computed the ratio between the average of retweets in each frame and divided it by the average of followers in that frame.
 14. In the extraction of the one-year database, we dropped the ‘Salvini’ keyword, as it would have included many unrelated messages.
 15. To estimate the trend, we considered the daily activity (tweets published and retweets received) of the nodes that were attributed to the Sovereignty or the Humanity frame during the peak days. We assumed that their positioning on the issue did not change over time. Then, in order to assess the goodness of our estimate, we calculated these nodes’ daily share of activity among all the nodes messaging on the issue over the one-year period, which include those not classified in the peak period because not active. As their share was, on average, between 55 and 80% during the first 10 months, we consider this a valid estimate.

adversaries, energized by the spectacle of David outsmarting Goliath, or – to use the metaphors employed by *Il Fatto Quotidiano* (June 29, 3) – Antigone vs. Creon, or Beauty and the Beast.

After the peak, though, things changed. Among the 10 most retweeted usernames in our one-year database, we now find six accounts messaging in the Sovereignty frame, all of them politicians or right wing news websites and journalists, and just four in the Humanity frame. Salvini's share still makes for almost half of those retweets⁸ but, in the long cue of the discussion, he is supported by other partners. On the other side, the Sea Watch is sided by one writer and two influencers, but no politicians. Together, these four accounts have a base of just 288,000 followers, one fifth of Salvini's alone. The most popular Twitter users in the Humanity frame are not on the affair anymore. The effervescence that characterised the crisis is over, the issue is not under the spotlight anymore, and the right-wing political and media galaxy that made a political bet on the refugees issue prevails.

2.2 Narrative making and success

a) *Who: successful storytellers and issues of access*

The question of who has more voice and also more capacity to shape prevailing narratives is a complex one and can be answered in different ways. In section 2.1.c we saw that the two actors who oriented narratives most, Salvini and Sea Watch, contributed almost 40% to the overall claim-making reported by traditional media. At the same time, we have shown that other voices were heterogeneous and less able to shape core narratives. Excluding Salvini, members of the government were poorly represented; members of the opposition were interviewed by few news outlets and their voices were given a critical treatment by those who reported on them. Migrants received very limited space. The analysis of Twitter highlighted even more the focus on the Salvini-Rackete clash, the real catalyst for a polarisation of public opinion. They were not only centre stage as *dramatic personae*, but also as voices whose utterances mattered. Salvini was quoted with direct or indirect speech¹⁶, albeit mostly critically, nine times, that is almost in 10% of the messages. Only the Sea Watch team could compete, with 5 quotes (mostly positively reported). Positive or negative, these references are an indicator of their influence over the conversation.

Why have Salvini and Sea Watch been so vocal? Why have other actors failed to impose different narratives in the media space? We have identified three main reasons:

One reason is the digital disintermediation that allows direct communication with the citizenry and forces traditional media to chase after posts and tweets. In this case, the two main actors in the affair were also very well equipped in the use of social media. Salvini has built a significant part of his communicative strength precisely on the use of social media, thanks to a team that takes care of his digital communication, and thanks also to a party that revolves around him as (at that time) unchallenged leader. The direct language typical of social media also allowed him to provoke and be politically incorrect, to identify enemies and make personal attacks through the sarcastic register. The Sea Watch, on the other hand, besides having a very well organised press office – defined as a 'war machine' by the *Corriere della Sera* journalist – and making extensive use of digital communication, had also an information monopoly on migrants, who were still the third character in this narrative. The absence of journalists on the ship meant that the NGO was the only resource for those who wanted to talk about them. Moreover, Sea Watch was able to exploit the media interest in Carola Rackete to its advantage, building a communicative strategy focused on her.

16. We are omitting in this count instances of indirect references, like "Salvini's bullying statement", where only the style but not the content of the speech is cited.

Salvini's media power and arrogance was very strong and overshadowed everyone. [...] His tweets were constant and so we were always checking to see what he was saying. His words were heavy and strong...harsh. 'The little braggart,' 'They can stay at sea until Christmas,' 'They will never disembark'... So it's clear that in terms of language he was fundamental to us and to the narrative. And as a result, wherever he went, he was always asked something by journalists about the Sea Watch affair and his comments went on the page. So he was the first source. And then there was everything that Sea Watch published through its social accounts. These were the two things that we mainly followed. Everything else was a side dish to the main story. (Journalist, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, IT_I_2)

Salvini is very efficient [with his social communication], because we need news and he constantly gives us news. I don't choose him because I like him more than others, but because I report the news he has given me. (Journalist, *Corriere della Sera*, IT_I_3).

These extracts show that the question of whether the traditional media first identify the central characters of the story, and only then become interested in following their communication, or whether it is the strength of their digital communication that makes them the protagonists of the narrative, could receive different answers according to the point of observation. As we will argue in section 2.2.c, dramatic personae perceived features matter a lot but, looking at journalistic working practices, the second interpretation is at least as credible as the first one.

Another reason for the prevalence of Salvini's and Rackete's opposed narratives has to do with the coherence and linearity of the messages produced. We argue that the coherence or the incoherence of the messages is crucially conditioned by the structure of both organisations.

Most of the newspapers reported this event as a clash between Rackete and Salvini, so in this context the one who benefited most was Salvini. It also happened because both Giuseppe Conte [Prime Minister] and Luigi Di Maio [Leader of the biggest partner in the government coalition] were totally immobile. Di Maio was initially pro-Salvini, but then he got into trouble. On the one hand, he said that the Sea Watch was taking advantage of the event to gain publicity; on the other, he said that the Government had to help the migrants. So it was not clear what he wanted. Salvini had a very clear position, not the others. This is one reason for his visibility and for their invisibility. (Journalist, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, IT_I_2)

The opposition did not have a consistent line either. In particular, the largest opposition party, the Democratic Party, carried different messages. Its Secretary General and its two parliamentarians who boarded the Sea Watch 3 had a pro-NGO discourse, but one carefully balanced between humanity and sovereignty. In a climate of polarisation, using two frames together in the same interview is often a losing strategy, and so it was received. Moreover, Marco Minniti, former Minister of the Interior and a member of the Democratic Party, who was interviewed several times, maintained an even different line, not sparing criticism of his fellow party members, starting with the secretary, for the position taken regarding Sea Watch. This is generally a problem that concerns all parties with a pluralistic identity and structure, in contrast with parties aligned around strong leaders that have structural advantages in contemporary communication, both digital and traditional.

Salvini had effective people around him, who, if you called them, would answer the phone and explain. Whereas if the others don't talk to you... So Salvini manages to make his [narrative] approach count for this reason. [...] So it's not just a matter of communicative power [but of accessibility]. If I call the finance [GdF] or the prosecutor's office, they have to protect confidentiality, because there is an ongoing investigation. If I call the navy, they have to go around the top and then come back down and if they say 'shut up,' that's it. But if, on the other hand, I call a politician who has a collaborative staff... This person [Salvini's social media manager] at that time was at the Ministry [and was very helpful]. So when we [journalists] urgently need to do an interview, it's inevitable that you'll have more space, because if you do the interview, while no one else wants to talk about it... (Journalist, *Corriere della Sera*, IT_I_3)

Thus, we can say that, for journalistic reasons, the focus on Sea Watch and on Rackete as the main character on a par with Salvini also depended on the absence of other voices that were easy to reach, or capable of imposing themselves through digital media, and at the same time coherent in their messages and capable of staying within a single frame, alternative to the Sovereignty one.

Finally, the third reason has to do with the dimension of novelty and what the media tend to consider new or, instead, already known. This element also went in the direction of rewarding the narrative of the clash between Salvini and Rackete, privileging these protagonists to the detriment of the others and of the migrants themselves. First of all, the new government – a government considered by most pundits as unlikely and difficult to hold – was confronted with an event that could not only put it in difficulty, but also change the precarious balance of leadership between the two parties and the two ‘vice-premiers,’ Salvini and Di Maio, a topic of enormous interest for Italian political journalism. Probably, if Di Maio had held a strong and consistent position in contrast to Salvini, the narrative would have been different and he too would have become a protagonist. As this did not happen, however, the novelty of this political moment was catalysed by Salvini ‘It was a strong political event because there was a new government and the need to illustrate what was happening. Salvini was a catalyst for protests, attacks, consensus... everything.’ (Journalist, *Corriere della Sera*, IT_I_3)

The communication of an NGO through the personalisation of the captain of one of its ships was also new. In the absence of an alternative political figure to Salvini, the personification of the NGO, to which the NGO itself contributed, was an unmissable opportunity for the media and also an extraordinary mobilising factor on Twitter.

The communication of an NGO through the personalisation of the captain of one of its ships was also new. In the absence of an alternative political figure to Salvini, the personification of the NGO, to which the NGO itself contributed, was an unmissable opportunity for the media and also an extraordinary mobilising factor on Twitter.

The migrants, on the other hand, were not a new element, all the more so in a situation where their stories hardly emerged, given the absence of reporters on the ship ‘Since there had been so many landings that year and the year before, we found it difficult to always tell the same things... Let’s say it was a routine. [...] so all you could say about the migrants was: “These were saved at sea but they won’t let them land”’ (Journalist, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, IT_I_2).

Moreover, the NGO’s choice to privilege the captain’s perspective over that of the migrants has contributed to their relative marginalisation as was also noted by a couple of journalists interviewed. This relative marginalisation became evident at the end of the event, when – consistent with the narrative that had been produced – the journalists who went to Lampedusa to cover the landing were only interested in interviewing Carola Rackete and, unable to interview her, disputed the words of her lawyer.

The three factors we have illustrated – disintermediation, coherence, novelty – are decisive in conquering the narrative arena. What are, however, the consequences of this hegemony? Our small case study does not allow to dig into the general issue, but it can provide evidence limited to the phenomenon of reception and to a minimal, albeit very influential, audience. During the interviews, we were struck by how several deep-seated narratives that can be considered at least questionable on factual grounds had been introjected by journalists, who had been so repeatedly exposed to them. On some crucial issues, journalists often reproduced assumptions, interpretive frameworks, and claims coming from the most vocal among their usual sources as if they were facts and not opinions or, worst, propaganda. These beliefs emerge from some news-items but, more interestingly, were still held during the interviews, two and a half years later. The examples are many, but we focus on just one issue, quoting all the journalists interviewed, across political lines.

The taken-for-granted ‘factual claims’ we present draw their assumptions from the master narrative about the abandonment of Italy on the part of the European Union. Its presuppositions are a) that Sea Watch’s ship could have approached other ports, but it was fixated on getting to Italy; b) that other countries could welcome the refugees, and indeed had to; c) that, therefore, the landing was illegitimate, according to the rules.

Salvini was right on several counts. The European Union had abandoned Italy. [...] Having signed the Dublin treaty, we were obliged to accept migrants. On the other hand, most of the NGOs took advantage of this and pointed towards Italy because they knew that there was a sovereigntist minister and that the affair would therefore have a strong media attention. Moreover, at the time there were no treaties between Italy and Malta, and Malta didn’t give a damn and only welcomed whoever it wanted. (Journalist, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, IT_1_2)

There was a strong clash between, let’s say, rules and humanity. In the sense that a load of young people arrives, because they are often very young, and therefore our country has always been attentive to this, let’s say to welcome. In that case, however, he [Salvini] demanded that we refer to the rules, and the rules in that case said that we should not be the ones to welcome, but it should be Malta, or it should be the nationality of the ship that was not ours. (Journalist, *Corriere della Sera*, IT_1_3)

... I don’t think that in Tunisia something happens, at least that I know of, I don’t think that there are mistreatments. Then Malta says ‘no because my territory is too small’ [...] So Malta says ‘no’, it seems that everybody is ok with it, nobody says anything to Malta [...] So why Italy? It has also been said ‘go to Germany’ in some cases, Germany says ‘never, later, we will take them after the redistribution’. Holland, which had granted the flag...[...]. So it’s necessarily Italy [...] we can’t do it this way... I don’t really think so... by now it’s emptying out Africa to bring it here. (Journalist, *il Giornale*, IT_1_1)

These assumptions seem to forget international law and treaties, themselves rules which moreover, in the general consensus, prevail over national laws. That consensus could be and has indeed been questioned, but what is relevant is that our interviewees did not even address it. The assumption a) clearly forgets the primacy of the duty to guarantee the protection of human lives sailing to a safe haven, whose identification in Lampedusa is not straightforward, but was reasonable since the alternatives were clearly worse, for reasons of lack of guarantees or distance. The assumption b) refers to European treaties, and is concisely rejected by the Member of Parliament we interviewed:

Italy was not numerically undergoing an invasion, there were objectively no possibilities to activate redistribution obligations towards other countries because, according to the treaties, there was not an extraordinary influx, there was not an emergency situation, the emergency had been created by the Salvini narrative. (Member of Parliament, *+Europa*, IT_1_4)

In fact, there were no agreements imposing compulsory relocations, let alone in the case of routine arrivals. In addition, the flag of the ship or the NGO’s nationality have no role in the obligation of reception in a safe haven, according to international maritime law.¹⁷

17. “Il soccorso in mare: i concetti di “porto sicuro” e “porto vicino” nel diritto internazionale”, *Ius in itinere*, 10 August 2019 updated 9 August 2020: www.iusinitinere.it/il-soccorso-in-mare-i-concetti-di-porto-sicuro-e-porto-vicino-nel-diritto-internazionale-22358.

b) *Where: narratives travelling across platforms*

In this short section we discuss the cross-media dimension of narratives, part of the broader phenomenon of re-mediation, that is, the representation and re-combination of the contents of one mass medium into another (Bolter and Grusin 1999; Conway-Silva et al. 2018). As we have just seen, Salvini and Sea Watch managed to impose characters and frames of the event on both old and new media and thus to condition the narration in an important way. We could therefore say that digital media, their channel of choice, played a crucial role. However, this capacity is exclusive to organised and coordinated communicative structures. In addition, the Big Two (Salvini and Sea Watch) reached out their followers also without the intermediation of the traditional media.

TV and newspapers mentioned messages coming from social media fifteen times, but among these messages six came from Salvini, one from another member of the League, and five from Sea Watch. The three remaining mentions were all given by one news outlet, *Il Giornale*: in two cases, to sarcastically criticise the social media messages of members of left and centre-left parties in support of Sea Watch; finally, in one case, to account for the flow of sexist messages against Rackete. Ultimately, social media messages published by members of civil society have not penetrated traditional media narratives.

Twitter users mentioned traditional media fifteen times as well. The figure is, however, much more impressive, since the number of quotations in a single tweet is not comparable to that of a news story in the traditional media, being reduced to one at best. Indeed, if we consider that the most retweeted messages were almost exclusively comments on the events reported by the traditional media (see section 2.1.e), even when they were not explicitly quoted, the inter-platform quotations appears very unbalanced.

Nevertheless, Twitter provided the public sphere with its own original contribution. The outraged comments in response to the sexist comments towards Rackete are probably the most specific aspect that Twitter put forward with respect to traditional media narratives, demonstrating how social media, more than traditional media, are the venue for symbolic squabbles and battles over identity issues around racism, gender issues, and so on. This does not mean that the press did not cover this topic, but it certainly did not give it a relevant space.

c) *What: 'good' and 'bad' narratives*

Before writing about the features behind the relative success of narratives about the Sea Watch affair, it is worth underlying a contextual condition (a 'When' factor, so to speak) that set the stage of the drama that was going to unfold. The second of the two security decrees wanted by Salvini to block refugees' arrivals on the Italian soil was in print on the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* in the very days the Sea Watch 3 rescued its 53 castaways. Therefore, NGO actions to ensure safe haven for refugees in Italy were the first test of this law decree in a moment of intense political and media attention over the matter. This did not only grant the newsworthiness of the event, making it *meaningful*, but also provided the legal framework that 'casted' the main characters of the story – Salvini, the sheriff intent on enforcing the law and Rackete, the defiant outlaw. This foundational legislative act set in part also the plot, as the investigation by the Prosecutor's office was at that point a due act. In turn, the inquiry opened an institutional forum to tell about the NGO's conduct in legal terms, examining its financial data and previous problems with Italian authorities or scrutinizing Rackete's father economic activities. The prosecution also spoiled the door to verbal clashes on Twitter between innocent and guilty positions. We can thus conceive law making as a 'narrative engine,' especially when it purposely targets specific categories of social actors and leaves ample room for legal uncertainty.

However, in the news, it is the journalists who are the storytellers in charge. Their first cognitive act is to define 'what the story is' (Tuchman 1978; Fishman 1990). Once the Who and the What have been established, the following news coverage is path dependent, proceeding on tracks that confirm

the newsworthy theme just established, because ‘that is the news’ (Fishman 1978). Salvini’s sheriff-like posture, for example, was a hook to talk about the possibility of building a wall between Italy and Slovenia, while the charge of aiding and abetting illegal immigration against the Sea Watch inspired news about new migrant smugglers’ strategies. Here we see the working of a well-known news value – in other words a quality that makes news fit for the media – namely *continuity* (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Chibnall 1977; Gans 1979; Harcup and O’Neill 2001).

The contours of ‘the Story’ do not only work to include but also to exclude. Sure, they are a guide for the coverage of developments or for the enlargement to events perceived as related, but at the same time they are a filter that marginalises other stories that do not share the same newsworthy ingredients, as in the case of the other ongoing landings during the Lampedusa crisis:

Now there are a lot of landings, we said several times ‘But do we care?’ [...] I was in charge of following this specific case so I can’t tell you why in our newspaper [the continuous arrival of other boats during the same days] found less space. It is clear that since it [the Sea Watch affair] is the focus of the day almost everyone throws him/herself on the situation. [...] One could also say that Rackete broke through the wall; it was the first time it happened, because then nobody did it anymore [...] Landings happened almost every week, it was always the same story. This story is a bit different. (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*)

The confrontation between the two ‘Captains’ (this was Salvini’s nickname appointed by his fan base) cannibalised other possible stories about landings, which received minor space. Besides Who and What, however, a news story is based also on Where, which determines, among other things, personnel assignment. Every news outlet sent at least one correspondent to Lampedusa, to follow the unfolding of events on the spot. In this way, local sources gained prominence over distant ones. The under-coverage of the investigation against Salvini by the Public Prosecutor’s Office in Rome, especially if compared to the insisted reporting on the Agrigento Public Prosecutor’s one (see section 2.1.a), can be explained at least in part by what is considered the scene of the Story:

... because that was the competent prosecutor’s office. The prosecutor had gone there, I remember him, he arrived at the port and somehow influenced the events. At that moment [...] he was responsible for what happened there ... then there are countless complaints, we do not always report them. (Journalist, *Corriere della Sera*, IT_I_3)

The drama, as defined by journalistic practices, unraveled in front of the Lampedusa port, so the obvious sources were, together with the protagonists, those who were managing the situation on the spot. What happened elsewhere would find more difficulties in becoming news.

Apart from journalists’ definition of what the story is about, we can find some dramatic qualities that were somehow intrinsic to the events. One journalist provides a good introduction to them:

I remember that it was clearly the story of Rackete against Salvini, and that’s it. Everything else was going to be overshadowed because Salvini’s strength and bullying on social media was very, very, strong. [...] because there is this female captain, this young girl, 31 years old [...], who was ready to go further, who was in contrast with Salvini. Therefore it becomes a big story compared to other landings that very often did not end up in the newspapers or ended up with small paragraphs. Then, above all, Salvini had labelled her a ‘little braggart’ and so she became a character, especially for the left that was riding her battle. [...] And the fact that she finally decides to bring the migrants inside and then take them a step away from Lampedusa to make them disembark, in my opinion, was the strongest thing, that really impacts. [...] If there had been another captain, if the attitude had been more wait-and-see, we would never have talked about the Sea Watch case. (Journalist, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, IT_I_2)

In sum, we have several newsworthy features: the challenge brought for the first time to the Italian Government that makes the incident novel, therefore good news; the duel-like confrontation and its dramatic moments, such as the forcing of the blockade, which is further dramatized calling it ‘ramming’; the personal qualities of the characters in the story that make them appealing, in particular the woman-captain that appears atypical to Italian journalists; and finally, the colourful epithets voiced by respectable institutional positions (another appealing singularity) were all ingredients that attracted both traditional media and Twitter users. Using the language of news-values, what makes good news is – apart from the above mentioned *meaningfulness* and *continuity* – the *atypical*, the *novel*, and the *drama*.

Journalists, however, are not passive reporters of a story that naturally springs from actual events, but mould the narrative, *personalizing* (here is another well-known news-value) the complex issues involved, thereby also maximizing the impact of the story:

She was now a character. That is, she was the heroine of one part of Italians and the devil who went against our country for another, and in any case she was a character. It happens to me that I make reality become a character, because it is easier to convey the arguments, because the arguments are super complex on this thing. So it's useless to say ‘according to the Treaty of I don't know...’ it's much better instead to colour it through the character. She's the one who makes you understand what's going on, so that way it becomes narrative.
(*Corriere della Sera*)

What probably appealed most and, in turn, shaped this story is the archetypal symbolism that pervades it. Rackete and Salvini appear as the mythical David vs. Goliath, or as the motif, constantly-recurring in popular culture, of the arch-enemies. These archetypes, established in the first place by Salvini's communication, led to polarization not only in the social media – see the prevailing negative emotions of outrage and anger and polemic registers such as criticism, sarcasm, or irony on Twitter – but also in the traditional media and political arena:

On the one hand, we had one of the most popular and prominent ministers at that time, who had done a job of months or even years on this issue, building a narrative based on the fact that he was the defender of the nation and national borders against the invasion. And there were instead a number of political figures such as myself who were allies of the invaders and therefore traitors of the homeland. (Member of Parliament, +Europa, IT_I_4)

If the communication of Salvini already moved along these stylized tracks, it is, however, journalistic work that has made it into a sort of mythical tale (Bird and Dardenne 1987), a story based on eternal archetypes able to latch on to the public's deepest imagination. A story shaped along a mental ‘pre-image,’ is *consonant* to the public's expectations and sometimes desires, another newsworthy feature.

However, many of the narratives circulating during the Sea Watch crisis benefited of this same relationship with what is already known. We speculate that they proliferated because they could be readily recognized as consistent with long-established master narratives on immigration (a list at the end of section 2.1.a), which the rhetorical armoury of political groups continue to re-actualize. Among these consonant stories, the narrative of Europe leaving Italy to its own devices was probably the most powerful, both because it resonated with well-established slogans and perceptions (related also to other domains – the economy is the first that comes to mind) and because it spread across the political spectrum.

The characteristics that made characters, events, and plots visible and engaging in the Lampedusa crisis do not come as a surprise to communication scholars. ‘Meaningfulness,’ ‘continuity,’

‘atypicality,’ ‘novelty,’ ‘drama,’ ‘personification,’ and ‘consonance’ are well established news-values. Nevertheless, another feature so central to media representations seems to have failed in this occasion. Elite or celebrity status, that so often establishes who makes and who does not make the news, has been made uninfluential by the protagonism of an absolute Ms Nobody. As we have seen, her personal characteristics and decisions turned on the spotlight on her figure, and her actions defined the narrative stages of all the media coverage.

3. Italy’s Citizenship Law: the reform debate

Citizenship laws are often the subject of intense political debate. Indeed, besides being legal instruments, they are also powerful symbolic objects that establish the boundaries between the included and excluded in those ‘imagined’ (Anderson 1983) and ‘invented’ (Hobsbawm 1990) communities that are nations. These laws are often charged with an identity-defining value and they are based on a political-cultural narrative (Brubaker 1992; Wimmer 2008). The challenge to narratives of citizenship is posed in particular by the presence of legal immigrants in the territories of states and is exacerbated by the conspicuous presence of migrants’ offspring. Contemporary states usually regulate acquisition, loss and transmission of nationality through different combinations of *ius sanguinis* (right of blood or descent), *ius soli* (right of the soil or birth in the country) and *ius domicilii* (right of abode or residence in the country) (Honohan 2010; Joppke 2003). In particular, *ius soli*, in its different variations and interpretations, is the juridical instrument through which states primarily deal with second-generation foreigners.

Among EU countries, ten apply *ius soli* at birth, while others, including Italy, apply it after birth. Within both groups there are great variations in additional requirements and procedures.

In Italy, *ius soli* produces its effects only when the person reaches 18 years of age. The main requirement is the uninterrupted legal residence in the country since birth. Furthermore, the procedure is not automatic, but by declaration. Children of immigrants born in the country can apply for citizenship by declaration within one year after the eighteenth birthday. The current citizenship law was approved in 1992 (Act 91/1992). It reinforced provisions of the unconditional transmission of nationality *jure sanguinis*, even for descendants of Italian migrants living abroad. It was therefore a legislative measure primarily concerned with emigration. With regard to acquisition of nationality for foreigners, the 1992 law was even more restrictive than the previous one (n. 555 of 1912). The current Italian Citizenship Law is particularly exclusive if compared to the citizenship laws adopted by other EU countries (Zincone and Basili 2013; Howard 2009).

There have been various parliamentary attempts to amend the Nationality Law in more liberal terms since the late 1990s. Considering only the main ones, we can count six.

In the following pages, we will focus only on the last of these legislative attempts, that is the one that has produced the media peak analysed in the following pages. In December 2016, the government led by Matteo Renzi of the centre-left Democratic Party fell and after the consultations that followed, Paolo Gentiloni (also of the Democratic Party) formed a new coalition that governed Italy until 1 June 2018, with the main parties of the right and centre-right lined up in opposition, together with the 5 Star Movement. The debate we are analysing therefore has to do with the (ultimately failed) attempt to approve, in the Senate, the reform that passed in the Chamber of Deputies in October 2015, almost two years earlier.

3.1. Representation: Main, collateral, and counter-narratives in traditional and social media

a) Narratives in traditional media

For this case study, we selected all the pertinent newspaper articles and TV news focused on the debate as they unfolded in the period of maximum media coverage,¹⁸ between 14 and 21 June 2017.¹⁹ Over the eight days we studied, there were important differences in the attention given to the debate by the five news organisations. Two of them (*TG1* and *Il Fatto Quotidiano*) published an average of 1.12 to 1.37 reports/articles per day. *Corriere della Sera* published an average of 2, and *TG5* an average of 0.5. Much more prolific was *Il Giornale*, which covered the debate with an average of 4.12 articles per day. The great salience in the coverage by *Il Giornale* is also visible in the nine front-page articles, compared to the three in total of the other two newspapers (Table 3.1). More than that, 29 articles out of 33 were placed in the first three pages. *Corriere della Sera* had also a considerable – although less relevant – number of articles in the first three pages (half of its production, eight in total), while *Il Fatto Quotidiano* had only two articles out of eleven on the first three pages.

TABLE 3.1. Coverage dedicated to the citizenship reform debate by news outlet, 14-22 June 2017. Absolute values

OUTLET	NEWS ITEMS	FIRST PAGES	OPENING NEWS OR TITLES	AIRTIME IN SECONDS
<i>Il Giornale</i>	33	9		
<i>Corriere della Sera</i>	16	2		
<i>Il Fatto Quotidiano</i>	11	1		
<i>TG1</i>	9		4	1,069
<i>TG5</i>	4		3	771
TOTAL	73	12	7	1,840

Considering the political position of *Il Giornale* (owned by media tycoon and centre-right political leader Silvio Berlusconi), we can therefore interpret the media peak in the period considered as an increase in news driven by conservative reactions to the possibility - very real at the time - of the reform being approved by the Senate. However, we must also consider that the centre-left newspaper *La Repubblica*, which is not included in our sample, played an equally important role in supporting the reform, giving voice to civil society movements that have been advocating for years the need to review the requirements for acquiring citizenship through *ius soli*, starting with the movements built by the so-called 'Second Generation network.'

In terms of events, the period under consideration is also fuelled by five 'facts': a) the declarations of Beppe Grillo, founder and leader *de facto* of the 5 Star Movement, who finally took a clear position, declaring himself be against the reform; b) a scuffle that took place in the Senate, during which a Minister of the Republic was slightly injured following violent protests against the reform initiated by members of the Northern League; c) a parallel protest, staged outside the Senate, in which members

18. As ascertained with the tool made available by Media Cloud, <https://mediacloud.org/>.

19. In order to cover the same events, we examined newspapers published in the period 15-22 June and TV news aired between 14 and 21 June.

of the extra-parliamentary right-wing social movements expressed their dissent from the reform; d) the initiative of the opposition party Fratelli d'Italia, together with the Northern League to collect signatures for a popular referendum against *ius soli* in case the reform is approved; e) the pro-reform statements of a member of the Italian Episcopal Confederation (CEI) and the immediate rude response by Matteo Salvini.

These political events catalysed the attention of the media and fuelled the discussion, which in the investigated period led to an intensification of the narrative-making process through interviews and opinion articles.

Looking at the journalistic genres, we can identify three strands: 1) 'news' on the facts and on the statements, 2) the 'analysis' of the text of the law and what it would change compared to the 1992 law, 3) the production of 'opinions' by journalists and opinion makers on the pros and cons of the reform.

Through a qualitative analysis of argumentation, we can distinguish 12 arguments in favour of the reform and 17 arguments against. The most frequent one (17 occurrences), and the only one to be reported on all five news outlets, is a negative argument: citizenship cannot be an automatic concession, but must be deserved. In addition to relying on the fake news that the discussion is about a pure *ius soli*, which journalists helped to propagate, this argument is inextricably linked to a culturalist narrative about nationality. Indeed, it is frequently associated with references to shared culture and values and to the need to select on the basis of such cultural competences and of the desire and pride to be truly Italian. The second most frequent argument – this time a pro-reform argument – is also culturalist in nature (12 occurrences). According to this argument, the 'children' who are affected by the reform are already Italian by culture. Here the references are to the fact that they speak Italian and sometimes also know regional dialects, that they go to school with 'our children,' that they cheer for Italian football teams, and so on. On these bases, granting citizenship to these 'children' would be 'due act.'

The most frequent one (17 occurrences), and the only one to be reported on all five news outlets, is a negative argument: citizenship cannot be an automatic concession, but must be deserved.

Again with 12 occurrences, we find another argument against the reform, indicating that it is inappropriate to discuss the citizenship law because measures for families and work are more urgent. But the hierarchy of importance in this argument is systematically accompanied by the opposition migrants-Italians and can be summarised in the slogan that will soon be central to the electoral campaign of Salvini's League: 'Italians first.'

With 11 occurrences we find three arguments, two against and one for. The two cons are once again of a culturalist nature, pointing out the cultural and value risk of enlarging the number of Italian citizens by including a high number of 'immigrants,' the other referring to the invasion narrative, arguing that 'easy citizenship' would become a pull factor for new waves of migration. The pro argument is instead a dry slogan: reform is an act of civilisation. With 10 occurrences there are one argument for and one against, which are mirror images of each other. The pro-argument claims that greater inclusion (or integration, depending on the occurrence) reduces the risks of security and terrorism; the con-argument argues that it increases the risks of terrorism, because it will no longer be possible to expel those suspected of terrorist activity. These arguments refer to four frequent and well-known narratives on migration: the cultural or culturalist narrative, the securitarian narrative, the invasion narrative, and the humanitarian narrative (universal rights). The argument that the reform is an act of civilisation is placed on this last narrative plane, as is the argument that it is a matter of humanity and dignity, and others that speak explicitly of the extension of rights or refer to justice. Taken together the right/humanitarian narratives make up 22 occurrences, which rises to

36 if we also consider the opposing arguments that refer to the theme of rights: the one according to which extending the granting of citizenship so much would diminish the value of being a citizen ('it sells off Italianness') and the one according to which the existing laws already guarantee equal social and civil rights and already offer the possibility of acquiring citizenship, which is why there is no reason to change the 1992 law. But the argument of 'selling off Italianness' puts together the narrative of rights (in this case to deny them) with that of the invasion or, as it is explicitly written in *Il Giornale*, 'the self-invasion.'

The arguments summarised here are found in 120 occurrences out of a total of 167. We can therefore argue that the main arguments refer to four narratives of migration:

- the culturalist narrative, focusing on the values and culture of the country in essentialist terms, with a reference to the discourse of merit passing through cultural assimilation;
- the securitarian narrative, with reference to Islamic terrorism, which leads to the claim – on the one side – that the reform would lead to greater integration and consequently reduce the risks of radicalisation, while – on the other side – that the granting of citizenship would not allow for the expulsions of those who radicalise, and at the same time rejects the idea that the granting of citizenship leads to some form of value-based integration (the securitarian narrative also passes through the issue of cultural integration);
- the narrative of the invasion, which imagines the more rapid granting of citizenship to the offspring of migrants as a pull factor for future waves of migration;
- the humanitarian narrative, which discusses justice and rights and which is mainly opposed through the discourse of the invasion from within, and of Italianness as a fact of blood.

In Table 3.2 we give an account of the distribution of the arguments for and against the reform produced by the five news outlets analysed.

TABLE 3.2. Frequency of arguments for and against reform by news outlet, 14-22 June 2017. Absolute values

OUTLET	ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST	TOTAL
<i>Il Giornale</i>	3	61	64
<i>Corriere della Sera</i>	17	14	31
<i>Il Fatto Quotidiano</i>	7	7	14
TG1	28	21	49
TG5	4	5	9
TOTAL	59	108	167

As can be seen, four out of five news outlets show an overall balance between the frequency of arguments for and against the reform, while *Il Giornale*, in addition to producing the largest number of arguments, is almost solely focused on those against the reform.

Moreover, if we look at who produces and reproduces the arguments, we see that TV news programmes leave it to politicians to produce arguments, while newspapers also have a significant share of arguments produced or repeated by journalists. But if in the case of *Corriere della Sera* and *Il Fatto Quotidiano* it is a small share, distributed between arguments for and against, in *Il Giornale* the arguments produced by the journalists are far greater than those produced by the political actors (37 vs. 21), and are all against the reform of the citizenship law.

Finally, in addition to the journalistic production of arguments and narratives about the reform, it is also important to consider the ‘introductory aspect’: by launching TV news reports, or introducing the topic of the reform in newspapers, journalists offer a first fundamental interpretative framework within which to place the arguments. This framework is often partial, and in some cases produces fake news about the scope of the bill.

TG1 introduces the topic by talking about the ‘law for the offspring of immigrants born in Italy,’ or the ‘law recognising citizenship for the offspring of immigrants born in Italy.’ This is a simplification, which does not give space to that part of the law that recognises citizenship by virtue of schooling in Italy (*ius culturae*) and also implicitly gives the idea of a recognition with no requirements. *TG5* speaks of a ‘law on citizenship for foreigners born in Italy,’ but above all it talks of the bill as if it was a *ius soli* with no requirements and an automatic procedure, with phrases like these: ‘...automatic citizenship for the offspring of foreigners born in Italy,’ ‘...the acquisition of Italian citizenship as a consequence of being born on our territory.’ In reality, the bill requires various conditions for the granting of citizenship. Moreover, it can be obtained by explicit request and not automatically.

Corriere della Sera and *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, on the other hand, are more correct and precise, although the former in a long opinion piece anticipated on the front page introduces the bill as an ‘automatic concession, without ascertaining the language, customs, rules or anything about Italian society,’ and the latter, in a front-page editorial signed by its director, argues that if the reform were to pass, Italy would become the most generous EU country in applying *ius soli*. These are two incorrect pieces of information that offer a distorted view of the reality of the bill. Finally, *Il Giornale* repeatedly writes about an automatic concession and a gift and introduces the bill as if it were a pure form of *ius soli*. It can therefore be said that the news media analysed introduce the law using the fake news of the automatic recognition of citizenship to any child born in Italy. Moreover, the part of the bill concerning the *ius culturae* is never mentioned in these introductory sentences, building in fact a pure *ius soli* frame that has probably contributed to make culturalist narratives and those that create indignation around the idea of becoming Italian without even knowing the Italian language and culture more credible in the eyes of the public.²⁰

b) Characters, labels, emotions and processes

The case we are analysing is very different from the Sea Watch case. Here there are no captains leaving the public in trepidation of their future actions, no migrants suffering from thirst, no financiers complaining of being rammed. We are dealing with a more abstract political and cultural debate, and this makes it difficult for journalists to build characters, which are so useful in making topical narratives exciting. But the journalistic need to produce characters, together with the desire for prominence and visibility of certain political actors who, more than others, know how to exploit the logic of the media, also allows this debate to take the form of a set of small stories, with its own characters.

The first character in chronological order is 5 Stars Movement leader Beppe Grillo (Image 3.1), who gets the role because of his sudden declarations and exploiting media and political attention with respect to the position his party would take. Although confusing and contradictory, his statements have gained wide visibility, making him the most quoted opposition political actor (see 2.1.c).

20. We are not claiming that the news outlets analysed never talk about *ius culturae*, the requirements for obtaining citizenship, or the fact that procedures require a declaration. Each newspaper has one or two articles explaining the bill in detail. But it is only one or two articles compared to numerous and frequent introductory speeches, both in the newspapers and on television, which offer a distorted picture that can be interpreted to all intents and purposes as fake news.

IMAGE 3.1. The first character: Beppe Grillo



Source: Corriere della Sera, June 18, 2017, 2.

In parallel with the emergence of Grillo's character, another political actor who manages to temporarily establish himself as a character is Gian Marco Centinai, leader of the Northern League group in the Senate, who takes on the role of the aggressor, and by Valeria Fedeli, the minister of education bruised by the scuffle in the Senate, who briefly emerges as the character of the victim (Image 3.2).

IMAGE 3.2. The brawl in the Senate: the aggressor and the victim



Source: Corriere della Sera, June 16, 2017, 2.

A few days later Monsignor Nunzio Galantino – the secretary general of the Episcopal Conference in Italy (CEI) – becomes a character, in spite of himself, because Salvini involves him, replying to his statements with insults and allusions (Image 3.3).

IMAGE 3.3. Cei chastises opponents: electoral calculations / wrath of the league: ‘think of our unemployed.’



Source: *Il Giornale*, June 19, 2017, 2.

Through the mechanism of conflict, some political actors in opposition have therefore managed to obtain the temporary role of character and – reflexively – to confer it on the aggressed. Conflict is often an effective way to gain visibility and try to give public force to one's positions on the topic of discussion. On the contrary, the threat to promote a referendum against the reform, put forward by Giorgia Meloni, leader of Fratelli d'Italia, received very little media attention. The demonstration of the extreme right-wing movements in front of the Senate was also reported in the newspapers in a marginal way, overshadowed by the simultaneous brawl inside the chamber.

While it can be said that these actions produce little in the way of protagonism, in the specific sense of producing a strong narrative character, it is nevertheless impossible to deny that the combination of these confrontational actions was very effective. It succeeded in sparking off a discussion, in polarising public opinion that was previously polled as being largely in favour of the reform and in putting the government coalition in check, finally pushing it to shelve the reform.

Another set of narrative characters that emerges in the media consists of those directly affected by the reform. However, if one can speak of a character formed by second-generation foreigners, it can only be done with reference to the character of children. In fact, the main arguments of government leaders in favour of reform insist on labelling beneficiaries as children. And the only speaking space given directly to the beneficiaries of the reform is a video produced by the newspaper *La Repubblica* (Image 3.4), which is also mentioned in the news outlets analysed here.

IMAGE 3.4. 'La repubblica uses children to sponsor ius soli'



Source: *Il Giornale*, June 18, 2017, 2

The video consists of interviews with children aged around 6 to 10, who are asked 'where are you from?' to show their confidence in calling themselves Italian. Instead of giving space to the young activists of the second-generation network and explaining what obtaining citizenship would mean for them, also in practical terms, the pro-reform communication strategy focuses entirely on the character of the children. This choice leads to a preference for an argumentative line linked to the theme of identity and belonging, with an emphasis on cultural assimilation. It also works as an attempt to create empathy and provoke more indignation towards those who refuse 'these children' the chance to be 'included.' The then secretary of the *Democratic Party*, Matteo Orfini, posts on Facebook (the post is quoted by *TG1* on 17 June 2017) the link to this video and asks people to watch it, adding that they 'go to school with our children, play and study with them' and concludes by condemning the oppositions who are making 'a sleazy [electoral] calculation on the skin of these children.' The insistence on children is part of a strategy to make it self-evident why the reform should be approved. Accompanying the references to children are lapidary phrases such as 'act of civilisation' and 'due act,' which constitute the heart of the (un)argumentation in favour of the bill. This work of making the topic under discussion emotional rather than argumentative is taken up with disappointment by journalists from both *Corriere della Sera* and *Il Giornale*, but also by Berlusconi, in a long interview with *TG5*, also reported by *Il Giornale*, who argues that one cannot think of a reform of this magnitude by relying on the naivety of feelings of goodness (an argument that Grillo will later make his own).

The labels referring to the beneficiaries of the bill show the predominance of the word 'children,' followed by foreigners, immigrants, terrorists and Italians (Image 3.5).

There are only 13 female voices out of 100 (8 out of 76 if we consider only political actors). There are only three voices of people with migrant origins. The only voice of a person who would directly benefit from the reform is that of a girl of foreign origin in an article in *Il Giornale*, which quotes her from *La Repubblica*. The intention, as is to be expected at this point, is to denigrate her. The other two voices are that of a journalist of Palestinian origin hosted in *il Fatto Quotidiano* to express an opinion in favour of the bill, and that of a journalist of Egyptian origin hosted in *Il Giornale* to express an opinion against the bill. In conclusion, the direct beneficiaries of the bill have no voice in the media analysed and the same can be said for migrants in general.

It is useful to refer here to the analytical distinction between strategic and issue frames (Cappella and Jamieson 1997) or – similarly – between game and governing schema (Patterson 1993). This distinction is quite significant from the point of view of narrative production. The strategic frame, like the game schema, refers to a narrative that puts the success and self-assertion strategies of leaders and parties before competing political proposals and programmes, while the use of the issue frame or the governing schema does exactly the opposite. It follows that a public debate in which the strategic frame is dominant is a debate about the power interests of the parties and not about the topics of discussion. The strategic frame produced by political actors accusing each other makes dialogue on content impossible, and leads to the constant de-legitimisation of the opponent, not because of his arguments but because of his alleged interests. When it is journalists who let the strategic frame prevail over the issue frame, the de-legitimisation of voices reported by the media no longer belongs to political conflict, but to political analysis. According to Cappella and Jamieson, the preponderance of a media narrative centred on the strategic frame leads to forms of cynicism and disenchantment with politics on the part of media audiences. In the case analysed here we can speak of a predominance of the issue frame. However, the strategic frame is nonetheless very significant. The table (Table 3.4) shows the distribution of the two frames in the five news outlets in absolute numbers distinguishing between the issue frames of the supporters and detractors of the reform and between the strategic frames aimed at discrediting – through the discourse of interest – the positions in favour and those against the bill. It should be noted that only verbal reactions produced by politicians or commenting on political voices are considered here, and therefore it is a different calculation from the one seen above on the totality of verbal reactions covered by the media.

TABLE 3.4. Issue frames and strategic frames on news outlets, distinguished on pro and anti reform actors. 14-22 June 2017. Absolute values

OUTLET	ISSUE FRAME ON PRO-REFORM ACTORS	ISSUE FRAME ON ANTI-REFORM ACTORS	STRATEGIC FRAME ON PRO-REFORM ACTORS	STRATEGIC FRAME ON ANTI-REFORM ACTORS	TOTAL
<i>Il Giornale</i>	2	9	8	2	21
<i>Il Fatto Quotidiano</i>	0	2	3	0	5
<i>Corriere della Sera</i>	5	7	2	4	18
<i>TG1</i>	14	9	6	5	34
<i>TG5</i>	3	2	0	1	6
TOTAL	24	29	19	12	84

The issue frame is proposed 53 times in total, while the strategic frame is proposed 31 times. On *Il Fatto Quotidiano* and *Il Giornale* the two frames are practically equal, while in the other three news outlets the issue frame predominates. *Il Fatto Quotidiano* and *Il Giornale* also distinguish themselves by treating the

political arguments in favour of the reform almost exclusively in terms of a strategic frame, thus denying legitimacy to the political proposal, while they do not do the same with the political arguments against the reform. In particular, it is noticeable that on *Il Fatto Quotidiano* the pro-reform issue frame is not present. This means that no voice of a political actor in favour of the reform is included in the coverage of the debate.

d) Frames

The distinction between issue frame and strategic frame seen above has mainly to do with the ‘causes’ that lead the political actors to take a position in the debate (interest vs. political programme) and methodologically takes into account the political claims reported in the media and the comments on these claims. The frames we will now see, however, have to do with the ‘expected or feared consequences’ of the law reform and take into account entire newspaper articles and TV news reports.

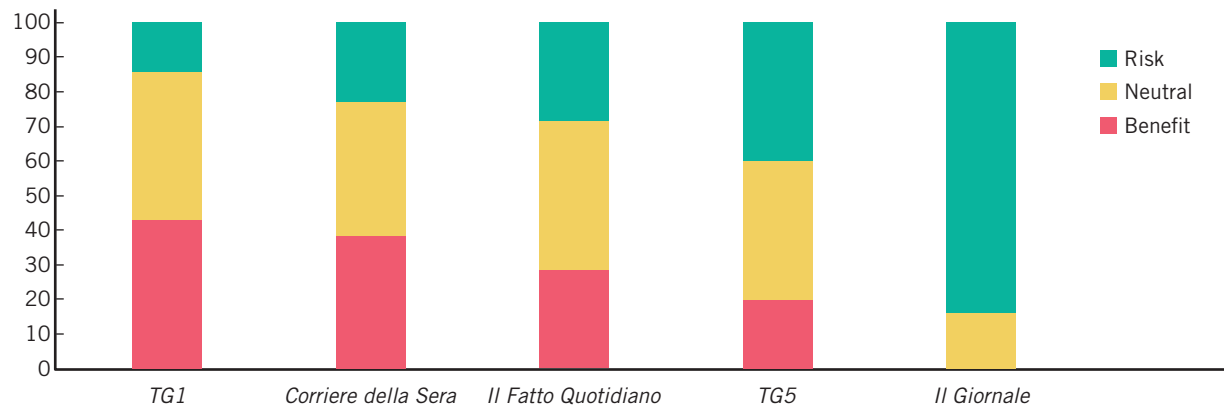
We distinguish between ‘neutral frames’ (no clear prevalence of benefits or risks of the reform), ‘risk frames’ (risks prevailing) and ‘benefit frames’ (benefits prevailing). Risks frames can be classified based on the type of risk: e.g., stimulating new arrivals (‘the *topos* of invasion’); terrorism and radicalisation (‘the *topos* of terrorism’); economic threat due to high costs over time (‘the economic *topos*’); cultural threat for the supposed progressive loss of an ethnic identity (‘the cultural/ethnic *topos*’). The benefit frame can refer to two *topoi*: inclusion and enlargement of rights as a value in itself leading to a fairer society (‘the inclusion *topos*’); a more pragmatic argument is built on the narrative that more inclusion leads to greater security (‘the integration/security *topos*’). The following table (Table 3.5) expresses the distribution of frames and *topoi* in percentage terms.

TABLE 3.5. Frames in the coverage of the citizenship reform debate, 14-22 June 2017. Percentages. N=57

NEUTRAL		29.8
RISK, of:		50.9
Invasion	8.6	
Terrorism	13.0	
Cultural/ethnic	26.0	
Economic	3.3	
BENEFIT, of which:		19.3
Inclusion	11.6	
Integration/security	7.7	
TOTAL		100

The table shows a large predominance of the risk frame over the benefit frame. The cultural/ethnic *topos* alone has more occurrences than the two *topoi* that make up the benefit frame. However, the data are strongly influenced by *Il Giornale*, which has 84% of articles with a risk frame and no articles with a benefit frame (Graph 3.1).

GRAPH 3.1. Frames in the coverage of the citizenship reform debate, 14-22 June 2017. Percentages. N=57

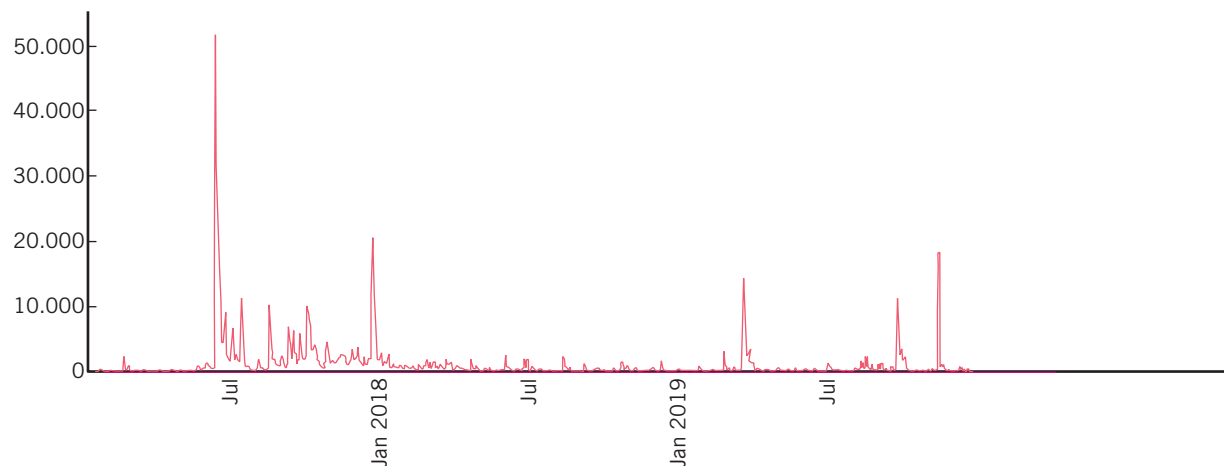


If we exclude the data from *Il Giornale* we find a pretty different situation: the neutral frame covers the 40.6% of framing, the benefit frame covers the 34.4%, and the risk frame covers the 25%. As for the *topoi*, the inclusion *topos* is the more represented, covering the 20.6%, and among the risk frame *topoi*, only the cultural/ethnic *topos* get our attention (15%), while terrorism and invasion only represent 5% each of the total framing production.

e) Voices and engagement in the social media

In addition to the 73 news items appeared in newspapers and TV, we considered the 100 most retweeted messages on the Twitter platform that had the keyword '*ius soli*,' '*no ius soli*,' 'citizenship' in the text and in the hashtags²¹ between 14 and 22 June. Similarly, to what happened in traditional media, this was the period of maximum activity also on Twitter, as we can see looking at the three-years trend on Graph 3.2.

GRAPH 3.2. Daily number of retweets on the citizenship law debate between January 2017 and December 2019



21. We kept only the messages related to the reform of the nationality law.

In the nine days considered for qualitative analysis, the engagement – measured considering each message’s number of retweets – ranged between 1,173 retweets (and 2,169 likes) for the top message and 175 (and 146 likes) for the bottom one. The most retweeted messages were (half of the first 100) concentrated on the 14 and 15 June. In these two days there is a concentration of events which, as we have seen, are also significant for the legacy media: the declaration of a vote against by the 5 Star Movement, the brawl in the Senate following the majority’s decision to bring forward the scheduling of the debate on the reform, the demonstration of the extreme right in the square in front of the Senate, the declaration to collect signatures for a popular referendum to repeal the reform, if it is approved, by the leaders of Fratelli d’Italia. For the most part, as we shall see, the tweets are reactions and comments to these events, or messages that anticipate them, to mobilise people for the demonstration, for example.

The 100 most retweeted messages on the Twitter platform are divided into 40 in favour of the reform and 60 against. The 40 in favour come from 32 different accounts, while the 60 against come from only 23 accounts. The top nine in terms of engagement, that is the 9 most retweeted single messages, are all pro-reform messages. However, the situation is reversed if we look at which accounts gained the most engagement on the topic over the nine days of analysis, considering all the tweets produced. Of the top five accounts, four are from people with clearly anti-reform positions (10 of the top 15).

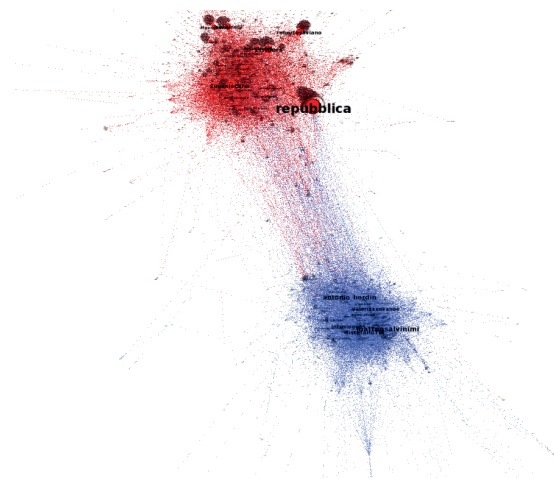
The role of politicians for and against the reform is relevant. On Twitter, some right-wing or extreme right-wing politicians with positions against the citizenship reform play a very relevant role. In terms of engagement, one of them even occupies the first place (Salvini, leader of the Northern League), one occupies the third place (Distefano, leader of CasaPound Italia, a neo-fascist social movement that also constituted itself as a political party), another occupies the fifteenth place (Meloni, leader of Fratelli d’Italia), one occupies the twenty-third place (Borghesi, Northern League) and one the twenty-fifth (Gasparri, Forza Italia). To find the first politician in favour of the reform in this ranking, we have to go down to 27th place, while to find the second we have to go down to 37th. If we look at the first hundred tweets, the disparity in the ability of political leaders to influence the discussion on Twitter is even more evident. Of the 60 tweets against the reform, 23 come from accounts of political actors; while only 4 of the 40 tweets in favour of the reform come from political actors. The number of retweets obtained by messages from political actors is, in the first case, 7,281 (out of 17,114 anti-reform retweets in the top 100), in the second case it is 1,511 (out of 16,837 pro-reform retweets in the top 100). On the one hand almost half, on the other not even a tenth.

In addition to the key role of right-wing and far-right political actors, the main accounts engaged on Twitter against the reform are of people or groups linked to the far-right galaxy and/or akin to the Russian propaganda agenda in Europe: yesterday anti-vaccinationists in the context of Covid, today anti-Zelensky in the context of the Russian war on Ukraine. Moreover, scrolling through the tweets of several of these accounts, some are permeable to various forms of conspiracy (from QAnon to the Kalergi plan, to the SarsCov2 virus created and deliberately spread). On the other hand, among the accounts in favour of the reform in first place is *La Repubblica*, a progressive news organisation linked to the centre-left, then three professional writers: Saviano, Cardini and De Luca. In addition to these four accounts, in the list of the top 15 there is only one informal group that defines itself as secular and anti-fascist.

As a result, the conversation is very polarized. In Graph 3.3 we can see the network of retweets between users,²² where nodes (i.e., accounts) inside the blue (anti-reform) and the red (pro-reform) bubbles have a quite endogamic conversation.

22. In the graph representation each node stands for a user and each bridge stand for a retweet relationship linking user A to user B. The graph has been spatially organized with a Force Atlas 2 algorithm, in our case that means that groups of nodes retweeting each other tend to cluster together, while groups of nodes that have little or no contact tend to be pushed apart. The colour of clusters represents different retweet communities. Communities have been calculated with the modularity maximizing approach, but in this specific instance we have increased the resolution to 5 to capture the two main communities.

GRAPH 3.3. Network of retweets on twitter, 14-22 June 2017



Also on Twitter, the voices are predominantly male. Only 18 out of 82 are by women (18 accounts are collective): a higher proportion than in legacy media, but still a minority. No entries by migrants or descendants of migrants are present in the top 100.

After the peak (14 to 22 June) anti-reform accounts take up even more space. In the months following the peak, efforts to scuttle the reform intensified. If we extend the period of analysis to the end of 2017, we see that the only pro-reform account that survives among the top 10 by engagement is the one registered to *La Repubblica*. However, it drops from second position to seventh. The others are all opposed to the law reform. Matteo Salvini remains first, followed by Giorgia Meloni, leader of Fratelli d'Italia, while Simone Di Stefano, the leader of the neo-fascist Casa Pound, is sixth. The first two politicians in favour of the reform are now 42nd and 48th. In December, the government led by Paolo Gentiloni claimed that there were not enough numbers in the Senate and in the country to approve the law.

f) Narratives and frames in the social media

Having addressed the issue of voices and engagement, distinguishing between tweets for and against the bill under discussion in the Senate, we now turn our attention to the content and frames of the messages, looking only at the 100 most re-tweeted messages: 40 in favour and 60 against.

A first theme that exemplifies the issue of ideological polarisation is the amount of messages that focus not on building a narrative or argument, but on insulting the opponent. 25 of the first 40 pro-reform messages contain sarcasm towards the opponent and in several cases contain just that. The opponents are in turn the 5 Star Movement, the Northern League, the neo-fascist movements or all those who oppose the reform, who are treated as morally unworthy subjects. Also, many messages against the reform (25 out of 60) contain mainly an insult to the opponents, which in this case are mainly the Democratic Party, the generic left and some left-wing political leaders in particular, but also – unlike in the previous case – journalists. If in the legacy media the polarisation led to the frequent use of the strategic frame, referring to the question of the selfish interests and political positioning of the parties, on Twitter the question of the adversary arises exclusively on a moral and ideological level and is not limited to political parties.

When it comes to narratives or arguments, almost nothing emerges in the field of pro-reform messages and many messages focus on children. Seven of the 40 most retweeted pro-reform messages include a link to the video released by *La Repubblica* containing interviews with primary school children. One sixth of the tweets with the highest engagement are therefore a proposition of this video. Taken together, these messages were retweeted 4,147 times. From an engagement point of view we can therefore say that they are worth

almost a third of the whole sample of the first 40 pro-reform messages. To these we can add those messages that explicitly talk about children - usually referring to their young son's and daughter's schoolmates – and that build their endorsement of the citizenship law reform by appealing to the theme of the innocence of childhood. If we take these into account, then the self-evident argument based on the imagery of childhood is worth 32.5% of the 40 pro-reform tweets and almost 40% of the engagement measured through the volume of retweets.

Among the messages against the reform, there are also many calls for street mobilisation or for the collection of signatures for a referendum, and they should be read in conjunction with those messages that serve to promote these actions and the boycott actions in the Senate. However, the messages against the reform, as was also the case in the legacy media, contain more arguments and narratives than the messages in favour. Among the frequent arguments, the most widespread is the one that contrasts this reform with the call for political action on labour and employment, creating the distinction between migrants and natives, which can be summed up in the slogan 'Italians first.' This is followed by arguments against the risk of an increase in migrant arrivals and terrorist actions; then there is the argument on the insuperable cultural diversity of Muslims, to whom it would therefore be wrong to grant citizenship and, finally, the argument on merit, which requires a more complex path, made up of additional requirements and checks for the granting of Italian citizenship.

Even with regard to frames, nothing original emerges in the field of pro-reform messages compared to what has been seen in the legacy media. Only 18 out of 40 messages contain a clear frame, and in all cases the *topos* is that of inclusion as a good in itself. On Twitter, the *topos* of the positive relationship between integration and security does not appear. In the field of messages against the reform, the risk frames are both more numerous (29) and more articulated. Unlike the legacy media, here the cultural/ethnic *topos* (6 occurrences) is not the most represented, but only the third. It is in fact anticipated both by the *topos* of invasion (12 occurrences), and by that of terrorism (8 occurrences), demonstrating an extreme nature of the discourse, which is in fact – as we have seen – largely managed by extreme right-wing subjects. The economic frame is not present here, but the crime frame is present, with three occurrences, with allusions to the risks of an increase of micro-crime as a consequence of an extension of citizenship and an expected increase of migrants' arrivals. This is the only *topos* that we find on Twitter and that we do not find on the news outlets analysed for this research. It is a very limited original contribution and shows that no alternative narratives emerged from Twitter.

It seems that the discussion on Twitter produces an articulated series of arguments and calls for mobilisation akin to the risk frame, while the benefit frames are produced through the imagery of childhood and by supporting the idea that the reasons for reform do not need arguments, as if they were self-evident.

In conclusion, it seems that the discussion on Twitter produces an articulated series of arguments and calls for mobilisation akin to the risk frame, while the benefit frames are produced through the imagery of childhood and by supporting the idea that the reasons for reform do not need arguments, as if they were self-evident. In this perspective, the world is presented as divided between those who grasp the reasons for the reform and those who – due to a presumed lack of humanity and moral stature – are unable to see them.

Finally, the analysis of Twitter messages reveals that, even more than in the legacy media, there is no attempt to reason about the requirements necessary to obtain citizenship, that is to discuss the merits of the proposed law. On the contrary, the contents of the messages, both for and against the reform, seem to constantly allude to a pure *ius soli*. Support for the reform through children's imagery and lapidary slogans such as 'whoever is born in Italy is Italian' feed the misconception that what is being discussed in the Senate is to all intents and purposes a pure form of *ius soli*. The hashtags themselves boil down almost exclusively to #iussoli and #noiussoli, also contributing to a context of discussion based on a false assumption.

3.2 Narrative making and success

a) *Who: successful storytellers and issues of access*

The main voices to which the traditional media gave space and which therefore acquired a certain power to influence the debate were those of the political actors. However, we need to add elements to better understand the protagonism of political actors. Indeed, if on the one hand the presence of their voices in newspapers and TV news seems obvious in relation to a public debate on a bill, on the other hand, if we look at the contexts in which political actors gained prominence, the issue is less obvious.

First of all, it should be noted that several public appearances of government political leaders took place on a particular stage, and from there they were then extended to TV news and newspapers. The stage was the 2017 edition (15-18 June) of *La Repubblica delle Idee* [The Republic of Ideas], an annual cultural event promoted and managed since 2012 by the newspaper *La Repubblica*.

The 2017 edition devoted a lot of space to the issue of the reform of the citizenship law and gave voice to several government representatives. It was also from this stage that other non-political actors took the floor to speak in favour of the reform, including Monsignor Galantino, whose words have had a certain echo in the media. We have also seen that it is *La Repubblica* that produced the video of the primary school children that had a lot of circulation in the media and especially on social networks. Finally, looking at the engagement data on Twitter, the role of this newspaper is clear: with 3,331 retweets the account was second only to Salvini's account between 14 and 22 June 2017.

If the prominence of *La Repubblica* is therefore an inescapable issue in confronting the question 'who had more voice in the field of pro-reform subjects?', the same cannot be said for the competing activism of a news outlet like *Il Giornale*. In fact, while we have shown the huge amount of articles produced by *Il Giornale* on the subject and its very clear focus in opposing the reform, we must also take into account the low capacity of this newspaper to carry the voices promoted there beyond the pages of the paper. *Il Giornale* and its journalists were rather invisible on Twitter. Moreover, *Il Giornale* was not able to produce contents that then circulated in other newspapers or went viral on social networks, nor did it promote initiatives and interviews that were then covered by TV outlets. In essence, unlike *La Repubblica*, *Il Giornale* limited itself to writing a lot, but did not (or was not able to) promote a wider circulation of content.

The messages of the opponents of the reform have had transversal circulation and visibility for two reasons: 1) The activism of political leaders through forms of disintermediation such as direct communication via Twitter; 2) The ability of political actors opposed to the reform to adapt their acts to the media logic (Altheide and Snow 1979) and thus gain attention from the legacy media.

With respect to the first point, as we saw in the analysis of Twitter messages, the activism of right-wing political actors is evident and their direct role in producing messages against the reform is not at all comparable with the marginal role of pro-reform political actors. In particular, in addition to Matteo Salvini, we note the very strong presence of Simone Di Stefano, the leader of the extreme right-wing political and social movement Casa Pound, whose account is the third most engaged in the period analysed. According to Riccardo Magi, a politician interviewed for this report, the exceptional success in terms of Twitter engagement of a marginal political actor is the result of an alliance with Matteo Salvini's social media managers.

This was the the time when members of Casa Pound were running for the League and Salvini's social communication machine included Casa Pound accounts among those to be given visibility. (Member of Parliament, +Europa, IT_I_11)

With respect to the second point, it is worth noting the ability of political leaders opposed to the reform to gain visibility in the legacy media, exploiting certain production logics. We see this in Beppe Grillo's ability to guess the right timing to produce strong and partly unexpected statements at the very moment when the reform was re-scheduled in the Senate. Grillo's statements managed to take part of the public scene, which for the other part in those days was occupied by a triple political action: a) the confusion in the Senate staged by the Northern League senators, all with placards ready to be displayed, while some of them forcibly occupied the government benches; b) the demonstration outside the Senate promoted by Casa Pound with posters of the jihadist terrorists who struck in Europe accompanied by the words 'Thank you *ius soli* and, finally, c) Giorgia Meloni's declarations to promote a repeal referendum. Moreover, a few days later, the conflict constructed as a direct confrontation was revitalised by Matteo Salvini, who was ready to react to Monsignor Galantino's words addressed to those opposed to the reform from the stage of *La Repubblica delle Idee*. The violent verbal clash with a clergyman generated immediate media attention, acting as extra fuel for the flames.

If these factors – the activism of *La Repubblica*, the activism of right-wing political leaders on social networks and the ability to stage conflicts and raise the tone of political confrontation by politicians opposed to the reform – explain almost everything with respect to the ability to gain access to and influence the media debate, an important question remains in the shadows. The issue is that of the absence of the voices of migrants and especially their descendants (the ultimate addressees of the bill). Marwa Mahmoud, an activist of the network 'Italians without citizenship' explains in the interview that this absence is partly due to a strategic choice on the part of the activists. In 2015, during the passage of the bill through the Chamber of Deputies, second generation activists purposely set up with the aim of putting pressure on public opinion by producing media contents and partly selling them to newspapers such as *La Repubblica* and *l'Avvenire*, and also TV news covered their messages. Instead, in 2017 activists invested more on lobbying with political representatives and less in media content production and relations with journalists, having already successfully fought the battle to win the favour of public opinion. This choice has possibly contributed to their invisibility. Riccardo Magi, member of parliament for the party +Europa, in the interview calls this choice of the activists a strategic mistake. From his point of view, they did not understand how much public opinion influences the choices of senators and politicians in general. However, mistake or not, what emerges is that the media systematically ignore the voices of migrants and their descendants unless they organise themselves and manage with great effort to gain visibility.

b) Where: narratives travelling across platforms

We have already said that a legacy medium like *La Repubblica*, unlike *Il Giornale*, has had the ability to circulate narratives well beyond its pages. It did so through an offline event and through the production of a video that was particularly successful in terms of circulation and visibility. This is perhaps the most striking case of message circulation between different media. However, other aspects must also be considered. One of them is Grillo's ability to receive huge media attention with a simple post on his blog. Grillo's success was due to the unresolved doubts of politicians and journalists about his party's position, and of party members themselves, who were waiting for guidance from the leader while already engaged in conversations about the reform with members of other parties. All this tension was dissolved with excellent timing (on the very day the debate on the reform was rescheduled in the Senate) through a post with strong and contemptuous contents. This example shows how the communication of the *5 Star Movement*, at the time still dominated by the actions of its leader through the blog, attracted the attention of journalists and how the blog itself was a news source for the legacy media.

Another interesting fact concerns the amount of verbal reactions on the main Italian news programme, *TG1*, that come directly from digital media. This news outlet offers many videos of PC screenshots in which one can read the words of political leaders through their posts on Facebook or blogs. One third of

TGI's verbal reactions are initially provoked by these digital contributions, which are followed by reactions of other political leaders. The debate is thus to a large extent constructed in the interaction between online content and television filming. But the interaction between legacy media and social networks also exists in the other direction. As we have seen, the children's video produced by *La Repubblica* has been reproduced many times and successfully on Twitter by the main pro-reform accounts. At the same time, it was on Twitter that Casa Pound coordinated and promoted the demonstration in front of the Senate that was then covered by the legacy media. The case of the then education minister Valeria Fedeli is also interesting. Her message on Twitter was the one that received the most retweets among those of pro-reform politicians during the peak, ranking eighth overall. Its content is as follows: 'I'm fine, thank you all. It won't be attempts at oppression that stop a battle of civilisation like #lusSoli'. It is a reassurance of her state of health after the brawl staged in the Senate by members of the Northern League, but it is also a message that turns the victim into a rebel, carving out a space for her as a temporary protagonist of the narrative, to which she tries to give a heroic dimension. The high engagement of this message depended entirely on the fact that the legacy media gave extensive coverage to the event in which she was slightly injured. Other examples include two satirical cartoonists whose three pro-reform cartoons published in legacy media were promoted via Twitter by three messages, which were among the 100 most retweeted messages in the period analysed. It is therefore evident that the public sphere is constructed by continuous intertwining of online and offline dimensions, between what is filmed and narrated for the benefit of legacy media and what is commented on or supported or even organised and coordinated through social networks.

The most important lesson of the strength of this mix of digital and legacy media is surely the coordinated action of the anti-reform parties mentioned above. The ability to organise protest actions in offline spaces, getting wide coverage in legacy media and, at the same time, promoting them on social networks was crucial in fuelling a polarisation of opinion on an issue that until then had seen public opinion largely in favour of reform, as recorded by many polls. It was the strength of a coordination played out between online and offline and built on risk frames that made the turnaround in the public opinion possible. Our interviewees seem to be in no doubt that this turnaround took place at that time, just as they seem to have little doubt that it played a decisive role in leading the government to abandon the reform.

An ISTAT report from February 2015 says that 72.1% of Italians are in favour of granting Italian citizenship to the children of immigrants born in our country. How did we rush to have a hostile majority? Today we are at 44% in favour, from the last poll I saw (Columnist, *Corriere della Sera*, IT_1_7).

The idea I had was that the reform was eventually abandoned because of a change in public opinion, whether real or perceived. I well remember the transformation of the climate that existed at that time on this issue (...) many institutional actors said to me: 'Now the orientation of public opinion has changed here, so much so that on citizenship, where there used to be a majority in favour, there is now no majority in favour'. (Member of Parliament, +Europa, IT_1_11)

In fact, the President of the Council of Ministers at the time, Paolo Gentiloni at the end of 2017 'justified the postponement of the law by saying that the climate of public opinion was not in favour' (Splendore 2018, 412), although it was largely favourable until a few months earlier. As Splendore (2018, 412-413) pointed out, 'the interruption of the legislative process set in motion by the law is linked (at least as several actors involved have argued) to the resistance expressed by a part of public opinion through social media or in the form of street protests.' Whether the change in public opinion was real or only perceived, what is certain is that the communicative actions of right-wing and far-right parties and movements at that precise moment in history marked a turning point, making pro-reform politicians more insecure. Indeed, they wanted at all costs to avoid unpopularity, given the fragility of the governing coalition. The communicative conflict that occurred in those days instilled many doubts among the law's

supporters. Splendore himself (2018, 412-413) argues that '[i]n reality, public opinion opposed to the law did not seem supported by evidence but rather the opposition was strategically well-orchestrated by the parties that did not support the law.'

The question of 'where' therefore shows that strategic communication that knows how to be everywhere (online, offline and in legacy media) is capable of triggering a polarising mechanism capable of changing the state of public opinion and, consequently, of directing parliamentary action under certain conditions. For this to happen, large numbers are not necessary (the number of tweets, for example, remains limited and lower than in the other cases analysed in this report), but a coordination of actions, which is able to establish the timing and manner of communication actions to obtain maximum coverage even from legacy media. In the field of pro-reform actors, this ubiquity was a specificity of *La Repubblica* alone. It is no coincidence that it was *La Repubblica*, rather than the political actors, that was the main target of *Il Giornale*, which repeatedly reported its initiatives in order to criticise them.

c) What: 'good' and 'bad' narratives

As we have shown in the analysis of the narratives and frames, the arguments in favour of the reform are limited in number and repeated without significant variations and have mainly insisted on the fact that children born in Italy to foreign parents were already *de facto* Italian. Moreover, neither the media nor the pro-reform actors were able to explain the actual consequences for the people of the acquisition of Italian citizenship, to the point that the media audiences could hardly have tools to understand the change the law concretely implied. The inability to explain the reform and support it with adequate arguments was certainly a factor in the reformers' defeat. One possible explanation for this resistance to argument and confrontation lies in the failed attempt to keep the discussion under wraps, to prevent it from exploding in the media, in the belief that the argument 'we owe it to these children' would get everyone to agree or at least provoke little resistance. Instead, the effect has been a proliferation of actions and messages against the reform, some of them inconsistent, but on the whole capable of instilling doubts about the fact that there was much more to be debated than the promoters let on.

I believe that the simultaneity of these actions [of the anti-reform political actors] has played an important role in directing, that is, in making a debate explode which, however, at the moment in which it exploded was already closed: it took a direction that was irreversible. Today, in order to be activists or even institutional actors who want to carry out reforms, one must also be equipped against this kind of use of instruments that manage to close off the possibility of explaining the goodness of a proposal in a rational manner. They have the effect of impressing in definitive terms that something is wrong. Those political actions have reached millions of citizens in a few hours with a message like: 'These people are crazy, they want to do something wrong'. At that point, it is extremely difficult to reverse that impression. (Member of Parliament, +Europa, IT_I_11)

According to Riccardo Magi of +Europa, in order to counter these waves of communication, it is necessary to prepare in time, to build up stories and arguments in the months beforehand, so as to have embankments to protect against the flood. However, Marwa Mahmoud, a second-generation activist who has been involved in the battle for the citizenship law for years, says that the legacy media are not interested in telling stories of young people without citizenship unless the issue is under scrutiny by politics and therefore made topical by the parliamentary process. In fact, Riccardo Magi argues that what is needed is an awareness-raising campaign that can bring together pieces of civil society, activists and politicians to gain visibility despite the media logic. The discussion that emerges from the interviews, and which I have briefly reconstructed here, stems from the criticism of the weak arguments put forward by the supporters of the reform in 2017. However, in addition to the weakness of the arguments, it is also necessary to look at the content.

This leads us to a point worth emphasising: the pre-eminence in the pro-reform field of a symbolic and identity-based argument – with the sole exception of the narrative, however secondary, that the granting of citizenship would bring greater security. All the people we interviewed stressed this aspect, but with different tones and perspectives. For Marwa Mahmoud the issue of discrimination is the most important one. She herself brought it up on all occasions when the media gave her space, especially during the discussion of the law in the Chamber of Deputies in 2015.

For instance, when I am interviewed, I tell about all the missed opportunities in my story due to not having citizenship. I always thought that drawing on personal experience and telling what I felt deprived of and what I did not experience because I was not recognised as a citizen was the best strategy. I realised this through experience, because I realised that so many people, friends, colleagues, etc., did not know what it meant not to have access to citizenship, in practical terms, until I told my story myself. What we took for granted was not to be taken for granted (Activist, Italians Without Citizenship, IT_I_8).

With regard to the choice of journalists and politicians to give pre-eminence instead to the symbolic and identity discourse she says:

Telling everything that we could not access was not what the politicians wanted to hear. They wanted something else. They wanted to feel needed. So they preferred this narrative: ‘I am a parent and I see that you are with my children and I recognise you as an equal and so it is necessary to extend these rights linked to citizenship, because you grow up together’ (...) It is a form of paternalism. Even in the stories of the media and Catholic politicians it was evident to us that there was so much welfarism and paternalism in narrating something that always seemed to be a concession. (Activist, Italians Without Citizenship, IT_I_8)

The preference on the part of various politicians and various media therefore seems to be to emphasise the discourse of belonging, recalling common cultural references, putting children at the centre. At the same time, even among second-generation activists, the narrative line preferred by the interviewee is not shared by everybody.

We have discussed it a lot and there are many people among us who think that it is not the decisive narrative passage and think that making children speak directly is effective (...) it is difficult to align all the activists on the fact of avoiding sentimentalism, of being pitied. It's not a kind concession or a merit, and above all I don't have to prove to you that I eat more pasta or support the national team, or have certain attachments to the country, when in my daily life I already feel that I belong, sometimes even to local areas. (Activist, Italians Without Citizenship, IT_I_8)

For Riccardo Magi, Member of Parliament for *+Europa*, the question of identity is inherent in the narrative of the citizenship law.

The question is a bit slippery; after all, citizenship is also something different from a residence permit. So in my opinion it is not wrong to use this set of cultural references, because it helps to counter the rhetoric of fear. (Member of Parliament, *+Europa*, IT_I_11)

However, from his point of view, the narrative that should have been focused on was another one, which in fact was hardly ever used in the analysed debate: insisting on how unsuitable is the current law, which allows people of Italian descent who have never set foot in Italy to vote in Italian political elections and denies this same right to a 18 year-old man or woman who grew up and went to school in Italy.

For Gian Antonio Stella, a columnist for *Corriere della Sera*, the issue of poor communication and the misguided campaign by the promoters of the reform is crucial, but in the interview there emerges a profound adherence to the identity and culturalist discourse, which is not questioned, but rather replicated.

One thing that my colleague Galli della Loggia used to say is that you have to define the rules, and I agree. If you prevent your daughter from going out of the house without the chador, you will never get citizenship from me. You must not have it. This is not your home; you are here, you asked to come and you respect our rules. If you infibulate your daughter, you will never have citizenship... never! Not even if you work 30 years. (Columnist, *Corriere della Sera*, IT_I_7)

The discourse makes little sense in reference to the reform proposal that was under discussion but it gives the idea of a widespread imaginary on cultural risk. On the other hand, even when supporting the reform, the imaginary is always the culturalist and identity-based one:

[The importance of the reform] is demonstrated by a number of Italian communities, such as that of Don Bruno Baratto in the Veneto region, which organises wonderful events centred on integration. A few years ago they made a choir that was filmed and published in the *Corriere della Sera*. In the video all the immigrants are singing the Italian anthem and they know it word for word, unlike some Italian footballers who don't always know it. It's absolutely thrilling. Those who sing the Italian anthem really believe it. Then I remember a little girl of foreign origin who, when interviewed, said: 'When I grow up I want to be an Italian teacher'. These are small but significant examples. Not understanding that culture is absolutely crucial is a very serious mistake. (Columnist, *Corriere della Sera*, IT_I_7)

On one point, however, everyone agrees: presenting the reform as if it were introducing a pure form of *ius soli*, or at least explaining very little about the requirements to obtain citizenship, was an obvious mistake. We have shown that this error is everywhere: in television reports, newspaper headlines, video campaigns, Twitter, politicians' statements, and editorials. It is a mistaken shared refrain that has distorted much of the discussion and favoured the reaction of those opposed to the reform.

We can therefore conclude by saying that, beyond the individual narratives and frames, the debate has been strongly conditioned by a shared assumption and by a master narrative. The shared assumption is that the law would have granted citizenship to all children born in Italy, whereas in reality, in order to obtain citizenship, it was necessary for the parents to hold a long-stay permit, which in turn was conditioned by questions of income and residence, as well as the length of time they had been in the country. The master narrative is the one that makes integration coincide with cultural assimilation and that is only exemplified through stereotyped images or caricatures of an alleged Italian character and with a clear abandonment – visible and demonstrable – of the culture of the family of origin, all the more so if linked to the Muslim world. In addition to being a very frequent and long-standing narrative in the Italian media, the one most often used to talk about positive integration (Pogliano 2019), this narrative feeds the opposite one – but based on the same principles – of cultural risk and raises the question of merit. Citizenship must thus be earned, and this 'privilege' can only be obtained by demonstrating one's complete adherence to a presumed and stylised Italian-ness. This narrative has the effect of overturning the discourse based on injustice and inequality. Yet, as we have also seen in the words of the interviewees, the culturalist narrative is widely shared, and even many second-generation activists considered it strategic. Analysing the success and failure of media narratives, it is clear from the analysis that it is precisely the messages that carry this vision that gain the most visibility. Outside of this vision, there is room for a few other narratives that also seem less able to circulate between different news outlets and platforms. In short, it seems that even the spreadability of messages on the reform of the law on citizenship, whether they are for or against, depends on adherence to the culturalist master narrative.

4. The attempted supremacist massacre in Macerata

On 3 February 2018, Luca Traini, a far-right sympathiser and former candidate in the municipal elections for the xenophobic party League, opened fire on people of African origin, wounding six of them (Wilson Kofi, Omar Fadera, Jennifer Odion, Gideon Azeke, Mahamadou Toure and Festus Omagbon), and on the Democratic party (centre-left) town office. The victims of the attack, according to Traini himself, were chosen based on the colour of their skin and their presumed status as migrants or asylum seekers, with the aim of ‘avenging’ Pamela Mastropietro.²³ She was a 19 year-old Italian girl killed two days earlier in the same town by Innocent Oseghale, her drug dealer of Nigerian origin. Traini, captured wrapped in the Italian flag, displaying a Roman salute and shouting ‘Italy for Italians’ in front of a war memorial, was later sentenced to 12 years’ imprisonment for racially aggravated massacre, a sentence upheld at various levels of justice.

IMAGE 4.1. Traini before capture



Source: *Corriere della Sera*, 4 February 2018, 1

The murder and subsequent shooting took place a few weeks before general elections, scheduled for 19 March 2018, during a campaign focused on the issue of immigration. The main exponents of the League were repeatedly describing immigration as an emergency, portraying asylum seekers as potential criminals and accusing the government and the parties of the left of pursuing a policy of ‘open doors to immigration’. The elections were a success for the far right, and brought to an unprecedented government coalition, one that, probably, would not have materialized if it were not for Traini’s shooting. As this journalist told us:

The League, as a result of the attempted massacre, surpasses Forza Italia. As a result of the surpass Berlusconi is no longer the one who negotiates for the formation of the new government [but is] Salvini [...] We would not have had the yellow-green government without Luca Traini [...] Because Berlusconi would have negotiated for the government and would never have gone with the 5Stars. (Journalist, *Corriere della Sera*)

23. Hereinafter ‘Pamela’ and ‘Traini’, as the media would call them.

Furthermore, the incident represents a ‘psychological turning point’:

The story of Macerata [is] a watershed in the xenophobic response to immigration in Italy [...] It is a fundamental psychological turning point, that is, the complete divorce of this strange people that are the Italians from the reasons of civilization that has made us what we are, through history, denying it completely, with a stroke of a pen, because those six were nothing, because they were part of an alien, enemy entity, designed as such for some years. (Journalist, *Corriere della Sera*, IT_I_6)

In the words of Macerata Mayor:

It is certainly an event that I believe will go down in history. I say this because it is as if it marked the opening of a passage, of a country that finds itself to be, I don't want to say racist, but let's say as if it had found itself a bit different. [...] We have portrayed ourselves, considered anti-fascist, not racist and so on, and this is how it is. But I believe that this passage [...] is a scar with respect to the soul of a national community [...] it is as if [...] we found ourselves saying ‘but in the end maybe Salvini is right that it is better not ...’ so maybe we are different from what we considered ourselves. (*Macerata Mayor*, PD, IT_I_9)

The following extract suggests otherwise. For this activist, there is a longer history of denialism, starting at least in 2011, when a man shot at a group of Senegalese people, killing two:

I don't see it as a ridge. In my opinion the Florence massacre is more of a ridge, that is our first mass shooter [in English in the original], he kills people and nobody seems to give a damn [...] that is the thing that struck me the most, that we refused to say that the killer was a fascist who had relations with Casa Pound, documented [...] I see that as the moment when we close our eyes, we as a society close our eyes to a case of mass shooting. Then when there are mass shootings in America we say that those things are American extravaganza, no? (Writer/activist, member of writers' collective *Wu Ming*, IT_I_10)

However, as we are going to see, the Macerata incident stands out for its going beyond denialism, to developments that reverted the blame onto immigrants themselves.

4.1 Making sense of trauma: Main, collateral, and counter-narratives in traditional and social media

a) Narratives and debates in traditional media

For this case study, we selected all the pertinent newspaper articles and TV news focused on the events as they unfolded in the period of maximum media coverage,²⁴ between 4 and 11 February 2018 (3-10 for TV). In the days we studied, each of the five news organisations published an average of 3.6 reports per day. Newspapers placed one news on first page almost half of the time, and TV news made an opening about one third of the times (Table 4.1). The coverage was at its highest intensity during the first three days, when two thirds of the news were published (an average of 6.4 news items per outlet per day, not in the table). Both *TG1* and *TG5* almost always used edited footage. The three newspapers' share of editorials, interviews, and news analyses was forty per cent, in the evident effort to provide keys to interpret a highly problematic event.

24. As ascertained with the tool made available by Media Cloud, <https://mediacloud.org/>.

TABLE 4.1. Coverage dedicated to the Macerata shooting by news outlet, 3-11 February, 2018. Absolute values

OUTLET	NEWS ITEMS	FIRST PAGES	OPENING NEWS OR TITLES	AIRTIME IN SECONDS
<i>Corriere della Sera</i>	41	4		
<i>Il Giornale</i>	32	4		
<i>Il Fatto Quotidiano</i>	30	2		
TG1	27		3	1,312
TG5	13		2	1,015
TOTAL	143	10	5	2,327

The distribution of topics in the media coverage over the week is shown in Table 4.2. A striking 71% of the content is dedicated to political debate, with almost no attention to the victims. This distribution is constant across the board, with no distinctions between electronic and paper or between different political leanings, the only exception being a lower-than-average coverage of the reactions to the attack and a more insistent attention to the debate over the subsequent demonstration by *Il Fatto Quotidiano*.

TABLE 4.2. Topics in the coverage of the Macerata shooting by news outlet, 3-11 February 2018. Absolute values²⁵

Statements and opinions on the attack	64
Behind the scenes: strategies and political exploitation	48
Statements and opinions on the demonstration	37
Fear in Macerata	29
Investigations and judicial information	17
Portrait of Traini	12
Reactions on social media: hatred, solidarity with Traini	7
Portrait of the victims	5
TOTAL	219

On the day of the attack – the following day in the case of newspapers – the reconstruction of the spree, reportages on the situation in Macerata and its residents' fears, and several portraits of the attacker were at the core of reports. Initial portraits focused on his fascist salute, nazi tattoo, and nationalist show using the flag and the slogan *Viva l'Italia*. Traini's theatrical show as a patriot in an Italian flag waging a war against hordes of colour could not be ignored, and was actually reinforced by the choice made by the *Carabinieri*, who had him in custody, to let him wear the flag even hours after the capture (Image 4.2).

Notwithstanding, this conflation of nation and whiteness was not dealt with further. All newspapers first page headlines connected the event, by way of time, place, or cause, to the killing of Pamela Mastropietro – according to *Il Giornale* 'the last straw' (4 February, 1). This happened already before the confession of the shooter. Hence, for the media, the thematic connection was not just or so much racism, or fascism, but 'surging crime in Macerata', or 'Italians' reactions to migrants' crime.' This is also evidenced by another association (made on 4 February by *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 12) with the killing of an

25. The number of narratives is higher than the number of news items (143) as each news could include up to three narratives.

Italian woman at the hand of a Romanian immigrant happened 10 years before. These associations seem to marginalise the theme of racism, which the media used as a qualifying label but with no connection to any other actual incident. One exception was provided by *Corriere della Sera* that talked, in the article body, of ‘lugubrious echoes of the massacre in Florence seven years ago, when two Senegalese died under the bullet of another hallucinated defender of the pure race’ (4 February, 2).

IMAGE 4.2. ‘The portrait’. Traini at the carabinieri station



Source: *Corriere della Sera*, 4 February 2018, 4.

However, more than reporting on the incident or its developments, since the beginning, the media gave space to the first massive wave of political reactions. The parties’ political positioning was very clear since the start of the debate. The centre-left government, in the person of its leader Matteo Renzi, talked about the act of a fool and ‘a climate of hatred [that] was created’ (by the League leader Matteo Salvini) but proposed, in a Facebook post that was quoted by all news outlets and would become its repeated stance: ‘Let’s all tone it down now. Let’s not exploit this affair. Let’s leave the election campaign out of this terrible event.’ (*TG1*, 3 February).

Renzi’s plea not to exploit the event, was backed by other members of the government centre-left coalition. However, this call to ‘de-politicization’ was echoed also in the opposition by the 5Stars movement’s leader Luigi Di Maio and by that movement subsequent silence on the issue. It was initially sided also by Silvio Berlusconi (formal but declining leader of the centre-right coalition), who excluded any political meaning: ‘it’s just the act of a ‘lunatic’ (*Il Giornale*, 4 February, p.6). However Salvini, with one of his tweets, was already enacting a sort of ‘reverse politicization’: ‘Violence is never the solution, violence is always to be condemned. And those who do wrong must pay. Out-of-control immigration leads to chaos, anger, social confrontation. Out-of-control immigration leads to drug dealing, theft, robbery and violence’ (quoted by *TG1*, 3 February).

For him, the responsibility was not on the attacker, but on the Government’s supposed weak approach on immigration. During the following days, when the debate widened the focus onto broader themes, opposition political leaders – Salvini, Giorgia Meloni (leader of the rising post-fascist party Fratelli d’Italia), and Berlusconi – while putting the focus on the ‘madness’ of the attacker, would all talk of ‘social unrest’ caused by ‘immigration out of control’, attributing a ‘moral responsibility’ to the left. In the words of Berlusconi,

Today in Italy there are at least 630,000 migrants [the reference was to the total number of cross-Mediterranean arrivals during the last five years] of which only 5%, 30,000, have the right to stay [...] the other 600,000 represent a real social bomb ready to explode because all these migrants do not live other than on expedients and crimes (*TG5*, 4 February).

This blaming-the-victim plus blaming-the-political-adversaries strategy, accused of letting the victims in, followed by the plan of sending ‘600 thousand [irregular migrants] away’ (*Corriere della Sera*, 5 February, 6, in the headline) served to turn the embarrassment – increased by a photo of Traini shaking hands with Salvini in 2015 and enriched by his neo-fascist and Nazis symbolic outfit – into offense.

The explicitly fascist, racist and, for some, clear terrorist qualification of the action were put centre stage, among politicians, only by the President of the Chamber of Deputies Laura Boldrini, active on civil rights and belonging to the left of the government coalition. Together with Boldrini, the well-known writer Roberto Saviano pointed the finger on Salvini as the instigator of Traini’s racist attack and his tweets were widely quoted for a day by newspapers and TV news. Even though also other politicians in the government coalition hinted at the role of Salvini’s fearmongering, only this tiny political fraction and other civil society voices tried to propose a reflection on the problem of racism and its encouragement by certain political forces, without giving in to the ‘immigration problem’ narrative.

As an example of the dominance of this narrative, we can consider the following statement by Renzi (matched by one almost identical by Di Maio), rebuking Berlusconi’s comments on immigration as a ‘social bomb’: ‘Berlusconi, who today speaks of social bomb, is the same one that has caused the problem of immigration, signing the Dublin agreement in 2003 that has left us alone to guard the borders.’ (*TG1*, 5 February)

We see here, as in other comments, the adoption of the ‘immigration problem’ explanation of the attack proposed by the right by its centre-left adversaries.

We see here, as in other comments, the adoption of the ‘immigration problem’ explanation of the attack proposed by the right by its centre-left adversaries. Berlusconi’s ‘social bomb’ and the centre-left’s reply to it brought to a shift in the debate towards the familiar theme of urban insecurity, where the implication is that Italians are those who suffer from it and immigrants are its cause. For days, exponents of the Italian government would not visit the victims (it would happen 4 days later, on the part of a lower profile Minister), according to some, for fear of losing votes and in order

to downgrade the terrorist attack to a case of crime (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 7 February, 13). The journalist working at *Corriere della Sera* we interviewed shares the same conviction: ‘It was because of fear of unpopularity, it was because of elections that were coming.’

This attitude towards the definition of ‘the problem’ – an individual case of crime favoured by political tensions and citizens’ unaddressed need of protection – would be concretized in the ban placed on holding demonstrations in the city of Macerata, by the Mayor (centre-left) and the Prefect, supported by the Minister of the Interior (Marco Minniti of the Democratic Party). While neo-fascist organizations were already making an unauthorized rally in town, clashing with the police, a fierce discussion inside the centre-left coalition began about the authorization of the upcoming anti-fascist protest, organized by trade unions, associations, and activists, and about the opportunity to participate. On 7 February, in a joint press release, ANPI (National Association of Italian Partisans), ARCI (Italian Recreational and Cultural Association, once part of the former Communist Party) and CGIL (Italian General Confederation of Labour) noting the Mayor’s request, suspended their participation in the demonstration, demanding that fascist ones be banned as well. This is probably the consequence of a logic of cooperation with their political ally:

That the bigwigs, without consulting the base, were preparing to take a distance so as not to upset the ‘friendly’ government, did not come as a surprise. [...] in a very prosaic way they play the role of a transmission belt when there is a friendly government [...] you automatically become a shock absorber of consensus and dissent, that is, an equalizer, a transmission belt that ensures that the signals of dissent against the government are preventively tamed, cushioned, diluted, dispersed in a thousand rivulets, while those few signals of consensus that do exist are amplified. (Writer/activist, member of writers’ collective *Wu Ming*, IT_I_10)

Many of their local sections, however, declared they would participate regardless. Eventually, the demonstration would be permitted last-minute, but without the participation of the main party of the centre-left coalition. At this point, the attempted massacre in Macerata was definitively denied the status of a terrorist attack to the Constitutional values of anti-fascism and anti-racism.

In a climate of fear and anticipated threats, with reports about an armoured town in a state of siege ('Macerata, tension on the rallies', *Corriere della Sera*, 9 February, 1, headline), the anti-fascist demonstration was eventually held on 10 February. That is the day of the celebration of *Giornata del ricordo*, a national remembrance day for Italians killed in Yugoslav and buried in natural ravines (*foibe*) by Tito forces at the end of World War II. A new narrative suddenly deranged the chronicle of the event, in the form of a junk-news, that is a catchy story that exploits 'political interest to clickbait attention' (Venturini 2019, 6). Apparently, a group of activists 'would have' mocked the *Giornata del ricordo* in a chant not picked up by other protesters. The supposed event, initially reported by an online local-news website and soon bounced from one tweet to another (Pilati 2020), became the focus of almost all mainstream media news (the exception being *Il Fatto Quotidiano*) as a verified fact, with outraged comments coming from across the political spectrum: 'How good the *foibe* were'. The hatred of the do-gooders parades (*Il Giornale*, 11 February, 1, headline). 'In Macerata (armoured) more than 20 thousand people, the city watches in silence. Shock chants on the *foibe*. And almost no one remembers Pamela' (*Corriere della Sera*, 9 February, 2, titling).

The mainstream media storytelling of the Macerata supremacist attempted massacre thus appears, to put it bluntly, as one whose writer gradually shifted the focus from a public threat, or moral enemy, to another: that is from racism to immigrants' crime and ultimately to leftist radicalism.

The mainstream media storytelling of the Macerata supremacist attempted massacre thus appears, to put it bluntly, as one whose writer gradually shifted the focus from a public threat, or moral enemy, to another: that is from racism to immigrants' crime and ultimately to leftist radicalism.

b) Characters, emotions, and settings

We can distinguish the most relevant characters portrayed in the reports assigning them to different roles (Table 4.3). On one side, there are figures whose actions are mainly semiotic (i.e. aimed at providing accounts and interpretations): public officials who release information or politicians and activists that enter the scene to propose their point of view in the public arena. Among these, politicians take the lead, not only in terms of number of mentions but also because, when appearing, they occupy the most prominent position in almost half of the cases. While politicians opinions are at the centre of the reports, the stance of anti-racist demonstrators – sometimes qualified as extremists – is often objectified using indirect references, such as 'protest', or 'parade', where their actions 'speak' for their opinions, which are rarely reported. The same holds true for fascists, among the main characters when they parade in the streets of Macerata or express support for Traini's action.

TABLE 4.3. Types of characters, 3-11 February, 2018. Absolute values²⁶

POLITICIANS	133
ANTI-RACIST ACTIVISTS	16
PUBLIC OFFICIALS	15
NEOFASCISTS	10
Victims	41
Asylum seekers in Italy	40
Oseghale	11
Immigrant community in Macerata	3
Blacks	2
TOT. ORDINARY OUTSIDER COMMUNITY	97
Traini	60
Pamela	13
Italians	10
Citizens of Macerata	7
TOT. ORDINARY INSIDER COMMUNITY	90
TOTAL	361

A second role position is that occupied by the targets of the attack, be they the actual victims, general categories to which they were associated – like asylum seekers in Italy, the immigrant community in Macerata, blacks – and even Innocent Oseghale, accused for Pamela’s death and perceived by Traini as a member of that same wider community. The six wounded people were nearly always represented as a group of asylum seekers, qualified by way of their gender or age, as innocent victims, immigrants, blacks, people, or foreigners. Their names were very rarely mentioned, and they appeared as specific individuals in just four instances. Almost nothing was said about their wounded bodies and the consequences they would face. There were rare hints of their emotions, only fleeting references to fear, anger and sadness in nine news stories. They were the most prominent character only 10% of the times they appeared. Despite being one of the two actual protagonists, albeit passive, of the news-fact, they remain quite anonymous, in a strategy of invisibilisation, confirmed by just four pictures dedicated to them during all the period, shot from a long distance in a stretcher, hidden by rescuers.

Much more characterized is the whole collective of (prospective) asylum seekers in Italy, Berlusconi’s notorious ‘social bomb’, a projection, in a metonymical relationship, of the victims of the attack. This metonymy was already present in the choice made by Traini, who targeted them as specimen of that wider community, and was adopted by commentators across the board, ‘reckoning’ with the problem of ‘massive immigration’. The portrait of this community of outsiders, whether in the words of journalists or politicians whose speech they are reporting, is mainly about invasion and illegality. These (‘irregular’) ‘immigrants’ and ‘*clandestini*’ (illegals), to quote the most widely-used labels, are described by *Corriere della Sera* as ‘miserable’, ‘desperate’, ‘thousands’, ‘drug dealers’, ‘tens of millions’, ‘people we know nothing about’. On the right, qualifications are more crude: ‘legion’, ‘African hordes posing as refugees and staying at our expense’, ‘your migrants’, ‘new recruits’ [of crime], ‘gangs’ (*Il Giornale*); or ‘misfits’ and ‘delinquents’ (*TG5*). Coherently, migrants’ actions are rarely semiotic or mental: they do not seem to feel, think, or talk. Instead, they appear as engaged in behavioural activities, among which the media

26. The number of characters is higher than the number of news items (143) as each news could include up to three main characters.

and politicians obsessively mention movement ('arrive', 'land', 'remain', 'invade', 'escape') and crime ('commit crimes', 'deal drugs', 'kill', 'rape', 'pander').

Migrants' champion, so to speak, is Innocent Oseghale who, despite having no concrete role in the news-fact, is evoked 11 times. He is reduced to his group: his nation of origin, Nigeria, or the category of drug dealers. Nationality and the drug dealing environment, together with his being an irregular migrant, is then the key characterizing element. He is denied any form of personification: nothing is said about his story, no acquaintance is tracked down to tell anything about him, no one is interested in knowing something more. The only repeated descriptor is his actions: he tore Pamela's body to pieces. As emerges in Pogliano and Frisina (2020), this was true also for the news dedicated only to the Pamela killing affair and not considered here, where we could have assumed a higher interest in the killer's motivations.

The targets' skin colour, the factor of choice in their victimization, is directly mentioned ('black', 'of colour') several times, especially in the first chronicles of the event, but it is no further thematised, so much so that blacks as a category are a character just in two stories. Even when talking about racism, the media refer to the status of asylum seeker and not to racialization. African origin is thematized once, but in a discourse about numbers and not about prejudice. For commentators, the problem seems to lie in immigration, not racialization.

The third role position is occupied by the shooter and the groups he is supposed to belong: the young woman he pretended to vindicate, the wider community of Italians, and Macerata citizens. The comparison with the second role position is striking. First of all, Traini not only appears as one of the principal characters more often than his victims but, when he does, he is the main one in two thirds of the cases. One third of the pictures is dedicated to him (41 out of 121) or his belongings, the others being dedicated to politicians interviewed, the police, and protesters, that is, to other Italians.

Second, in contrast with Oseghale²⁷, Traini is humanised. Despite several hints to his fascist ideology and his reading of the *Mein Kampf*, and despite a 'jerk' epithet, his action is psychologically contextualised, with references to emotions, first of all the anger and the pain he felt following Pamela affair. The description leans on the daily environments he frequented – the gym, the bedroom, the psychologist's study, the bar – that, together with references to his mother and grandmother, make him an ordinary person, a troubled man, as we could all be.

The 'avenger', the 'gunslinger' is closely described detailing:

- a) his bodily traits: 'burly, muscular', 'dressed like a nephew of Rambo', 'bald as a skinhead';
- b) his troubled past: 'only child of separated parents', 'difficult young man', 'small-town kid', 'loser', 'person overwhelmed by family troubles', 'a social outcast with enormous problems', who 'lost friends from the gym' and 'approached the wrong companies'; and
- c) his psychological deficiencies: 'crazy', 'insane', 'deranged', 'man with mental problems', 'child trapped in the body of an adult', 'borderline and antisocial personality', 'a sick mind', 'demented supremacist'.

This insistence on social and psychological issues sometimes amounts to an absolution, especially, but not only, by *Il Giornale*. This 'quiet boy, an extremely respectful and introverted person', 'dumb, not bad', 'romantic who loses his mind', who is 'a fool, not a murderer', a 'good and simple person', 'poor avenger', who 'had friends from all parts of the world, even non-EU, black kids', 'laughed and joked with everyone', 'was trying to bring justice' deserves our compassion. In sum, Luca Traini has the right to a story that tells

27. This remains true also considering earlier news following the finding of Pamela's body, not in our sample but studied in Frisina and Pogliano (2020).

and partially absolves him, while Innocent Oseghale had no right to one. One could think that Traini's prominence is justified by the need to understand his gesture. As we have seen, however, this was not the case for Innocent Oseghale.

The same unbalance holds true for the victims. While the six targets of Traini were practically invisible, the Italian Pamela, Oseghale's victim, was not. Not only was she still one of the main characters also in 13 news stories dedicated to the attempted massacre but, as Frisina and Pogliano show (2020), at the time of the discovery of her body she was the object of a highly doctored representation, with images of intimate moments continually put on display, excerpts from videos with friends carefully selected and edited to bring out the innocent and 'sunny' side of the victim ('she was always smiling', 'she was kind to everyone'), which hid her story of addiction. Her popularisation would make her 'Pamela' for everyone, while Traini's six victims barely had a name.

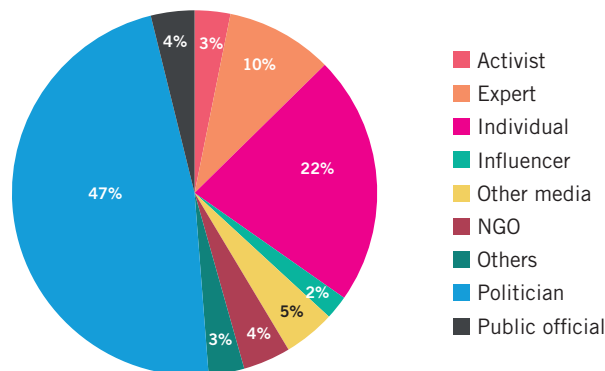
The community of insiders is represented also by way of the collective 'Italians' and of the city of Macerata and its citizen's, all of them implicitly autochthonous. 'Italians', 'the people' (*Corriere della Sera*), 'everyday people', 'the original population' (*Il Giornale*) are 'exasperated by illegality'. On the ground, the narrative seems more interested in the fears experienced by the citizens who heard the gunshots than in those who had those bullets in their flesh. The shooting 'threw Macerata into panic', triggered 'great fear', 'sowed panic around the city', 'under siege', 'plunged into nightmare', in an 'alarm and anxiety syndrome', whose white people 'remained locked in the house', 'risked being affected'. This exhibition of Italians' affects evokes similar emotions in the public, prompted to feel anger and fear in more than three quarters of the news stories²⁸. In sum, these projections of Traini's Italianness transform the (individual) culprit into (collective) victims.

Among the characters into which Traini's 'community' is reflected, one, probably the most important one, is almost missing. The neo-fascist *milieu* to which Traini belonged is found ten times within the main characters represented, but only because they organized a rally in town and clashed with the police and other protesters. We do not see any digging into the neofascist environment as the one we saw for the community of refugees in Italy, represented 40 times as one of the three main characters. Neofascists as a collective category, as an issue to be dealt with, which can shed light onto Traini's behaviours, are among the main characters just two times in articles published by *Il Fatto Quotidiano*. Overall, the coverage of the Macerata shooting thematized the collective of asylum seekers, representing them as 'problem people', but overlooked Traini's neo-fascist context, if not as a descriptive repertoire in the portraits of shooter. One might venture to speculate that rather than trying to understand Traini by investigating his political context, journalists have tried to explain, so to speak, the 'inevitable victimization' of asylum seekers, in a subtle form of the blaming the victim strategy.

c) Voices

The count of all the voices hosted by the various news organizations, be they verbal reactions, testimonies, or interviews, provides a non-surprising result, as politicians get the lion's share, especially on TV (Graph 4.1). Those belonging to the main government party (*Partito Democratico*, hereon *PD*, centre-left), in their dual role as authorities (ministers, mayor) and campaigning political formations, prevail. As we have seen above, their numerical prominence (48 statements, against 13 from LEU – at their left – 14 from Berlusconi's Forza Italia, 20 from Salvini's League, and 16 from 5Stars Movement) didn't grant them hegemony over the conversation, as they first adopted their opponents' theme, that of the 'immigration bomb', and then split over participation in the anti-racist rally.

28. The news solicit also compassion or sadness in more than one quarter of the stories (in all cases towards various targets) and, in a handful of instances, guilt (only in three news by *Corriere della Sera*) or satisfaction.

GRAPH 4.1. Types of verbal reactions reported by mainstream media. N=285

We can find also many quotations from everyday people. Macerata residents were interviewed as witnesses to the events (a little more than a quarter of the total of the ordinary people quoted), and a similar number, either in Macerata or elsewhere, to provide opinions about the attack, exemplifying ‘what the people think’ either ‘understanding, without justifying’ or being ‘outraged’ at the attack. They would be quoted in similar amounts, if it weren’t for *Il Giornale*, which only interviewed the ‘not good, but...’ opinion bearers. Among common people quotes we included Traini and his acquaintances, whose voices were reported 33 times, that is forty per cent of all common people’s verbal reactions. The media drew from his testimony or previous utterances (in half of the cases), or talked to his lawyer, or mother. Only two quotes come from the victims.

Anti-racist activists, despite being the protagonists of the final days of coverage, directly or indirectly, were rarely given a voice. In half the cases, four instances, to express their opinions, otherwise to reassure about the peaceful nature of the protest or to be mocked by *Il Giornale* quoting some of their slogans.

Overall, this overly male choir – 223 men and 42 women – is even more unbalanced in terms of origin. Out of 285 voices, only 14 come from non-white people (only two interviewed on TV): apart from two victims and two people working for a local NGO, news outlets collected a number of testimonies and a few opinions, the latter in the field of those who understand ‘Italians’ exasperation’, and just one from an expert.

In the heated political debate, voices expressing opinions, like other journalists, influencers, or politicians, are sometimes portrayed in a negative way, deemed unreliable or reported with words expressing disagreement. This is also true for the presentation of Traini’s confession. Overall, TV news maintain almost always a neutral approach, while *il Giornale* and *Il Fatto Quotidiano* tend to be often critical, sceptical or negative, though in opposite directions. *Corriere della Sera* stands in between TV news and these two newspapers.

d) Frames

We can summarize how the different news publications inflected the meaning of the event considering how they framed the story. We decided to distinguish between seven frames according to the preferred explanation(s) attributed to the tragic event. As a matter of fact, the different voices in the political discussion and most news stories diverged mainly in the emphasis given to the various factors that brought to Traini’s attack.

Neutral framings, balancing causes or reporting fact-based breaking news, were almost one fifth of the total, with a higher proportion in the *TG5* (Table 4.4). The other news pointed at different social and

political factors and, less commonly, to individualistic explanations. News outlets in the right preferred to talk about the ‘immigration problem’ as a trigger of Italians’ exasperation in about one fourth of the news. They also insisted, in a similar proportion and much more than the others, on Traini psychological problems and his desire to avenge Pamela Mastropietro.

TABLE 4.4. Frames in the coverage of the Macerata shooting by news publication, 3-11 February, 2018. Percentages. N=143²⁹

FRAMES	<i>CORRIERE DELLA SERA</i>	<i>IL FATTO QUOTIDIANO</i>	<i>IL GIORNALE</i>	TG1	TG5	TOTAL
Divided society/Climate of hatred	29	22	27	17	6	23
Neutral	17	13	19	18	31	18
Fascism	7	41	4	24	6	17
Racism	21	12	2	22	11	14
Immigration	12	0	26	7	23	13
Madness	10	10	18	10	17	12
Revenge	4	2	4	2	6	3
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100

The other news publications gave more place to other explanations, usually political. Racism is one, in about one fifth of the cases: ‘In the split city that reveals intolerance ‘No, you don’t shoot like that, he could have caught someone’ (*Corriere della Sera*, 5 February 2018, 5). Fascism is another, although with a strong discrepancy between *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, highlighting that factor in 40% of the news, and *Corriere della Sera*, proposing a reading in terms of fascism very rarely. A last frame – focusing on the theme of a divided society crossed by a climate of hatred – was adopted on an average of one fourth of the times by almost all publications. This frame lends itself to different political usages. It was employed to talk about opposing views on the appropriate social reaction and positionings towards the attack: ‘The report. Half the community against racism, the other exasperated by lawlessness’ (*Il Giornale*, 6 February 2018, 7). It was also adopted to criticize the emotional tones of the electoral campaign and in particular Salvini’s fearmongering: ‘The entrepreneurs of resentment that becomes a political weapon’ (*Corriere della Sera*, 4 February 2018, 11). In several instances, the two usages intermingled somehow ambiguously.

Despite being rarely one of the two dominant frames, the theme of the revenge (3%), as well as that of madness (12%), were much more common than one could think. As we showed above, they were often present by way of associations to the case of Pamela or of labels and qualifications attributed to Traini.

e) Narratives and commentary in the social media

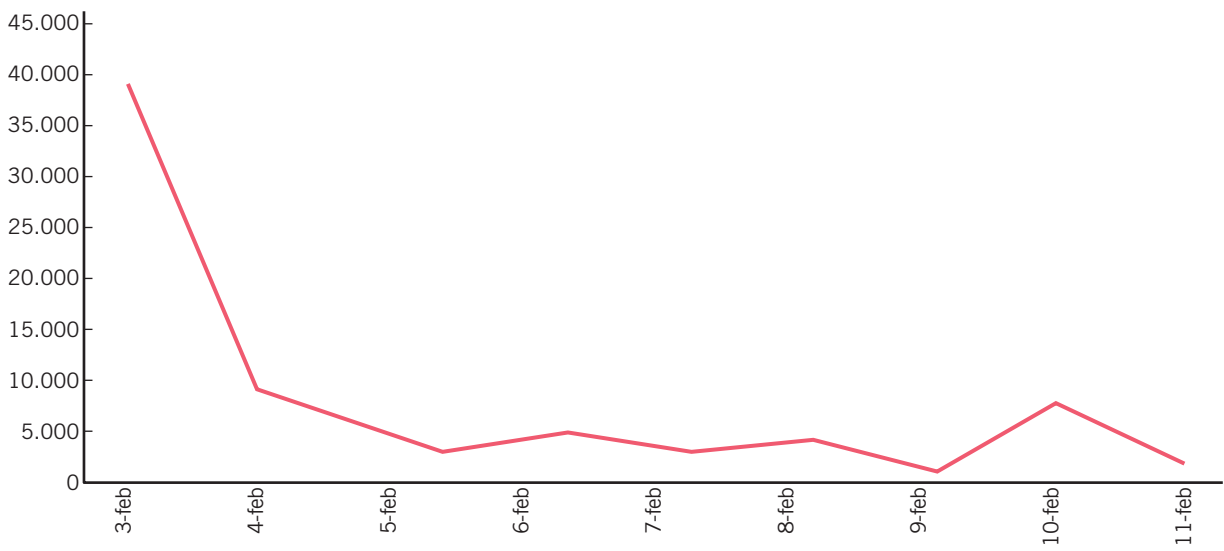
In addition to the 143 news items appeared in newspapers and TV, we considered the 100 most retweeted messages that had the keyword ‘Macerata’, ‘maceratamanifestazione’, ‘Traini’ and ‘Pamela’³⁰

29. Each news item could be classified using up to two frames. However, percentages have been calculated out of the number of news items, in order to maintain the right proportion between news with a neutral frame (that was always the only one) and news in the other frames, which could have up to two frames.

30. We kept only the messages related to the issue.

in the hashtag or in the text and that were published in the same period considered for the traditional media. The tweets' engagement ranged between 4,608 retweets (and 9,664 likes) for the top message and 373 (and 408 likes) for the bottom one, for a total of 74,379 retweets and 126,812 likes.³¹ Most messages were concentrated on the day of the attack and the following (58), with a final smaller spike on the day of the anti-fascist demonstration. The trend of the aggregated engagement of the first 100 most retweeted messages can be seen in Graph 4.2.

GRAPH 4.2. Aggregated engagement of the 100 most retweeted messages per day. Total engagement=74,379



The conversation on Twitter was a commentary on events, institutional and activists' reactions, and political and media comments. For this reason, we distinguished again between the user's comment and the target (event or utterance) against which that comment was directed. They are reported on Table 4.5. Also in this case, negative comments were far more numerous than positive ones. Only 12 comments expressed positive emotions, like solidarity for the victims and hope, determination, and appreciation for the anti-fascist reaction. 87 comments were denunciations and criticism about the other side's commentary and their actions, on the wings of outrage, anger, sarcasm, or irony.

Twitter users concentrated their attention on two kind of events. First, on the attack, whose responsibility many gave to right-wing politicians as moral instigators, but a few also to the left supposed open-door policy on immigration. Seven messages were aimed at underlining the names of the victims and their destiny, as a display of respect for people whom they deemed had been disregarded by politicians and the media. Second, comments on Twitter were directed at factual reactions. Above all, they focused on antifascists' reactions, especially the demonstration held in Macerata. While six messages promoted the events, a majority of the tweets were harsh critiques directed at violent actions by protesters (in other towns or in the days before the national demonstration) and at the notorious chant on the *foibe*. Furthermore, eight messages denounced the way institutions, almost always the Minister of Interior Minniti, dealt with the attack. Minniti's visit to Macerata outraged right-wing commentators, because he had not visited the site of Pamela's killing, as well as left-wing ones, who criticized his failure to visit the victims.

31. We could not access the number of Likes of 15 discontinued accounts, so the real total number of Likes is higher.

TABLE 4.5. Target events and utterances (rows) and comments (columns) on Twitter, 3-11 February, 2018. Absolute values³²

TARGET NARRATIVES	POSITIVE COMMENTS	NEGATIVE COMMENTS	TOTAL
Events: Traini's action		13 Cause: moral instigators	29
		9 Critique	
		4 Cause: open doors to immigration	
		3 Other	
Events: Victims' fate	7 Solidarity		7
Reactions: Antiracists	6 Promotion	12 Critique	18
Reactions: Institutions		8 Critique	8
Commentary: C-R politicians		20 Critique	20
Commentary: C-L politicians		9 Critique	9
Commentary: Media		7 Critique	7
Other	1 N/A	1 Critique	2
TOTAL			100

Other tweets were dedicated to comments and media representation. Opinions coming from centre-right-wing politicians were attacked in 19 messages, which depicted them as nonsensical, instrumental, or unacceptable. Similar comments were dedicated to centre-left-wing opinions, albeit in lower numbers. Also, media representations, often conflated with commentary in general, were criticized. Most critical comments came from the left, addressing a lack of will to recognize the real nature of the attack. In the words of the most retweeted message in all the sample, by writer Roberto Saviano: 'I invite the media to define the facts of Macerata for what they are: a terrorist, fascist act. Any attempt to sweeten or make neutral the news is connivance' (3 February, 2018).

Despite the disapproving remarks to the detriment of the media, the events on which users on Twitter commented were those covered by newspapers and TV. There are, however, important differences in the topics covered. First, typical traditional media features like portraits of the protagonists and updates from investigations were, not surprisingly, absent. Second, the theme of fear in Macerata, a staple of news media coverage of violent acts, was almost absent. Third and more interesting, the victims were comparatively much more considered on Twitter. Fourth, the traditional media depiction of comments on social media – focused on racist support to Traini and the photomontage of the decapitation of 'friend-of-immigrants' Laura Boldrini – did not reflect the prevalent trend on Twitter. In the media platform most used by journalists, as we will see below, anti-racist stances were far more common than racist ones.

f) Frames and voices in the social media

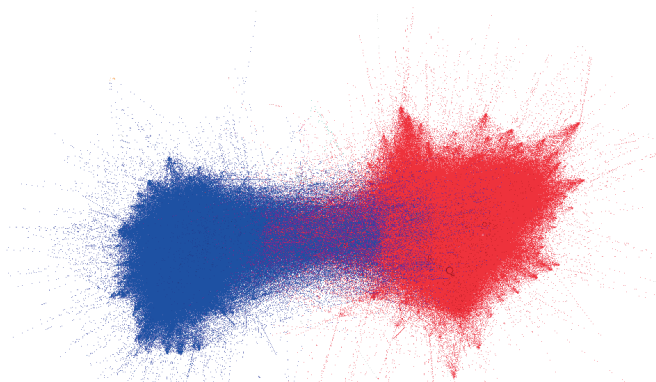
The conversation in this corpus is quite different from the one in mainstream media. To begin with, the discussion is much more polarized. In Graph 4.3 we can see the network of retweets between users³³, where nodes (i.e., accounts) inside the blue (Nativist) and the red (Civil reaction) bubbles are engaged in an endogamic conversation.³⁴

32. The raw totals are not always the sum of the positive and negative comments as some tweets did not comment on their target narrative. Given the simple structure of Twitter texts, for each Tweet we only classified one target narrative, one comment, and one frame.

33. For technical details see note 12.

34. The image is much more compact than the one in the first case study, but this is due to our zooming out in order to include all the very numerous nodes.

GRAPH 4.3. Network of retweets on Twitter, 3-11 February 2018



Furthermore, the frame distribution is rather different from the one seen for newspapers and TVs. Neutral stances are absent, and so are the psychologising frames of madness and revenge (Table 4.6). Also the ambiguous frame often contextualising the climate of hatred in a vaguely naturalised societal division is followed in just one tweet. Two thirds of the sample are instead mobilized in what looks like a civil society uprising. Half of them talks explicitly and often interconnectedly of fascism, racism and terrorism. This is not only an interpretation of the shooting, but also an accusation to those who do not want to see them and, in a handful of cases, a support for the coming demonstration. In addition, as we have already seen, 8 tweets put the spotlight on victims.

TABLE 4.6. Frames on Twitter, 3-11 February 2018. Absolute values

CIVIL REACTION, OF WHICH:		65
Racism	24	
Fascism	17	
Terrorism	8	
Victims	8	
Anti-right debunking	5	
Divided society	1	
N/A	2	
NATIVIST, OF WHICH:		35
Anti-antiracism	16	
Pamela first	11	
Immigration bomb	8	
TOTAL		100

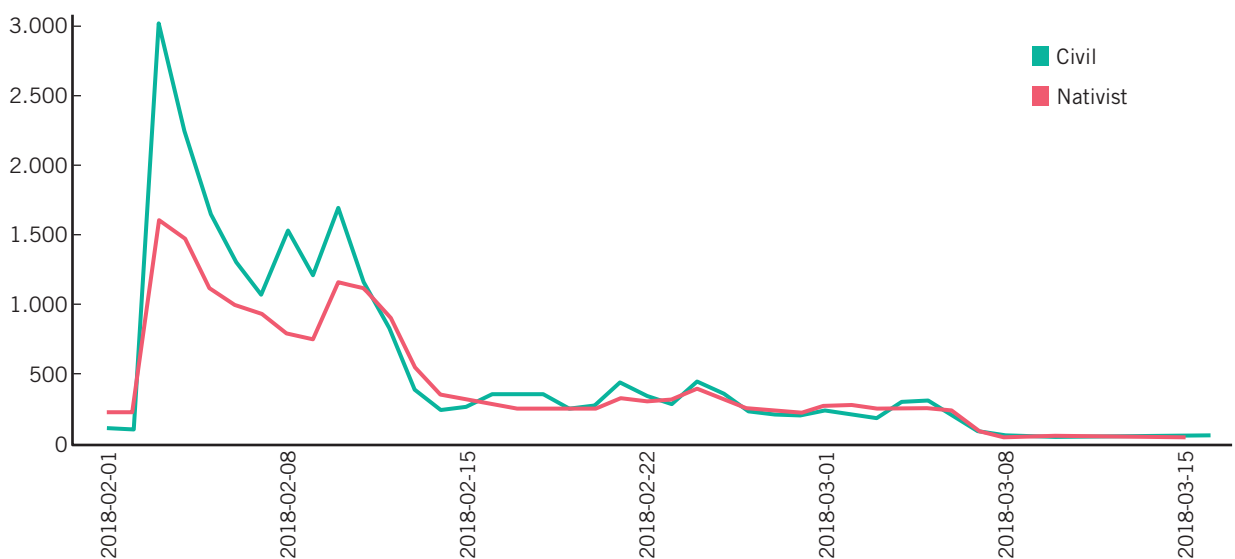
In fact, in this macro-frame, the only statements that do not explicitly denounce fascism, racism, and the terrorist nature of Traini's action and do not focus on the victims come from exponents of the government coalition, like the Prime Minister Gentiloni ('Shooting of unarmed citizens in a community already hit by the barbaric killing of a girl. No to an escalation of hatred and violence. Let's stop it now. Let's stop it together', 3 February), or the secretary of the main party in the government coalition Renzi. Others, often from the same political area, concentrate on debunking Berlusconi promise to get rid of 600,000 illegal migrants, without proposing their own frame.

One third of the tweets constitutes an opposite and compact macro-frame that brings forth a nativist perspective. These messages pick up Salvini and Berlusconi's theme of the immigration bomb, make outraged comments to their opponents double standard – for not protesting for Pamela's killing as they were doing for Traini's spree – and condemn the alleged hypocrisy, violence, and anti-Italianness of the demonstration, in an escalation that reaches 45% of the messages in our sample on the day of the protest and 100% on the following day.

In terms of engagement, the Civil reaction macro-frame dominates more sharply, as its messages amount to a total number of retweets which is 2.5 times that of messages in the Nativist frame (52,259 vs. 20,905). The disproportion in the total number of likes is even bigger – by a factor of 3.6 times (97,683 vs. 27,502). This higher engagement and appreciation could be explained by the fact that accounts in the dominant frame had more followers, and so a wider 'base' that could retweet or give a like, but in fact they had slightly less, on the whole. As in our first case study, the followers of the accounts in the Civil reaction front mobilised simply more than the followers of accounts in the Nativist one: the ratio of retweets per follower is, on average, 2.6‰, as compared to 1.7‰ in the Nativist frame.

As would later happen in 2019 with the Sea Watch affair, this mobilization and the numeric prevalence it produced did not last. We extended the analysis to the messages tweeted over one month and a half, that is to the 4 March general elections and their aftermath, when the issue disappeared forever. In Graph 4.4 we can see an estimate of the trend of the Civil reaction and the Nativist frames where, after the main peak period, the first continues to prevail only during two small peaks but in general the difference is negligible.

GRAPH 4.4. Estimate of the one-month-and-a-half trend of the civil reaction and the nativist frame on Twitter



Despite this drop in the Civil society frame hegemony, the change after the peak is not as dramatic as the one experienced in the Sea Watch affair. If we look at the 10 most retweeted usernames during the peak days, the ratio between Civil society frame (chosen by writers, journalists, bloggers and just one politician) and Nativist frame (Salvini and two bloggers/influencers) is 7 to 3. After the main peak, it becomes 6 to 4. What is most remarkable is the bi-partisan loss of interest into the issue, which will only be briefly and timidly resumed during anniversaries and judges' rulings over Traini case.

4.2 Narrative making and success

a) *Who: successful storytellers and issues of access*

The most straightforward conclusion we can draw from our analysis of the conversation on the Macerata shooting is that the victims' perspective was absent and almost as absent was the narration coming from the groups to which they symbolically belong, such as the foreign communities in Macerata and in Italy. Despite being almost ten per cent of the town's population, foreign born residents were clearly not considered members of the community, neither by the authorities nor by the media. As a matter of fact, the same Minister of Interior who would later say 'I felt it was my duty to go and stand by the citizens of that deeply affected city' did not pay visit to the victims. Also, the City Mayor, who proudly and respectfully talked in our interview about their integration in the social fabric, did not seem to think about their viewpoint and feelings when mentioning 16 times the (Macerata) 'community' sentiments (see below).

As we have seen, politicians in the centre-left government coalition were the protagonists of the debate (with the exception of Twitter, of which we talk in the next section). Occupying the apical positions both in the national and the city government, they benefited of the space that the media routinely reserve to public officials. This does not mean they imposed their agenda, their narratives, or gained politically, on the contrary. To explain this, it would not help focusing on issues of communication and social media management, or of marginalisation from the media arena. The spine of the government coalition, self-reportedly, simply decided to 'step back', 'tone it down', 'not exploit'. As a consequence, they rejected the frame of the fascist terror but, when attacked for their supposed 'open-door' policy on immigration, reacted putting the blame for the supposedly high number of immigrants on Berlusconi's previous right-wing government. In brief, they implicitly accepted the right's 'immigration-problem' frame, that is their opponents blaming-the-victim strategy.

As this approach had deep consequences on the way the racist attack in Macerata was narrated in mainstream media, it is worth exploring its rationale. According to the Mayor of Macerata, the first to distance himself from the idea of a collective reaction, what mattered more was the 'perception' of the attack in the community.

That was not a terrorist act, and I do not mean this in the technical sense, but in the sense of perception. That is, the people of Macerata did not perceive it as a terrorist act. Absolutely not, that was a criminal act that naturally swam within a sea. (Macerata Mayor, PD, IT_I_9)

The 'sea' the Mayor is talking about is the widespread outrage at migrants' illegal activities. As a consequence, in a cooperative dialogue with his administration, the Minister of Interior and the Prime Minister, he did not participate to the national anti-racist rally in town (he would participate to a smaller, local-scale event later). In his reconstruction, the theme of the local 'sentiment' is pervasive:

The question that we asked ourselves together is 'but what would the people of Macerata want us to do at this time' [...] we believed we could interpret that the best feeling in those days, in light of everything that was happening around us, was that of political silence, [to avoid] the instrumentalization that sometimes occurs with respect to these events. [...]. My immediate need was also to represent a different city from the one the world was watching on TV [...] if I identify Macerata with Traini's shots [...] I felt that silence was very important. It was the subject of a great deal of controversy, even in the major national newspapers [...] because they did not understand what was the role of a mayor within a community, which had to embrace all feelings: the death of Pamela Mastropietro and at the same time also the story of Luca Traini, in my opinion, suggested to be attentive to the respect of that community [...] I say this as a man of the left with a sensitivity to racism but obviously also to everything that concerns incomprehensible criminal acts as happened for Pamela Mastropietro with Oseghale (Macerata Mayor, PD, IT_I_9)

We see here all the arguments put forward by many political exponents in his party: the will not to instrumentalize, the need to move beyond, erasing bad feelings and bad images sparing Macerata another difficult moment, and the caution of taking into account the sentiments of those outraged by the homicide of Pamela Mastropietro – who would not accept a civil reaction different from that dedicated to Pamela’s killing. The reduction of the terrorist, fascist, and racist attack – that would require a public ritual of reparation – to a (racially motivated) common crime is central to this *par condicio* approach: why to react differently to two very serious criminal acts?

The skeleton in the cupboard behind this communicative strategy is the fear of being perceived as ‘pro-immigration’, something of which a political right prolonged campaign seems to have convinced also moderates. In the words of the journalist working at the middle-of-the-ground *Corriere della Sera*,

It is also very much the fault of the Italian left. [...] a right wing that decided to ride in the most unscrupulous way the migratory peak that we had [...] has been matched by a left wing that has simply pretended that the issue did not exist [...] exchanging [in the relations with the European Union and other EU states] welcome – that is, you give them [refugees] all to us and Amen and you give us more flexibility because my problem is the public deficit – but to a large extent simply pretending that the issue did not exist. That is, the left has divorced the Italian population (Journalist, *Corriere della Sera*, IT_I_6)

However, this is not the opinion of activists who went to the rally. For one of them, the speculation about Italians being ‘anti-immigrant’ is an unverified presumption: ‘You assume that public opinion is more to the right than you are. But that’s also a myth. It starts from premises that have never been proven. This is also often disproven’. (Writer/activist, member of writers’ collective Wu Ming, IT_I_10)

What is at stake here, is the age-old opposition between those who ‘recognize’ and ‘respect’ public opinion and those who think it is ‘constructed’ in circumstances such as these. What the country needed, for the latter, was exactly a popular reaction:

The point was that the Macerata demonstration had to be attended and defended in terms of its legitimacy and political and even human utility. There was a real need, Macerata needed it and the country needed a prompt response to such an event. If, in the name of moderating tones and all these things, this need had been eluded, it would probably have been a very hard blow to the psyche. (Writer/activist, member of writers’ collective Wu Ming, IT_I_10)

In addition, the institutions should have favoured the process:

When this thing happened, the Minister of the Interior, the first thing he should have done, should have gone to the hospital to visit the victims, he should have given them honorary citizenship and they should have invited them to the Quirinale [the seat of the Presidency of the Republic] and given them a medal, they should have made them go around the schools to make them witness the consequences of racism. There had to be an investment by the institutions, which is not that there was not, there was exactly the opposite. And then they all had to go to the square in Macerata after a week to demonstrate against racism. This would have been a right reaction. (Association executive, ARCI, IT_I_5)

The contrast between the two approaches that split those in the centre-left political spectrum seems to be one between two different public goods. For those at the left of the Government coalition or outside it, rights come first and cannot be negotiated. For the majority of the governing centre-left, the goal of ‘social cohesion’ – or, in cynical terms, of avoiding a presumed loss of popular support – may suggest mediating between rights and consensus management.

b) Where: narratives travelling across platforms

Among the 285 verbal reactions we coded examining mainstream media reporting, most were collected with direct interviews, from other traditional media outlets or from unknown channels (presumably press releases). Out of 14 verbal reactions coming from social media, 6 were attributed to high profile politicians and intellectuals, mostly Renzi and Saviano, and eight to common people using a language of hate against immigrants and their ‘friends’ and/or ‘understanding’ Traini’s action. However, Renzi and Saviano were not represented as social media users, but rather as influential personalities who, by the way, have a direct access to mainstream media anyway. Thus, the traditional media representation of the conversation on social media, that is of exchange among common people, was all dedicated to anti-immigrant hate speech, even making a few headlines.

This representation of what is considered a proxy of public opinion – the most enraged, hot-blooded, but still ‘what the people think’ – may well have been influenced decision-makers. This is clearly suggested by the mayor of Macerata in his conversation with us:

One of the things that struck me the most and surprised me to the point of being quite astonished were the readings on social networks in which people wrote about Traini ‘he was wrong, one should not shoot, but...’. This adversative adverb was a constant, the ‘but’ was the photograph, the image of a path, of a narrative that was fed by the facts. Because the narrative [of the League] had settled down so much, had entered the heads of the people, that all this seemed [justifiable]. (Macerata Mayor, PD, IT_I_9)

In our study, however, we saw that the main trend on Twitter was going in the opposite direction, a phenomenon totally neglected by mainstream media. For them, a person who wishes that the same treatment inflicted on Pamela will happen to ‘friends of immigrants’ is more newsworthy than a civil reaction of condemnation of something that even the right was formally condemning.

It is possible, however, that Twitter is not a good proxy of public opinion as Facebook is, for example. This is the opinion of the Mayor, who replied to our observation about the real trend on Twitter saying:

I believe that Twitter is a rather selected tool, that is, specific groups go there. I – very popular – [...] for example I don’t go on Twitter, I’m not able. I believe that the sentiment of the people – this said a bit rhetorically – was Facebook. (Macerata Mayor, PD, IT_I_9)

He also reminded the users’ comments seen on an online local newspaper, which went in the same racist direction.

The issue about which online platform is really ‘representative’ of public opinion is not simple, but, as we argued in the introduction, a reasonable answer is ‘none’, as each platform attracts particular socio-demographic, cultural, and political profiles. Without denying the elite nature of Twitter, what we can safely say is that mainstream media misrepresented the debate on that platform (from which came half of their quotes from everyday people’s hate speech), seeing only the ‘dark side’ of social media, an approach that does not sound novel. And politicians and public officials, daily consumers of the ‘old’ media, likely drew their own conclusions.

If we approach the cross-media exchange from the opposite side, the picture is different. On Twitter, mainstream media role was key, whether with their direct presence, in their function of sources to have news of events and political reactions, or as a target of criticism. Nevertheless, Twitter played a peculiar task in the wider media sphere. First, it was the site of a civil reaction that, despite losing momentum after a few days, was much more determined and unambiguous than the one in mainstream media, at the point of attacking the moderate-progressive array: ‘We were trying to deepen the rifts within

what at that moment was the counterpart, that is the organizations that, for subordination towards the government, were leaving a population of anti-Nazis on the ground'. (Writer/activist, member of writers' collective *Wu Ming*, IT_I_10).

Second, Twitter worked as an infrastructure for the anti-racist mobilization that led to the 10 February rally. The idea and the organisation of the rally were happening elsewhere, inside trade unions, associations, social centres, and using personal contacts, but the platform played its part.

c) What: 'good' and 'bad' narratives

Once again, the political context was decisive in drawing the boundaries of the narrative outcome. Impending elections led right-wing parties to exploit an initially problematic event drawing on the tried and tested 'immigration-problem' frame, developing a nativist version of it. Their opponents, in the fear of losing the support of a perceived anti-immigrant public opinion on an issue considered a vote loser, preferred to downplay the incident. However, in times of permanent election campaigns, such political conditions are by no means exceptional.

To a certain extent, Salvini's propaganda on the misdeeds of immigrants, not contrasted by an alternative clear and unequivocal narrative proposed by the centre-left, played the role of a sort of 'master narrative', providing a common frame of reference. The combination of Pamela's killing with Traini's 'reaction' was key in this respect, provoking a shared approach on the part of both political sides: they could not react to one episode without considering the other one. In the words of the Mayor of Macerata, they viewed 'Pamela on one side and Traini on the other, as if they were walking on parallel tracks'. Furthermore, their relationship was seen as a litmus test of a more general immigration issue. For him, the incident:

... was the explosion of a path. The water was already boiling, it had been boiling for a long time and I think it was not boiling only in Macerata, it was boiling in the whole country. I am talking of the narrative [...] of the reception of migrants, which had been set [...] by Salvini well in advance, which [...] puts together the economic and social difficulties of a country with those who steal jobs and those who come to do crimes in our country [...]. And there, it is as if he had been able to open the curtain and say 'there! I've proven to you everything I've been saying for months!' [...] The road was already mapped out, we were the symbol, the image, the front office of Salvini's narrative [...] it had become flesh, it had become life, their theory, their theorem 'immigrants, violence, pain, job theft...' with fear. (Macerata Mayor, PD, IT_I_9)

In the effective Mayor's formulation, the double incident in Macerata – a crime and then summary 'justice' – was the validation of Salvini's propaganda. The causal relation between 'uncontrolled immigration' and 'social clash', to use the League leader's words, had been confirmed, and both political sides seemed now to share the same assumptions. With the most relevant 'primary definers' (Hall et al. 1978) on the same page, it is not surprising that the prevailing narrative in the mainstream media (but not on Twitter), in its basic elements – neglect of the victims, focus on 'out-of-control immigration' and Italians' discomfort and fear – was in line with this view. Its clearest illustration, in the Salvini opponents' side, was given by Marco Minniti, then Minister of Interior, who declared 'I stopped them [migrants, thanks to the agreements he concluded with Libya] because I predicted Traini' (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 9 February, 2). An indicator of how this has remained the mainstream narrative is the choice made by the State's broadcaster to use Minniti as the narrator in the episode dedicated to the incident in Macerata in the series *Ossi di seppia* cited in note 38. Minniti explains:

When a democracy [...] leaves its citizens alone in the face of fear, there is a risk that someone will feel like a vigilante, there is a risk that someone will think they can interpret that feeling of fear. (4 February 2022)

This passage is important because it makes very explicit what in other statements was only implicit. The link between Pamela and Traini was not just an empirical coincidence; it was not even just in the mind of Traini; the idea of becoming a ‘vigilante’ – with a reprisal aimed at a certain number of ‘blacks’ in order to avenge a ‘white woman’ – however mistaken, has its own sense. The fear shared by many Italians can lead to a war between ‘races’, which politics must understand and ‘prevent’. The narrative of widespread fear of an overwhelming migration is as old as the Italian public discourse on immigrants itself and, incidentally, it is more a rhetorical approach than an empirically proven social reality (Maneri 2013).

This master narrative inherently evokes a couple of archetypal roles: the invading forces that must be kept at bay – here all those articles on irregular migration – and the besieged community. In between, the mediators of the conflict, those who want to calm the minds, distinguishing themselves from those who inflame them. The media, in their role of ‘public storytellers’ and in their search for unambiguous stories, have a tendency to stick to these recurrent archetypes. Characters that do not fit the assigned roles thus tend to be adjusted. Traini’s victims, unfit for the archetype of threat, were simply removed from the scene. Traini himself was, at least in part, victimized – also Minniti will talk in 2022, in the broadcast mentioned above, of his ‘distress’ (*disagio*). The same holds for Italians as a collective. As the narrative goes, they are dominated by fear of immigrants. So the civil reaction on Twitter, for the mainstream media, did not occur (Saviano being represented as public intellectual). When asked about this neglect and the corresponding overrepresentation of social-media hate speech, with the hypothesis that it was due to its newsworthiness, our interviewee at *Corriere della Sera* replied:

It’s not that it makes news, it is the news. [...] Even if you were right, [...] that one third were, how should I put it, sympathetic to an attacker and two thirds were not, that third seems to me to be the news, because in a normal world, I won’t say 100%, but 98% would have to say ‘lock up this criminal’. (Journalist, *Corriere della Sera*, IT_I_6)

This journalist was worried by exactly that one third of people ‘understanding’ Traini, even if they were not representative of the Twitter conversation let alone the Italian population. In a sense, so, it is not true that journalists do not want to see racism in the Italian society, as is sometimes said. However, if we consider the aggregate picture, what the media have done is locating racism outside the mainstream public opinion, re-confirming again the latter’s innocence. As social media often represent, in stereotypical fashion, the ‘deviant’ and dangerous public sphere, there can be projected the condemnable part of Italians’ reaction, what Italians *risk* to become. The messages in the civil reaction frame clearly did not fit the picture.

If the civil reaction online was obliterated in favour of the stereotype of hate speakers, the mobilisation offline was again projected outside the mainstream. Its representation conceded to the very well attended, peaceful nature of the protest but, as we have seen, gave ample evidence to a small bunch of people’s anti-Italian chant on the *foibe*. To our question about the representativeness of this portrait, the journalist we interviewed, who heard himself the chant from a line of protesters, answered:

I see what you mean, it’s a synecdoche, a part for the whole. No, because the demonstration was absolutely shifted to the more radical left. [...] If you have a conscience and you don’t agree, you kick those guys out. [...] There was only one sign for Pamela among all the 20,000 participants. [...] The demonstration was completely turned on extremism. [...] That the PD decided [...] not to give a response of militant anti-fascism at that moment precisely because of [...] the attempt to mend civil society [made sense]. It was a demonstration that was completely shifted elsewhere. (Journalist, *Corriere della Sera*, IT_I_6)

It is clear from these words how mainstream news outlets saw the protesters: their radicalism put them ‘elsewhere’ from civil society.

In the widespread reporting of the chant, another interviewee sees, instead, a nose for news that creates engagement:

compared to that event is a disturbance, isn't it? It's something that emerges, that gushes [...] from the river of people marching. So I take it out and I make an article that will surely be read by many, and that's my job. Then I don't care about the consequences. And it's clear that if there are reactions and counter-reactions, the number of interventions on that subject increases... (Association executive, ARCI, IT_I_5)

Another participant reads it in terms of political utility:

It was providential for the media and mainstream politics and for all those who said that the Macerata rally shouldn't have happened. Instead of saying that tens of thousands of people, organising themselves from below and against their own organisations – because in the streets there were also the bases of those organisations – instead of saying that the thing had succeeded, they concentrated on a slogan that to this day I don't even know if it was ever really shouted and by how many people, it was probably two people, three people. It was a crutch to delegitimise an entire demonstration. (Writer/activist, member of writers' collective *Wu Ming*, IT_I_10)

Whatever the weight of the political, commercial, or narrative logic, the storytelling of Macerata was deeply rooted and firmly entrenched in the *longue durée* of public discourse on migration. Given the association between Pamela's murder and Traini's attack and the longstanding positions on immigration of the two major political sides – one stubbornly promoting a nativist reaction to the threat of immigration; the other sometimes calling it a 'resource' but fearing to be considered 'pro-migrants', especially in election time – the denunciation of racism was unthinkable for the former and seen as inconvenient by the latter. The master narrative of immigration as a 'problem', in addition, set the boundaries of 'reasonable' and 'responsible' reactions.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Who: issues of strategy and access

The first section of these conclusions investigates the issue of visibility and can be summarised in the question: who (and how and why) access the media spreading her or his narratives? We answer this question considering: A) the hierarchies of access to the legacy media; B) the strategies for gaining media visibility; C) the importance of constructing frames that are clearly distinct from those of political opponents; and D) the ability to preside over discursive spaces over time (what we term 'persistence').

a) Hierarchies of access to the legacy media

Access is far from being equal for all. As newsmaking studies remind us, there are clear hierarchies of access, both for sources and commentators. Gaining access to the legacy media involves coordinated strategies and great efforts for those at the bottom of the hierarchy, without which those people remain invisible. We have seen this with regard to migrants and their offspring in the three cases analysed. Their presence was hardly seen, their voices were not heard. Yet in all three cases migrants were potentially at the centre of events. In the first case, the event stemmed from their rescue at sea and yet their presence barely occupied the background, so much so that when they disembarked, no journalist was interested in them. In the second case, the migrants' offspring were the direct beneficiaries of a reform of the citizenship law that aimed at re-establishing a new balance

between the principle of *ius sanguinis*, designed for Italian emigrants, and the principle of *ius soli*, which would benefit more young people born or raised in Italy. Yet none of these young people were interviewed by journalists, their bodies remained invisible, as did their reasons. In the third case, migrants were the direct victims of an attempted racist massacre. Yet they were sometimes not even mentioned, and the institutions did not consider it necessary to pay them a visit. They were not even worthy of playing the role of the victims, replaced in this by the people of Macerata who were frightened by the gunshots heard in the distance and the temporary curfew issued by the mayor.

The issue of the lack of voice given to migrants in the news about them is a recurring theme in studies on media and migration, not only in Italy. However, the analysis of these three cases would strike even those who have been studying the phenomenon for years and raises a fundamental question: how can we tell the story of a rescue at sea while ignoring those who were saved, an attempted massacre while ignoring the victims, an attempt to remedy an inequality of rights while ignoring those who suffered it? The cases analysed tell us that it is possible, and the interviews conducted tell us that to a certain extent this absence is not even surprising, nor does it sound absurd or incredible for different categories of professional narrative-makers.

In the end, the question of access to the public sphere is a question of hierarchies, in which official sources, members of the government, leaders of political parties are always on top. But the media also differ from country to country (Hallin and Mancini 2004; Benson 2013), and the Italian case shows an extraordinary propensity to fill the spaces that are not occupied by politicians and official sources with journalists themselves, who become also opinion leaders, experts, commentators and moralisers, while the voices of experts, researchers, professors and scholars end up being almost missing.

How can we tell the story of a rescue at sea while ignoring those who were saved, an attempted massacre while ignoring the victims, an attempt to remedy an inequality of rights while ignoring those who suffered it?

b) Strategies for gaining media visibility

In order to gain visibility, those at the bottom of the hierarchy have to get active, organise themselves into long-lasting collective actions, produce contents, create alliances, in short, act as a very entrepreneurial social movement. This is what many young people born in Italy to migrant parents have done.

In 2015, when the reform of the law on citizenship was discussed in the Chamber of Deputies, they were reported in the newspapers and by television news, they were heard in Parliament. To gain that visibility they had been coordinating in associations for years. But this did not last long. Two years later, in 2017, youth associations of migrant descent decided that this time the debate in the Senate did not need their work on public opinion. The result was a media discussion devoid of any memory of their activism. As if no one had ever seen or heard them, no one sought them out to present their point of view. They became invisible again.

Those at the top of the hierarchy normally enjoy media visibility by default, with no need to invest extra energy. However, this visibility varies with the events and the momentary interests of the media. As we have seen, in the case of Sea Watch some politicians, despite being government leaders, did not get any, while others kept the spotlight on themselves for the whole show. How does it happen that a high capital of visibility is concentrated? We have identified three possible reasons: a) disintermediation and the organisational strength of those who communicate on social media (Robles-Morales and Córdoba-Hernández 2019; Scott A. Eldridge, García-Carretero, and Broersma 2019); b) coherence and linearity of the messages produced, which are in turn conditioned by the structure of the organisation – leader's party vs. plural party, etc. (Gerbaudo 2019); c) what the media tend to consider new or, instead, already known.

Disintermediation makes it possible to communicate directly with the public by avoiding traditional journalistic mediation. It is clear from the analysis that mediatisation can be very effective when it is accompanied by the strategy of personalisation and conducted by actors who already enjoy visibility in legacy media. In the Sea Watch case we have shown the NGO's strategy of focusing on its captain, a new strategy for this kind of event that has undoubtedly paid off in terms of visibility, although it has diverted attention away from the migrants. Equally strong was the ability of the Northern League leader, at the time Minister of the Interior, to focus attention on himself, but personalisation was also a factor in the high exposure of Beppe Grillo, leader of the *5 Star Movement*, in the debate on the reform of the citizenship law.

Both in the Sea Watch case and in the reform debate, the party structure of the leader was crucial. The confusion between the leader and the party and the centralisation of party communication on the leaders' channels (Salvini's Facebook page and Beppe Grillo's blog) has made those same channels a major source of journalism. The rescue NGO acted in the same way, concentrating the messages on its social channels around the figure of Rackete alone. In the broader context of the disintermediation of politics, therefore, the party of the leader and the organisation at the service of personalisation gain visibility. The leader may even say things that contradict each other, but this will make the media even more curious, eager to discover his true intentions, as in previous years the pioneering figure of Silvio Berlusconi had showed everyone in Italian politics. When contradictions arise in the normal dynamics of a plural party, the result is instead one of dispersion, of an absence of narrative impact. Fascination with the character rather than the organisation or the party are in fact well-known realities rooted in the media logic.

A third reason for narrative success stems from knowing how to take advantage of the media's fascination with novelty. In the cases analysed, the figure of Carola Rackete is certainly a novelty, both because she is a woman in a 'man's role' and because a captain opposed to the Minister of the Interior makes it possible to narrate the policy of closed ports as clash between two contenders. New as well are all those situations that lead journalists to wonder whether there will be new alliances that will overturn the balance of power in Parliament, as happened at the time of the debate on citizenship reform, when the position of the *5 Star Movement* was uncertain and their recent resounding defeat in the local elections presaged a change of strategy. These legitimate curiosities of political journalism grant otherwise unhopd-for spaces of media visibility.

c) Framing and distinction

We now refer to frames and the capacity acquired over time by certain frames to penetrate public discourse and impose themselves as common sense. Lakoff (2005) illustrated this theme by describing the ability to impose a political vision without being adequately countered by opponents.

In the Italian migration discourse, the strong presence of some frames – mainly focusing on security and culturalism – has been widely documented (Pogliano 2019). The ability of right-wing politicians and conservative journalists to impose these frames has made liberals and progressives very insecure in talking about the topic of migration. Thus, the idea that, in order to talk about migration, it is necessary to talk about security not to lose voters' support has become widespread. This is what Lakoff would call a losing communicative choice: in politics, those who use the opponent's frame further strengthen the opponent.

Our case studies offer abundant evidence in this respect. We have seen how marginal the voices of centre-left political actors were in the case of Sea Watch; how the inability to address the issues of rights, injustice and inequality linking instead integration and security led the centre-left government to construct weak arguments in the case of citizenship, offering the right wing a great opportunity to counterattack; and finally, we showed how the fear of using the frames of racism and terrorism bogged down the left in the case of the attempted massacre of Macerata, despite the right wing being in trouble. The attempt to lower the tone, to avoid confrontation, to try to push through one's

politics without really supporting it except by resorting to the lowest common denominator that hopefully will bring everyone into agreement is the symbol of a communicative weakness that leads to marginalisation and failure.

In particular, what the progressive bloc has not been able to adequately preside over is the discourse on rights. In this regard, the case of the writer Roberto Saviano is emblematic. Having chosen to preside over this discursive space, Saviano has been very successful in terms of visibility and engagement on social media, and the same could be said for the recently deceased humanitarian doctor and founder of *Emergency* Gino Strada. It is no coincidence that, in all the cases analysed, Saviano was one of the most representative figures in advancing progressive and humanitarian causes on the issue of migration. Yet no political leader with significant electoral support chose to occupy that discursive space, as one of our interviewees claimed:

We always say that there is a lack [in Italy] of a political entrepreneur of rights, someone who calls things by their name: who calls fascists fascists, who calls racism racism. It's not that these political entrepreneurs of rights don't exist. There are us and a few politicians, but they are marginal in terms of public communication. It is an empty space [...] in which one can throw oneself because there is no one... instead it is considered an uncomfortable topic by those who should have filled it with watchwords and contents that go in the direction of the enlargement of rights. (Association executive, ARCI, IT_I_5)

d) Persistence

The fact that the frames imposed over the years by the political right are dominating the discussion can also be seen by the persistence of the voices of right-wing political leaders and influencers in the debate on migration. This aspect was also evident in the three cases analysed. Even when the voices of progressive politicians manage to lead the engagement on Twitter, as happened for various reasons in the cases of the Sea Watch and the attempted racist massacre in Macerata, as soon as we extend the period of analysis, we see that the messages on the topic by xenophobic accounts rebalance the disadvantage and become dominant.

At the centre of this dominance is certainly Matteo Salvini, thanks to a team that takes care of his digital communication and makes him always present, especially on the topic of migration. In our case studies, his Twitter account was the most followed among politicians. But we have seen that also accounts of marginal political subjects, such as that of Di Stefano, leader of the neo-fascist movement Casa Pound, gained a surprising visibility, most likely because Salvini's social media managers included him among the accounts to be supported with a network of retweets where probably bots were also used to fuel engagement. This discursive dominance, that from social networks reverberates to the other media, makes the narratives and frames they support widespread in the country, generating a sense of frustration in those who wish to take the narratives to other shores. This frustration emerges clearly in the words of a political actor interviewed for this study.

[I]n the public debate it is as if every time we had to go back to specifying, as if to excuse the presence of these six million people in Italy by saying: 'But look at them working, they are good, they do no harm to anyone, on the contrary, they contribute...'. The backwardness of our debate lies here: in the fact that every time we have to start from scratch and we have to reconstruct all these things as if we did not know them. It is as if what researchers and research foundations write is not common knowledge, but something that only those who study and write about it and a few others know. I am a little discouraged to deal with these issues. Because in parliamentary halls and on talk shows the discourse always starts out the other way round, overturned, and one has to make an incredible effort just to try to reconstruct reality, let alone propose something like the reform of citizenship! (Member of Parliament, +Europa, IT_I_11)

In conclusion it is worth noting that the issues discussed above are interrelated. The exclusion of migrants from the public conversation and the exclusion of experts means that the debate is totally left in the hands of journalists and political actors. The political actors most able to exploit visibility strategies are also those who are the least democratic in terms of pluralism and internal party representation, building leader's parties with a centralised communication. The resulting personalisation makes their often xenophobic messages clearer and more unambiguous, just as the insistence on certain frames over time gives their communication the power of setting the agenda. The weakness of their political opponents has been not to impose alternative frames and not to guard the field of rights with conviction. They ended up playing into the opponent's frame (assimilationism, culturalism, security), effectively accepting the assumptions of the right-wing frames.

In another passage of the interview, it is the same interviewee who explains that in order to have any success – the case is that of the citizenship reform – it would have been appropriate to act in time, build narratives and propose them in the media, for months, in order to be ready to face the reactions of political opponents. Once again, Lakoff's (2005) observation that communication is a sowing of seeds that requires the strategic identification of frames and narratives that must then be repeated with constancy and patience over time seems appropriate. This is the only way to guarantee a good level of media access and visibility on the issues under discussion. If this is not done, those who express narratives consonant with established common sense will always have more chance of being visible and of confirming a specific vision of the world.

5.2. Where: legacy and new media distinctive features and re-mediations

After dealing with the issue of visibility and access to the media, we consider here Twitter and its relationship with mainstream media, dealing with the platform's specificity, its representation in the legacy media, cross-platform flows and re-mediations, and the strategies that make some Twitter accounts influential.

a) Twitter's distinctiveness

Papacharissi (2016) described Twitter as an infrastructure of civic engagement, whose choral flow of repetitive, cumulative and amplified expression of affect allows the public to 'feel their way into the story' (Papacharissi 2016,12). These structures of feeling activated by retweeting allow 'thought leaders to be crowdsourced to prominence' (Papacharissi 2016, 7). Together with this 'networked gatekeeping', a 'networked framing' persistently revises and rearticulates frames (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013).

While we found that on this platform issues like racism, sexism, and fascism, but also nativism, have been brought to the fore – and Twitter has been used as an infrastructure for collective mobilization – its networked framing has shown many limits. After a few days, the most spontaneous mobilizations had faded away. In addition, more than a dialogic exchange for the elaboration of new ideas, the conversation appeared as a flame war between opposing parties, where the predominant feelings fell between outrage and sarcasm. This is also the opinion of one of the activists who played an important role on Twitter during the Macerata civil reaction, but later abandoned the platform:

You can't make real lasting movements with Twitter and Tiktok because everything is too fast, chaotic, swirling. Everything comes and goes. Everything goes out of fashion in a matter of days, even hours. No sowing and no reaping. In addition to the fact that it cannot be a public sphere because there is no possibility of a real discussion, you don't discuss on Twitter, you slash each other, you insult each other immediately, you read quickly [...] There is only a fucking algorithmic madness that leaves nothing. You can't build, you can't sediment,

you can't structure, you can't organize. I mean, you can mobilize [...] to make mass on the moment, we all go to ... [...] I name them all, it's not a specific problem of Twitter, it's that they are programmed, engineered to work in that way. [...] [Messages on Twitter] remained there, they were immanent to the logic of the medium, they remained confined to the medium, the times in which Tweets are published on other media is simply because they make an ephemeral scandal, in the moment. (Writer/activist, member of writers' collective *Wu Ming*, IT_I_10)

The algorithmic architecture of all social media platforms would thus not be suitable for a proper networked framing of issues related to migration.

b) Representing social media conversation

In addition, as suggested in this extract, the representation of Twitter outside the platform is inherently distorted. What emerged from our study is that what gets out of the platform is the atypical, in particular what is consonant with the stereotype of social media as the arena where the basest instincts are unleashed. While the networked framing that dominates Twitter can go unnoticed – this happened in particular in the case of the civil reaction to the Macerata shooting – minority albeit considerable positions, like the hate speech endorsing the racist shooting by Traini, were commented in the press and on TV as what the crowds in the social media think. This representation of Twitter ends up transmitting an idea of society at large as intolerant or racist, influencing the idea of public opinion held by political representatives.

c) Cross-platform flows and re-mediations

Another important point made in the interview extract above hints at the confinement of the grassroots networked framing inside the platform boundaries. In terms of information flows and cross-platform remediations, as we have seen, what gets from the social to the mainstream media is the stereotype of social media as the slums of the public sphere. This is the only flow arriving from crowdsourced elites, while other more numerous and influential voices are never mentioned as respectable voices from civil society. A big space is instead given to the tweets of political actors and a few other people that have anyway direct access to the traditional media and that are screenshotted or filmed in order to convey the immediacy and vividness of their messages. On the contrary, the reception and remediation of the legacy media contents on Twitter is much more substantial. They are present on the platform in the journalists' and their news organizations' accounts; they are linked and retweeted. Above all, they are commented and remediated, often using irony and sarcasm.

What we see is a two-stage flow. The messages of a few accredited actors, mainly political leaders, influence, often via social media, the narratives produced by newscasts and newspapers which, once amplified, in turn produce an agenda effect on many commentators' messages on Twitter. The Twittersphere thus can produce alternative frames only in reaction to the 'augmented reality' conveyed by traditional media, both in terms of voices made prominent and of events and narratives reconstructed and filtered by media organisations and their sources.

d) Strategies that make some Twitter accounts influent

In our study, Twitter appears to benefit mainly political actors and subjects already highly visible in the legacy media, However, this visibility can be also the outcome of deliberate strategies of well-coordinated actors. The case of the debate on the citizenship reform shows the ability of a network of right-wing and far-right political actors, on the one hand, and of the newspaper *La Repubblica*, on the other, to achieve very high levels of cross-mediality.

The latter managed to do so in two ways. On the one hand, organising an offline cultural event filmed by its digital television channel, making the words of political actors and exponents of the Catholic Church in favour of the reform easily available, with the consequence that they were then repropounded by other news outlets and commented on Twitter. On the other hand, shooting a video in support of the reform and then circulating it on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram using its accounts, but also those of its journalists and its best-known columnists and commentators. The success of these actions in terms of cross-media visibility has been such that we can say that *La Repubblica* imposed its narratives by dominating the pro-reform camp.

Right-wing and far-right political actors, instead, used offline conflicts (mainly protests inside and outside the Senate), which were promoted on social networks through the ability of the Northern League leader's team of social media managers to build a dense network of retweets. Both the protest actions and the social media messages were highly covered by the legacy media and commented on on Twitter, to the point of giving the impression to the government politicians promoting the reform that the climate of opinion on the issue was profoundly changing, as witnessed in interviews and declared by the Prime Minister himself a few months later.

Coordination of offline and social media actions, calculated timing to exploit legacy media interest, and previous popularity are ingredients capable of breaking into the debate and radically influence it. Nonetheless, this cross-media activity cannot start from scratch. Who aims at being covered by the media impacting decision-making cannot do without the amplification guaranteed by the press and especially TV. In this respect, traditional Italian media had a crucial role in establishing Salvini in the position of main protagonist on migration issues, as this interviewee reminded to us:

At a certain point, the media played along with him and favoured him in every way. I remember: Salvini's media presence was suffocating. At all hours. He started at 6 a.m. on those morning talk shows and ended late at night, he hardly slept. If they hadn't pumped him up, if they hadn't aroused him, if they hadn't given him all that presence, which was functional in my opinion to create this frame of the two Mattei [Matteo Renzi, leader of the centre-left coalition, and Matteo Salvini], of the two antagonists, the civilised one and the feral one to watch out for and then vote for the least worst, in the end it's the usual binary scheme... If the media hadn't played this game Salvini wouldn't have grown so much. (Writer/activist, member of writers' collective Wu Ming, IT_I_10)

On exceptional occasions, like Rackete's abrupt forcing the blockade, a new character can impose herself and be given voice. Opposing herself to another media icon, the bullying Salvini, she contributed to introduce humanitarian narratives that were being suffocated at the time. However, this was an exception and clearly cannot be the ordinary situation.

5.3. What: successful narratives

In our three case studies, several features appeared to bring certain narratives to success, that is, to enhance their *coverage* in the legacy media, *engagement* in and out of the social media, *persistence* beyond peaks of attention, *persuasiveness* to the ears and minds of relevant actors, and *consequentiality* for decision-makers and probably voters. These features, or filters, have to do with medium-specific, commercial, political, cultural, and structural factors. They condition – and are implemented by – especially those who emerged as the key actors in our study: journalists and politicians, the most powerful gatekeepers of narratives about migration.

a) *Medium-specific factors*

By *medium-specific* factors, we mean organizational routines, sense of newsworthiness, logic of virality, algorithmic affordances, and professional values. These factors are also taken into account by politicians

who need the media to propagate their message, and in fact they actually influence their choice of narratives to endorse in debates over citizenship, such as simple messages about stereotypical symbols of vulnerability or threat. Medium-specific filters determined also the over- and under-coverage, and engagement across the media, of certain stories and characters – see for example the cases of the *foibe* chant or the non-event of the Roma prosecutor's action against Salvini when all the media personnel and attention was converging to Lampedusa and the confrontation between Salvini and Rackete was considered 'the story'. In mainstream media, the stories that were preferred were those considered novel, but at the same time in continuity with previous mediatized events, meaningful to the audience, consonant to widely shared expectations, atypical and dramatic, hence attention-hitting, and that could be personified. The professional values of completeness and accuracy, while still in place, were to a certain degree often twisted by this logic.

On social media, the filters that enhance circulation are not totally different, but their cornerstone is shareability (Harcup and O'Neill 2017), itself made possible by the use of high arousal emotions (Berger and Milkman 2012). In our study on Twitter, the most widely shared messages sprang from outrage (Berger and Milkman 2012). Actually, this could favour narratives of many kinds, provided they include a target to blame. Outrage could be used in the denunciation of the violent sexism characterizing a League exponent's outbursts directed at Carola Rackete; to treat those opposed to citizenship reform as incapable of empathy or those in favour as unpatriotic; and finally to criticize politicians and legacy media that were not qualifying the attempted massacre as terrorism or, on the contrary, in a nativist framework that addressed the supposed double standards of those protesting the attack and not mobilizing as much for Pamela Mastropietro's killing. What is certain is that a debate based on respect, mutual listening, and partaking of common principles is impossible when strong emotions are the main drivers of success.

b) Commercial factors

In a media system that must operate in the market, factors like news-values are strictly linked to *commercial* considerations. Good stories are also stories that sell, as their newsworthiness secures also circulation, engagement, and visits to the media websites, which does not benefit only media organizations but also (political) storytellers. In our study this was particularly clear, again, with the hyper mediatization of the *foibe* chant, but also with the framing of the Sea Watch affair around the mediatically attractive characters of Salvini and especially Rackete, which obliterated migrants as subjects deserving attention. Also the categorization of the 'almost-contact' between Sea Watch 3 and the Guardia di Finanza patrol boat as 'ramming' had to do with increasing the impact of the news, with the consequence of framing human rescuers as criminals.

c) Political factors

While medium-specific and commercial filters are somehow intrinsic to the media arena, and can be expected to act across time and space in western media, the remaining factors are contextual, as they may vary across time and space. One of the most powerful filters, all the more so in the Italian media system with its strong political parallelism (Hallin and Mancini 2004), is, precisely, *political*. In a situation where the overwhelming dominant voices were those of politicians, and where the issue of migration plays such an important role in the fight for electoral support, news outlets tend to select akin-voices that will provide akin-narratives that will be framed in ways coherent with their editorial line. In our case studies, not only were news organisations differentiated on every parameter strictly according to those lines, but the journalists we interviewed, with the notable exception of a reporter working free-lance for *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, spoke to us more as bearers of a political vision than as exponents of a profession. The case of the most important Italian newspaper, that is *Corriere della Sera*, is the most interesting, not only for its sheer influence, but also for what it has in common with all mainstream news outlets, that is the role played by an abstract idea of public opinion:

We have a varied audience because *Corriere* is a system-newspaper, a country-newspaper. *Corriere* is Italy, basically. [...] If you want to understand how Italy is, you have to understand how *Corriere della Sera* is. [...] We have a good part of readers who are moderate, who appreciate this kind of approach, very critical and very hard towards a racist and sovereigntist right-wing, but which does not give discounts to that left, let's say, hypocritical and a bit cowardly [in not tackling and governing migration]. After that, keep in mind that we are a newspaper that has its constituency in Lombardy and in Lombardy a part of the readers has historical sympathies towards the League, so they may have less favourable reactions to a certain type of reasoning [...] [however our reasoning is] that immigration should be governed even rather seriously, even hard enough, if necessary, to crush the racists and xenophobes. [...] A part of the Italians would have gladly shot the immigrants. (Journalist, *Corriere della Sera*, IT_I_6)

In this extract and its developments, the journalist tries to strike a balance between *Corriere* autonomous editorial line and its nature of a prism through which the whole country is reflected – to be more precise its moderate and Lombardy readership, but one including xenophobic tendencies. Trimmed of its regional characterisation, this aspiration to correspond to the country's attitudes is common to broadcasting TVs and every outlet with a wide audience. This makes the perception of what is the sentiment of public opinion of utmost importance, both for journalists, who must meet their public, and for politicians, who must win their vote. This perception cascades on which narratives are deemed more engaging and persuasive. What happened in the coverage of Macerata, the shift of attention, and partly blame, from a group of migrants-victims to a collective of migrants-threats, is a case in point, as the focus was put on the character that a presumed public opinion was deemed really concerned with.

However, in everyday inference that of 'public opinion' is more the site of projections than of scientific investigation. As we have seen, the most cited proxies used to ascertain its status, both in media commentary and interviewees accounts, were social media trends. That is, both journalists and politicians, during the debate on citizenship and the conversation about Macerata, tried to attune their narratives to 'what the people think', at least to a certain extent.

d) *Cultural factors*

Notwithstanding, this is a cumulative process resulting from more than 30 years of public discourse about migration. Narratives that make their way pass through a *cultural* filter. One component is provided by longstanding cultural myths – think of *Italiani brava gente* (Italians good people, a myth generated during the colonial adventure and reinforced after World War II, when it opposed 'good Italians' to 'evil Nazis') and how it shaped the representation of Traini and of Italians' approach to immigration. Another important factor is the commonsensical knowledge resulting from how multiple immigration 'crises' have been discursively constructed in the public sphere. In a situation where the threat frame (security, invasion, cultural incompatibility) has dominated both media and political discourse (Maneri 2013; Pogliano 2019), the available master narratives tend to structure which stories are deemed consonant to the public's expectations and rendered reasonable, persuasive, and engaging. In other words, the success of the present is in part the fruit of success in the past, as new narratives must accord to persistent master narratives if they hope to resonate to the ears of most of the actors involved, casting archetypal characters that must be fit to the assigned roles. The partial mis-representation of the culprit-victim roles during the supremacist attack in Macerata fed precisely into this kind of symbolic stock. Humanitarian narratives have played a role both in the debate on citizenship and in the Sea Watch affair, but what we found interesting is that, in cases where the threat frame was out of place from the start, it could still operate and contend if not conquer the floor.

It is objectively difficult to use the threat frame in the case of less than 50 exhausted migrants rescued at sea, of the rights of people grown up in the country, or on the case of a supremacist attack, but this is precisely what happened. If the operation was successful, it is also because those master narratives had already won, if not the hearts, at least the minds of most journalists. Out of the many examples we had, we documented one set of false assumptions about who had the responsibility to accept migrants who were on board of the Sea Watch 3. The creed about the responsibility of countries like Malta, the Netherlands, or Germany had no legal base, but all the journalists interviewed across the political spectrum had nonetheless introjected it, as this narrative had been bi-partisanly pursued. As a consequence, Salvini stance could be also presented as a legitimate defence of the authority of the State and the narrative of Rackete as outlaw could have more purchase.

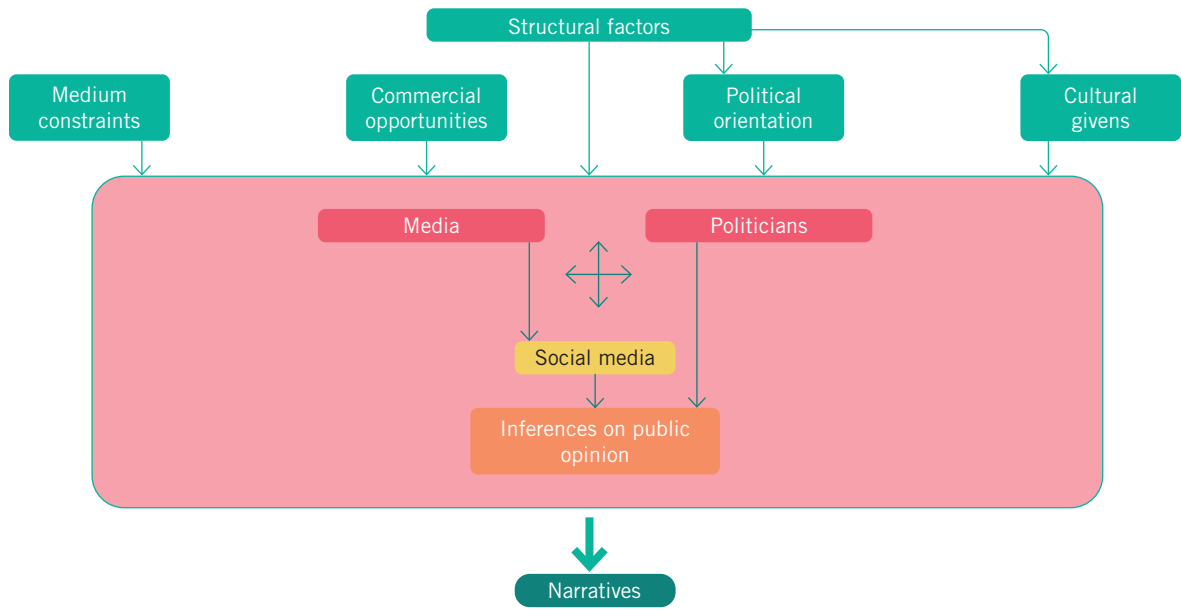
e) *Structural factors*

A final, *structural*, filter we want to mention is rarely considered in media studies. We documented how a newly enacted law set the stage of the confrontation between Rackete and Salvini, but more in general this is true for all the border spectacle (De Genova 2013), that is to say the perpetual show of the establishing of legally legitimised barriers at the border and their inherently-illegal trespassing.

An additional structural factor is the EU legal and symbolic framework that distinguishes between EU citizens and those who are not – with their own exclusive label in Italy: *extracomunitari*. Certain narratives could not even exist if it were not for this distinction between who belongs and who does not, bringing to threat narratives with the consequence that *ad hoc* control is not only considered legitimate, but dutiful. A *de-facto* Constitution thus presides to the roles that characters may play in the story. This is actually something that can supersede the formal Constitution, as it did in the case of Macerata, when it came to cast (or not) someone as terrorist who must be symbolically ejected and some others as victims in which all the community should identify. This *de-facto* Constitution has to do with fundamental deep fractures, going back to the colonial past – as the blackness of the victims in Macerata suggests – of which those operating in the political and in the media sphere are, sometimes unknowingly, aware.

We can schematize this layered set of narrative filters that determine which stories will be more covered, produce more engagement, persist, persuade and cause consequences as follows (Graph 5.1). While intrinsic factors like medium-specific constraints and commercial opportunities tend to provide an enhanced version of reality, maximising the stories impact or selecting those narratives that are considered impactful in themselves, structural factors are more unidirectionally orientating. Structural factors pre-set role positions (autochthonous and white politicians, journalists, and ‘community’ against allochthon and black or brown individuals and collectives) that cannot but compete for common goods (in our study mainly security, identity, and entitlement to humanity). Political factors inflect the representation of the relationship between these role positions and desired goods (who deserves, usurps, or is deprived of these goods). This means that, in the given structural conditions, it is very difficult to change the internal composition and alliances that characterise the role positions. Given those alignments, it is also difficult to bring to the fore common goods that do not imply a conflict between the two arrays. This discourages narratives and narrators who try to shuffle the cards. Finally, cultural factors crystallise those relationships in rhetorical and symbolic resources, making it difficult to get out from established master narratives and archetypal characters. Judging from our three case studies, and given the above-mentioned structural factors, the ecological niche (Hacking 1999) seems to be all for narratives of threat.

GRAPH 5.1. Narrative filters on migration



References

- Altheide, David L., and Robert P. Snow. 1979. *Media Logic*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso.
- Benson, Rodney. 2013. *Shaping Immigration News. A French-American Comparison*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Berger, Jonah, and Katherine L. Milkman. 2012. "What Makes Online Content Viral?" *Journal of Marketing Research* 49 (2): 192–205. doi: 10.1509/jmr.10.0353
- Binotto, Marco, and Valentina Martino. 2004. *Fuori luogo. L'immigrazione sui media italiani*. Roma: RaiEri.
- Bird, Elizabeth S., and Robert Ward Dardenne. 1987. "Myth, Chronicle, and Story: Exploring the Narrative Qualities of News". In *Media, Myths and Narratives: Television and the Press*, edited by James W. Carey, 67–86. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Brubaker, Roger. 1992. *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bolter, David Jay, and Richard Grusin. 1999. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press.
- Bruno, Marco, Marco Binotto, and Valeria Lai. 2016. *Tracciare confini. L'immigrazione nei media italiani*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Cappella, Joseph N., and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. 1997. *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Chadwick, Andrew. 2013. *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chibnall, Steve. 1977. *Law-and-Order News*. London: Tavistock.
- Conway-Silva, Bethany A., Christine R. Filer, Kate Kenski, and Eric Tsetsi. 2018. "Reassessing Twitter's Agenda-Building Power: An Analysis of Intermedia Agenda-Setting Effects During the 2016 Presidential Primary Season." *Social Science Computer Review* 36 (4): 469–83. doi: 10.1177/0894439317715430
- De Genova, Nicholas. 2013. "Spectacles of Migrant 'Illegality': The Scene of Exclusion, the Obscene of Inclusion". *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36 (7): 1180–98. doi: 10.1080/01419870.2013.783710.
- Entman, Robert M. 1993. "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm". *Journal of Communication* 43 (4): 51–58. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x
- Fishman, Mark. 1978. "Crime Waves as Ideology". *Social Problems* 25 (5): 531–43.
- Fishman, Mark. 1990. *Manufacturing the News*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Frisina, Annalisa, and Andrea Pogliano. 2020. "Dalla Parte Del Carnefice? I Fatti Di Macerata e La Pervasività Del Discorso Razzista Nei Media Italiani". In *Un Attentato «quasi Terroristico». Macerata 2018, Il Razzismo e La Sfera Pubblica al Tempo Dei Social Media*, edited by Marcello Maneri and Fabio Quassoli, 95–114. Roma: Carocci.
- Galtung, Johan, and Mari Holmboe Ruge. 1965. "The Structure of Foreign News: The Presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus Crises in Four Norwegian Newspapers." *Journal of Peace Research*, 2 (1): 64–90. doi: 10.1177/002234336500200104.
- Gans, Herbert J. 1979. *Deciding What's News*. New York: Pantheon.
- Gerbaudo, Paolo. 2019. *The Digital Party. Political Organisation and Online Democracy*. London: Pluto Press.
- Gozzini, Giovanni. 2011. *Storia del giornalismo*. Milano: Bruno Mondadori.
- Hacking, Ian. 1999. *The Social Construction of What?* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hall, Stuart, Charles Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts. 1978. *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*. London: Palgrave.
- Hallin, Daniel C., and Paolo Mancini. 2004. *Comparing Media Systems*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Harcup, Tony, and Deirdre O'Neill. 2001. "What Is News? Galtung and Ruge Revisited." *Journalism Studies* 2 (2): 261–80. doi:10.1080/14616700118449.

- Harcup, Tony, and Deirdre O'Neill. 2017. "What Is News? News Values Revisited (Again)." *Journalism Studies* 18 (12):1470–88. doi: 10.1080/1461670X.2016.1150193.
- Hobsbawm, Eric J. 1990. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Honohan, Iseult. 2010. "The Theory and Politics of Ius Soli. Comparative Report." RSCAS/EUDO-CIT-Comp. 2010/2. San Domenico di Fiesole: EUDO Citizenship Observatory <http://eudo-citizenship.eu/docs/IusSoli.pdf>
- Howard, Marc Morjé. 2009. *The Politics of Citizenship in Europe*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Joppke, Christian. 2003. "Citizenship between De- and Re-Ethnicization." *European Journal of Sociology* 44 (3): 429–458. doi: 10.1017/S0003975603001346.
- Lakoff, George. 2004. *Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*. London: Chelsea Green Publishing Company.
- Lipsky, Michael. 2010. *Street-Level Bureaucracy. Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Mancini, Paolo. 2009. *Elogio della lottizzazione*. Roma: Laterza.
- Maneri, Marcello. 2013. "Si Fa Presto a Dire «sicurezza». Analisi Di Un Oggetto Culturale.» *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa* 6 (2): 283–312.
- Maneri, Marcello. 2019. ««Vengono qui per delinquere»: logiche e cicli di criminalizzazione dell'immigrazione.» *la Rivista delle Politiche Sociali / Italian Journal of Social Policy*, 2: 63–84.
- Meraz, Sharon, and Zizi Papacharissi. 2013. "Networked Gatekeeping and Networked Framing on #Egypt." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 18 (2): 138–66. doi: 10.1177/1940161212474472
- Papacharissi, Zizi. 2016. "Affective Publics and Structures of Storytelling: Sentiment, Events and Mediality." *Information, Communication & Society* 19 (3): 307–24. doi: 10.1080/1369118X.2015.1109697
- Patterson, Thomas E. 1993. *Out of Order*. New York: Knopf.
- Pilati, Federico. 2020. "Molte piattaforme, un'unica storia: La junk news dei cori inneggianti alle foibe e la manifestazione antifascista di Macerata." In *Un attentato 'quasi terroristico'. Macerata 2018, il razzismo e la sfera pubblica al tempo dei social media*, edited by Marcello Maneri and Fabio Quassoli, 79–93. Roma: Carocci.
- Pogliano, Andrea, and Riccardo Zanini. 2010. «L'immaginario e le immagini degli immigrati.» In *Facce da straniero. 30 anni di fotografia e giornalismo sull'immigrazione in Italia*, edited by Luigi Gariglio, Andrea Pogliano and Riccardo Zanini, 103–187. Milano: Bruno Mondadori.
- Pogliano, Andrea. 2019. *Media, Politica e Migrazioni in Europa: Una Prospettiva Sociologica*. Roma: Carocci.
- Robles-Morales, José Manuel, and Ana María Córdoba-Hernández. 2019. *Digital Political Participation, Social Networks and Big Data: Disintermediation in the Era of Web 2.0*. Cham: Springer Nature.
- Scott A., Eldridge, Lucía García-Carretero, and Marcel Broersma. 2019. "Disintermediation in Social Networks: Conceptualizing Political Actors' Construction of Publics on Twitter." *Media and Communication* 7 (1): 271–85.
- Tuchman, Gaye. 1978. *Making News : A Study in the Construction of Reality*. New York: Free Press.
- Van Gorp, Baldwin. 2005. "Where Is the Frame? Victims and Intruders in the Belgian Press Coverage of the Asylum Issue." *European Journal of Communication* 20 (4): 484–507. doi: 10.1177/0267323105058253.
- Venturini, Tommaso. 2019. "From Fake to Junk News, the Data Politics of Online Virality." In *Data Politics: Worlds, Subjects, Rights* edited by Didier Bigo, Engin Isin, and Evelyn Ruppert, 123-144. London: Routledge.
- Wimmer, Andreas. 2008. "Elementary Strategies of Ethnic Boundary Making." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31 (6): 1025–1055. doi: 10.1080/01419870801905612.
- Zincone, Giovanna and Marzia Basili. 2013. "Italy, EUDO Citizenship Country Report." RSCAS/EUDO-CIT-CR 2013/3. European University Institute <http://eudo.citizenship.eu/docs/CountryReports/Italy.pdf>

Appendix. List of interviewees

Sea Watch landing

- IT_I_1 Journalist (*Il Giornale*), woman, 20 December, 2021
- IT_I_3 Journalist (*Corriere della Sera*), woman, 17 January, 2022
- IT_I_2 Journalist (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*), man, 12 January, 2022
- IT_I_4 Member of Parliament (*+Europa*), man, 21 January, 2022

Debate on *Ius soli*

- IT_I_7 Columnist (*Corriere della Sera*), man, 21 March, 2022
- IT_I_11 Member of Parliament (*+Europa*), man, 8 April, 2022
- IT_I_8 Activist (Activist, Italians Without Citizenship), woman, 24 March, 2022

Macerata shooting

- IT_I_6 Journalist (*Corriere della Sera*), man, 19 March, 2022
- IT_I_9 Mayor (*PD*), man, 24 March, 2022
- IT_I_10 Writer/activist (*Wu Ming*), man, 25 March, 2022
- IT_I_5 Association executive (ARCI), man, 15 March, 2022

BRIDGES

Assessing the production and impact of migration narratives

BRIDGES: Assessing the production and impact of migration narratives is a project funded by the EU H2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation and implemented by a consortium of 12 institutions from all over Europe. The project aims to understand the causes and consequences of migration narratives in a context of increasing politicisation and polarisation around these issues by focusing on six European countries: France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom. To do so, BRIDGES adopts an interdisciplinary and co-productive approach and is implemented by a diverse consortium formed by universities, think tanks and research centres, cultural associations, and civil society organisations.

The BRIDGES Working Papers are a series of academic publications presenting the research results of the project in a structured and rigorous way. They can either focus on particular case studies covered by the project or adopt a comparative perspective.

How to cite this Working Paper:

Maneri, Marcello, Andrea Pogliano, Flavio Piccoli, and Guido Anselmi. 2023. "Migration narratives in media and social media. The case of Italy." *BRIDGES Working Papers* 8. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8009758>

© BRIDGES Consortium 2023

The texts are published in digital format in open access and under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8009758>

ISSN: 2696-8886

Editorial Coordination: Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB)

This publication has been funded by the European Union under the Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement no. 101004564. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union. The European Commission and the Research Executive Agency are not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.