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Covering Migration—in Africa and Europe: Results from a Comparative Analysis of 11 Countries

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ABSTRACT

While the issue of migration has heavily impacted on public debates in the Global North, much less is known about coverage of migration in the Global South. This pilot study sets out to de-westernize the discussion, by analyzing and comparing news coverage in migrants' destination countries and countries of origin. The study's focus is on media coverage of migration from Africa towards Europe.

The paper builds upon prior studies on the coverage of migrants and refugees. A consortium of African and European researchers has conducted a comparative content analysis of migration coverage in 22 opinion-leading newspapers in six European and five sub-Saharan African countries. The study has retrieved 1,512 articles which have appeared in 2015/16. The topic was much less salient in African countries, with only 175 articles found in the African news outlets under study. Coverage in the European destination countries was dominated by domestic issues like border security and migration policy, but also paid attention to the actual migrants—who received much less coverage in the sending countries. Coverage of migration in African media was more negative and focused on disasters at sea. Both African and European media ignored the causes of migration.

KEYWORDS

Journalism; comparative study; migration; Africa; Europe; content analysis

Introduction

The refugee crisis¹ and the issue of migration continue to dominate political agendas and public debates across Europe since 2015, marked by the arrival of a record number of

refugees from the Syrian civil war. Since then, the discussion about the European Union's (EU) capacity to accommodate growing numbers of refugees and migrants² has had a considerable impact on election outcomes across Europe, and shed light on a sharp divide between EU countries with regard to migration policy (Harteveld et al. 2018).

In the wake of the Syrian refugee crisis, European policy-makers, as well as scholars and journalists started to discuss the impact of increasing immigration from African countries into the EU. In 2015/16, the "Calais Jungle"³ for the first time drew global media attention to the conditions of African migrants and refugees in Europe. Emigration from Africa is frequently ascribed to a lack of perspectives (Gimenez-Gomez, Walle, and Zewdu 2017) and a sharp rise of the population of the African continent expected to continue until 2050 (Kebede, Goujon, and Lutz 2019). Numerous political initiatives and partnerships between European and African countries have, since, been signed, all attempting to limit migration flows and promote economic development in African countries.⁴ Still, photos of boats overloaded with African migrants continue to be an iconic image in European media—while African leaders remain reluctant to address the situation of African migrants heading for Europe, with many of them kept in inhumane conditions in Libya (Voellinger 2017).

Even though more than one million sub-Saharan Africans are estimated to have moved into Europe since 2010, with numbers rising since 2015/16 (Connor 2018), no recent study has focused on the news media coverage of migrants from Africa to Europe. In general, the majority of studies concentrates on media coverage in destination countries, and questions of how news media shape the perception of migrants and refugees (e.g., Lawlor and Tolley 2017).

However, we argue that it is just as relevant to look at news media coverage of migration in countries of origin.⁵ Communication (including journalistic media, social media, personal communication between migrants and their co-ethnic communities, migratory peers etc.) is considered a cross-cutting factor of outstanding relevance in the push-pull framework to explain migration movements. Media both in the Global North and in the Global South have been addressed during the negotiations for the UN Global Compact on Migration, demanding "independent, objective and quality reporting" of migration-related issues (UN 2018). This resonates with Hafez (2011) call for a "global journalism" to discuss matters of global governance, even though he has been generally sceptical about the concept of globalization (Hafez 2007, 143).

This paper takes the refugee crisis of 2015/16 as a starting point, and combines the efforts of African and European researchers for a pilot study comparing formal categories, content (topics, countries and actors) and evaluative categories of migration coverage in sending and destination countries. The study comprises six key destination countries for migrants in Europe (France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom) as well as five relevant sending countries in Africa (Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda). Among the sample, Germany, France and Italy had the highest numbers of first-time asylum applicants from African countries in 2015 and 2016, while the UK had a relevant share in 2016 (EUROSTAT 2015, 2016).⁶ Kenya and Ghana are among the top sending countries from Africa to Europe, while Ethiopia and Tanzania have a significant share as well (Connor 2018). Uganda hosted increasing numbers of refugees from the civil war in South Sudan, but Kenya and Tanzania also stand out as host countries for inter-African migrants and refugees (UNHCR 2019).⁷ Ethiopia experienced intense internal

migration in 2015/16 due to extreme drought and political pressure against the Oromo ethnic group (Schlindwein 2016).

Literature Review

Bleich, Bloemraad, and Graauw (2015) have observed that over the last forty years, since the 1980s, the number of studies on the coverage of minorities in European countries has increased. In their study, Bleich, Bloemraad, and Graauw (2015, 857) sought to analyze “the factors that shape media coverage of migrants and minorities, as well as the effect of that coverage on public attitudes, policy outcomes or social relations”. However, few studies consist of more than two countries. A meta-analysis of 78 studies published since 2000 concludes “there is little comparative research on the salience of immigration-related issues or actors in the media across different European countries” (Eberl et al. 2018, 1). This literature review focuses on comparative studies on migration, as “this policy domain is increasingly shifting to supranational decision making” (Horsti 2008, 42). Comparative views on this topic are crucial for a broader understanding of how migrants and refugees are covered by the media.

Migration coverage in (Western) European media

Most studies accessible in English focus on migration coverage in Western European countries, while coverage in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) before 2015 remains a blind spot. The majority of studies finds that migrants are framed in a rather negative way. An influential study compared migration coverage in France, UK and Italy, based on the observation that a large proportion of migration coverage is “increasingly linked with crime and security issues” as well as “threatening economic prosperity and cultural identity” (Caviedes 2015, 898). His analysis finds both the economic frame and the securitization frame dominant in migration coverage across countries between 2009 and 2012. However, “debates over immigration vary in intensity and issue salience between countries, such that they may each sustain their own particular critical narratives” (Caviedes 2015, 912). Eberl et al. (2018) point out that coverage differs in countries with a long history of immigration, like the former colonial powers UK and France on the one hand, and on the other hand countries like Italy, Spain and Greece, which were until recently sending countries.

According to Esses, Medianu, and Lawson (2013, 520), negative frames and conflicts characterize coverage of migrants in European media. In general, the literature review shows that intra-EU migrants are more often described by the media as a “threat to the economy and welfare system”, while non-EU migrants are portrayed as a “threat to the host countries’ culture” (Eberl et al. 2018, 6). Eberl et al. (2019) studied media coverage of intra-EU migration in seven EU countries and found that migration was considerably more salient as a topic in the media of destination countries as compared to media of CEE countries of origin.

In contrast to the research results cited above, studies focusing on the refugee crisis of 2015 conclude that migrants (mainly refugees from the Syrian civil war) received more positive coverage. Berry, Garcia-Blanco, and Moore (2015) found that coverage differed significantly among European countries: Humanitarian issues were more prevalent in Italian media; Swedish publications had the most positive tenor; those in Great Britain

remained largely negative. In Germany, the prevalent negative portrayal of migrants and refugees e.g., in the context of crime or terrorism (Goedeke Tort, Guenther, and Ruhrmann 2016) was less evident during the first phase of the refugee crisis (Haller 2017). Maurer et al. (2019) argue that German media provided a rather positive picture of migrants and refugees until late 2015, while at the same time the phenomenon of migration to Germany itself was described as a danger.

Comparative studies also started to include media coverage in CEE countries. According to an analysis by the European Journalism Observatory, newspapers in Western Europe were generally more compassionate towards the plight of migrants (mainly Middle Eastern) and refugees as compared to CEE countries; this also holds true for liberal versus conservative media (EJO 2015; see also Fotopoulos and Kaimaklioti 2016; Maurer et al. 2019). However, an analysis of news coverage in eight European countries concludes that all media paid little and sprinkled attention to the context of refugees and migrants. Stories were largely domesticated, and only rarely connected to war reporting or other international news stories from the countries of origins (Chouliaraki, Georgiou, and Zaborowski 2017). Several studies identify a lack of reporting about refugees' and migrants' individual stories, and criticize an under-representation of migrants and refugees as individuals in news coverage across Europe (e.g., Chouliaraki, Georgiou, and Zaborowski 2017; Ramasubramanian and Miles 2018). Dimitrova, Ozdora-Aksak, and Connolly-Ahern (2019) compared coverage of refugees in Turkey and Bulgaria, and found that cultural and geographical proximity had an impact. Turkish media in the sample covered refugees in a more personalized way and emphasized the suffering of people (victim frame), while coverage in Bulgaria focused on bureaucratic aspects related to the handling of refugee matters (administrative frame).

Additional studies focus on practices and routines of media professionals. McNeil and Karstens (2018) stress the impact of different national journalistic norms and media-government relationships on media coverage across Europe. A practice-oriented overview by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (2017) points towards a lack of knowledge about the complex issue of migration among journalists in Europe and newsrooms' vulnerability to pressure by populists and via social media.

Coverage of migrants and refugees from Africa in European media

Only very few studies have analyzed coverage of African migrants and refugees in Europe. Fohrn (2009) found that Italian media in 2006 paid considerable attention to the growing numbers of African migrants reaching Europe via Italy, whereas the German media were reluctant to tackle these events. Horsti (2008) analyzed media coverage of the arrival of 30,000 undocumented African migrants to the Canary Islands (Spain) in 2006. According to her study of one Finnish and one Swedish newspaper, the event was largely "domesticated" (Horsti 2008, 51) in the papers, by emphasizing local actors and perspectives on this event in Southern Europe.

Thus, we could only speculate about the characteristics of European media coverage of African migrants prior to our analysis. Coverage may be impacted by the awareness that Africa has for long been a blind spot for the global media (see also Horsti 2008). Segev (2015, 425) notes that "(a)t the global level, under-represented countries were mostly from Africa." Scholars like Mengara (2001), Obijiofor and Hanusch (2011), Wa'Njogu

(2009), and Serwornoo (2019) criticize the conflict-centred representation of African countries in “Western” media. Chibkubuike (2015) argues that most media in the Global North fail to keep pace with the actual economic developments in African countries. Sturmer (2013) explores the marginalization of African citizens and civil society in foreign reporting, which may also be connected to weak infrastructures for foreign coverage from Africa (Mükke 2009). More recent studies point towards a decline of *Afro-pessimism* in the Western press (Nothias 2018). The afore-mentioned aspects reflect the structural shortcomings of foreign coverage in general, as identified by Hafez (2002, 58–67): *Geographical proximity* (coverage in most media systems focuses on adjacent foreign countries), *negativism* (political and social crises, conflicts and man-made catastrophes dominate foreign coverage), *politization* and *elitism* (media coverage presents political actors and systems as primary social driving forces and concentrates on official elites and their counterparts, while neglecting economic or cultural perspectives as well as social groups and the general public), *de-contextualization* (negligence of political, economic, social, and cultural cause-and-effect relationships), and *marginalization of structural problems in the international relations* (foreign coverage ignores conflicts between global politics and economics systems, e.g., the problem of underdevelopment referring to the relation of developed countries and developing countries).

Coverage of migrants and refugees in African media

The topic of migration is almost entirely absent from mass communication research in African countries. Assopgoum (2011) compared news coverage about migration from Africa to Europe in Senegal and Germany between 1998 and 2008, and found 393 articles in the two German newspapers as compared to 179 articles in the three Senegalese newspapers analyzed. According to her study, the Senegalese articles covered the issue predominantly from the perspective of a sending country, focusing on negative aspects like the dangers and downsides of migration (“brain drain”), as well as state attempts to regulate emigration. Zappe et al. (2020) conducted a panel discussion with migrants from African countries in Germany. According to the interviewees, migration as a topic is largely ignored by African news media. For The Gambia, Jaiteh (2015, 6) finds migration coverage “limited, and stories about the hardship migrants endure are rare. Self-censorship, where reporters do not want to offend either their media employer or the government, is also an issue.” Chinje (2016) adds that many African journalists may be unaware of the magnitude of the issue of migration. For South Africa, Harber (2015, 96) argues that the large numbers of inner-African migrants are challenging local media. “There are few specialist reporters and certainly none who have expertise in the migration question, even though it has been a major political and economic issue.” Several studies have analyzed the coverage of xenophobic incidents in townships across South Africa targeting migrants from neighboring African countries, concluding that the South African media provide an “incomplete” and “simplistic” picture of the events (Smith 2009, 11).

Migration coverage in origin versus destination countries

With this scarcity of empirical studies to build upon, we can assume two different scenarios for the coverage of migration in the African media. On the one hand, migration coverage

in other journalism cultures and political systems may be generally distinctly different from migration coverage in Europe. Ramasubramanian and Miles (2018) found noticeable differences in a comparison of frames used by Anglo-Saxon versus Arabic news media in their 2016 coverage of the refugee crisis. The scope of coverage in many African countries with restricted press freedom (African Media Barometer 2018; Reporters Without Borders 2019) maybe limited, especially as politically highly sensitive issues are considered to be the key push factors for migration. Remittances sent home by migrants represent a substantial share of the national GDPs in many African countries (KNOMAD 2018).

On the other hand, news coverage in African media maybe surprisingly similar to news coverage in Europe. A pilot study by Balabanova and Balch (2010) compared coverage of labor migration in the UK and Bulgaria after EU enlargement 2007, and thus coverage in an origin and a destination country. They expected differences in coverage, due to different stakes in the issue of migration. Yet, the Bulgarian media agenda largely mirrored that of the UK, because the Bulgarian news media due to lack of newsroom resources for original coverage imported news from the UK. This might be the case for migration coverage in African media as well, as Asante (2013) points to weak infrastructures of African media outlets. Wa'Njogu (2009) argues neither African media organizations nor news agencies issue the global news about Africa. Serwornoo's pilot study (2018) confirms that African media represented Africausing, most of the time, the same frames Western media do. Serwornoo (2018) also argues African media rely on sources from the Global North even for the coverage of neighboring African countries. This lack of original coverage is due to a scarcity of reporting resources, poor editing, lack of space due to advertising policy, and negative assumptions about the public's interest in political affairs.

Research Questions

The results from the relevant streams of research can be summarized as follows:

- Media in the European destination countries generally tend to emphasize negative aspects in the coverage of migrants, and focus on domestic issues such as security and economic and cultural challenges. However, in the wake of the 2015 refugee crisis, coverage was somewhat more positive towards refugees and migrants, even though it lacked context and complexity. The shortcomings of foreign coverage, that Hafez (2002) defines, are particularly visible in news coverage of topics related to Africa and might have a noticeable impact on migration coverage as well.
- The few prior analyses available indicate that coverage in African sending countries is rare and emphasizes the dangers and downsides of migration. Migration coverage in African media may also have a limited scope due to political and economic restrictions.
- News agendas in sending countries may mirror migration coverage in destination countries to some extent, as prior studies indicate a lack of resources for journalistic research in African news outlets.
- Prior studies have criticized an underrepresentation of refugees and migrants in news coverage in destination countries, while no comparable studies could be found analysing the representation of migrants in sending countries.

In order to address these results, as well as the scarcity and inconsistency of research especially on migration coverage in Africa, we aimed at comparing *news coverage of migration from Africa to Europe* in European and African news media during the peak of the refugee crisis in 2015/16. The following research questions guided our analysis:

RQ1: How is the coverage of migration from Africa to Europe in the media of *European destination countries* under study characterized in terms of content, and both formal and evaluative categories?

RQ2: How is the coverage of migration from Africa to Europe in the media of *African sending countries* under study characterized in terms of content, and both formal and evaluative categories?

RQ3: What are the similarities and differences between the coverage of migration in the African and European media under study?

RQ4: How often are key actors (notably migrants) covered by African and European media?

Methodology

In order to answer these research questions, we formed an international research consortium to analyse and compare the coverage of migration from Africa to Europe in six (Western)⁸ European and five African countries. Despite numerous obstacles and undeniable shortcomings in the research process,⁹ the African-European consortium conducted this pilot research in order to add data from sending countries to the discussion about migration coverage, and to enable colleagues from the Global South to bring their own voice to the debate.

Table 1. The study's media outlets by country in Europe and Africa.

EUROPE	Media Outlet/Newspaper
Germany	Sueddeutsche Zeitung; Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
United Kingdom	The Independent; The Telegraph
France	Le Monde; Le Figaro
Italy	La Repubblica; Corriere della Sera
Greece	TaNea; Kathimerini
Spain	EIPais; ABC
AFRICA	Media Outlet/Newspaper
Uganda	The New Vision; The Daily Monitor
Tanzania	Daily News; The Guardian
Ethiopia	The Ethiopian Herald; Addis Zemen
Ghana	Ghanaian Times; Daily Graphic
Kenya	The Daily Nation; The Standard

Quantitative content analysis was performed to answer the research questions posed above. It included coverage in each participating country from the online versions of two opinion-leading newspapers (see Table 1) that can be expected to be used not only by citizens and decision-makers in general, but also by other journalists, and thus have an agenda-setting effect on the media at large (Reinemann 2003). This is especially relevant for most African countries, where radio is the dominant medium due to financial and technological restrictions as well as the lack of literacy (African Media Barometer 2018). However, newspapers are widely used by all other media segments and thus replace the non-existing news agencies in many African countries (Serwornoo 2019). The selection of newspapers was based on their role in the national media system and referred to the expertise of the national partners.¹⁰ Due to space limitations for this paper, we refer to Eberwein, Fengler, and Karmasin (2018) and the African Media Barometer (2018) for an overview of the media systems and journalism cultures of the European and African study countries.

The study analyzes the period from 1 June 2015 to 31 May 2016 and is conceptualized as a complete inventory count for this year. Numerous key events are included in the study period, among them several boat catastrophes in the Mediterranean Sea with hundreds of (African) casualties, the peak of the Syrian refugee crisis and the so-called “Calais Jungle”, as well as the EU–Africa summit in Malta and the EU–Turkey refugee agreement.¹¹

For the sample, all news items and opinion pieces with a clear reference to the topic of migration from Africa to Europe (keyword search for combination of root words) were selected.¹² As databases, e.g., Lexis Nexis, did not allow access to all of the African outlets in our sample, we relied on online archives of the media organizations.¹³ The research network followed the “project language proceeding” described by Rössler (2012, 463), using English as a common language for the codebook and the training and reporting process. To avoid a “Western” perspective on the topic, all project partners were involved at every stage of the research process, starting with the conceptualization of the project and the design of the code book. The formal codings include the newspapers’ name and country, headline of the article, publication date, length of the article, beat, genre and illustrations. Regarding the content, the three variables countries, actors and topics—defined by Stevenson (1984, 26) as “the kind of event or situation that the item is mainly *about* [emphasis in the original]” (see also Eilders 1997)—were split into a “main” and “additional” categories. With regard to the evaluative categories, articles were coded as positive, neutral/ambivalent or negative.¹⁴ The first codebook draft was shortened and the categories slightly changed after a pre-test revealed a range of interpretations of categories in the heterogeneous journalism cultures involved.

Results

General findings

The study retrieved 1,512 relevant articles in total, and found a huge gap regarding the quantity of migration coverage between African and European media, even when we take into account that African newspapers on average have less space for news compared to European newspapers. The 12 European media outlets under study dominate our sample with 1,337 articles retrieved, while we found only 175 articles in the 10 media

outlets from Africa. While this confirms prior studies pointing towards a higher salience of the topic of migration in the destination countries of migrants (i.e., Assopgoum 2011; Eberl et al. 2019), the inequality of sub-sample sizes requires cautious interpretation of the data from African countries. Where suitable, we provide results in absolute and relative numbers for maximum transparency.

Among European countries, France with the ongoing challenge of the “Calais Jungle” during the study period produced 465 articles (the highest share and equating to 35% of the European aggregate of 1,337, see Figure 1). Italy produced 262 articles (19%) and Greece 210 articles (16%). Both countries are core entry points for migrants into the EU and experience more coverage; Italy also had a high share of first-time asylum applicants from African countries during the study period. The UK’s slower share of 170 articles (13%) and Spain’s 109 articles (8%) corresponds with the lower numbers of applicants for asylum from Africa. Despite high numbers for first-time asylum applicants from African countries during the study, Germany produced only 122 articles (9%). This probably reflects that the German newspapers were not only focused on the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015/16 but also in general provided scarce coverage of migration from Africa.

Among African countries, Ethiopia has the largest number of articles dealing with migration with 60 articles, or 34% of the 175 produced by the study’s sub-Saharan countries. This result may reflect the magnitude and complexity of the issue in the country in 2015/16, as outlined above, even under conditions of tight press control. Tanzania produced 31 articles (18%), Ghana 30 articles (17%), Uganda 28 articles (16%) and Kenya 26 articles (15%). These lower shares confirm previous studies hinting towards a lower salience of migration topics in sending countries.

An increase of articles in European media can be found at the start of the study period in June 2015, and during the climax of the refugee crisis in August/September 2015. Both periods were marked by several tragic migrant boat accidents in the Mediterranean Sea with hundreds of casualties from Africa (see Figure 2). The EU–Africa summit in Malta in November 2015 obviously had no major impact on coverage. Another peak is discernible in January/February 2016, a period marked by the

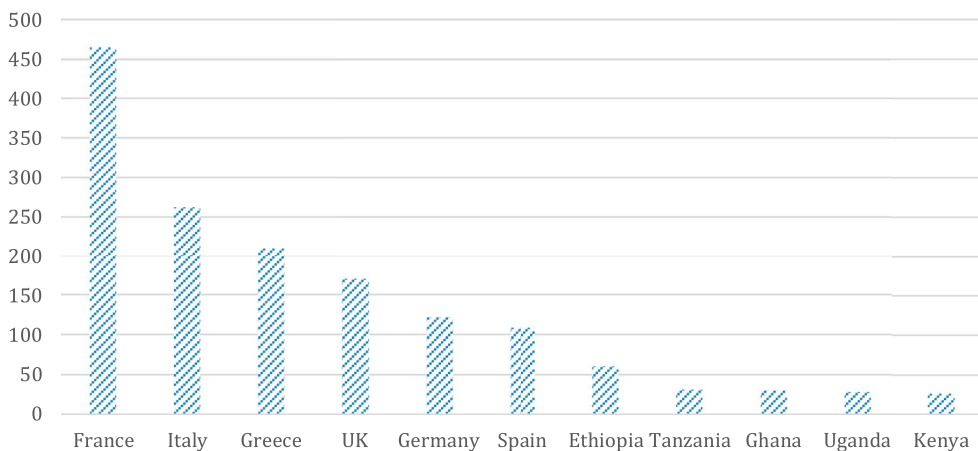


Figure 1. Number of articles on migration from Africa to Europe (N = 1,512) retrieved from European (n = 1,337) and African (n = 175) media outlets. Source: Field data, 2015/16.

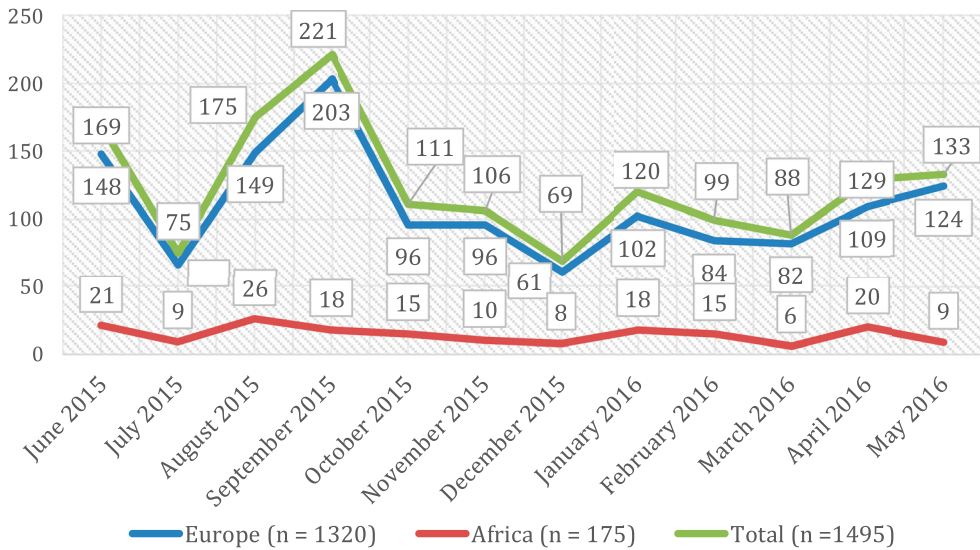


Figure 2. Development (in absolute article numbers) of media coverage of migration from Africa to Europe. Note: N = 1,512. Source: Field data, 2015/16.

debate about sexual assaults of migrants (mainly North African) on women in Cologne on New Year’s eve, and the French government’s attempts to solve the situation in the “Calais Jungle”. In May 2016, the G7 summit addressing the issue of migration may have triggered the peak in European news coverage. The small aggregate of articles retrieved from African media outlets does not allow a comparative interpretation of the development of coverage over time.

Most of the articles retrieved were published in the general news section of the studied media in Europe and Africa alike (see Table 2). Less frequent on both continents were articles in sections categorized as “Topic of the day”. There was a considerable difference by continent in the publication of opinion pieces (6.2% of the 1,512 aggregate): In African media, we found 27 opinion pieces, which represent 15.4% of the African aggregate. In European media, we found 67 articles, representing only 5% of the European aggregate.

Table 2. Location of articles by section in African and European media outlets.

Media Outlet Section	Overall aggregate of 1,512 articles Numerical Percentage	African Media Outlets (175 articles) Numerical Percentage	European Media Outlets (1,337 articles) Numerical Percentage
General news	1,015 67.1%	99 56.6%	916 68.5%
Topic of the day	226 15%	25 14.3%	201 15%
Opinion	94 6.2%	27 15.4%	67 5%
Economic /Finance	47 3.1%	8 4.6%	39 2.9%
Culture	40 2.7%	1 0.6%	39 2.9%

Note: Numerically and as percentages (%) of continental aggregates.

On both continents, articles appeared least frequently in the Economic (Finance) and the Culture section.

Migration coverage in European media

Answering RQ1, our data indicate that media coverage in Europe is largely domesticated and omits chances to connect to the context of the migrants’ countries of origin. This is in line with prior studies on the deficits of foreign coverage in general, and of news coverage at the peak of the refugee crisis in specific. According to our data, European media emphasize Europeans as main actors in 707 articles (52.9%). Only 341 articles by European media (25.5%) focus on African main actors, while 224 articles (16.8%) represent international actors. Even more striking are the European media’s favored countries for coverage: Italy attracted 242 articles (18.1%) and France 211 articles (15.8%) about migrants from Africa. At the same time, the European media largely ignored the sub-Saharan African countries of origin. Libya received some attention—69 articles (5.2%) –as the crucial African transit country to Europe. Also, Eritrea, with the highest share of migrants to Europe during the study, attracted just 9 articles (0.7%). “Africa as a continent” was the main country in 36 articles (2.7%).

Our data also show that topics in European coverage of migration from Africa to Europe follow the patterns found in prior studies to a considerable extent, focusing on issues related to security aspects (see Figure 3). Economic aspects were much less salient, in

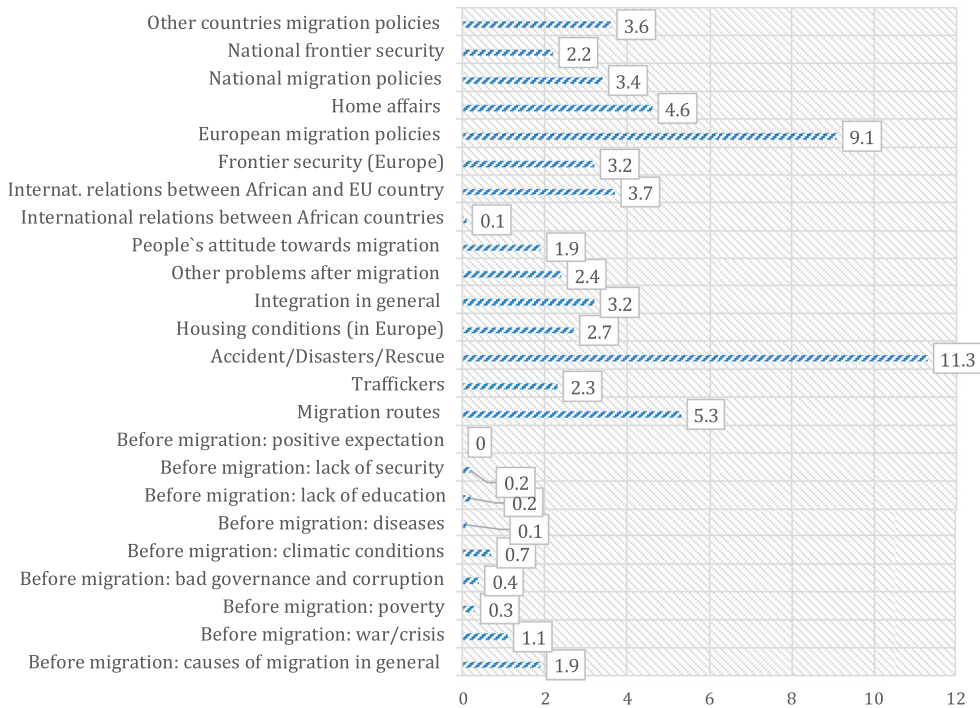


Figure 3. Selected main topics of migration coverage by percentage (%) in European media outlets. Note: N = 1,321. Source: Field data, 2015/16.

line with prior studies on the coverage of migration from outside the EU. Migrants’ shipwrecks and boat accidents comprise the most-covered topic with 151 articles (11.3%), followed by “European migration policies” with 122 articles (9.1%). Underlining the focus on security issues, two topics attracting the same level of coverage “(European) national migration policies” and “other countries’ migration policies” reached an aggregate of 94 articles (7%). Other topics related to security issues attracted a considerable share of coverage as well: “National frontier security” 29 articles (2.2%), “European frontier security” 42 articles (3.2%), “frontier security (frontiers outside Europe)” 5 articles (0.4%), “European defense policies” 9 articles (0.7%), “national defense policies” at home/abroad 16 articles (1.2%) and “home affairs” 61 articles (4.6%). The seequate to almost 19.3% of the European articles focusing on a wide array of issues related to security and policy in Europe. However, topics dealing with “causes of migration” (all topics “before migration ...” in [Figure 3](#)) received only marginal attention by European media with a combined share of 64 articles (4.9%). This is less than the coverage on “migration routes” (71 articles/ 5.3%). In contrast to prior studies on the deficits of foreign coverage in general, and migration coverage in 2015/16 in particular, we found that European media also paid attention to the situation of migrants from Africa after their arrival in Europe, with an aggregate of 118 articles for a combined share of 8.8%. Topics related to “integration in general” attracted 43 articles (3.2%), “housing conditions in Europe” 36 articles (2.7%),



Figure 4. Tone of media outlet articles concerning migration from Africa to Europe (in % of articles, by country and continent). Note: N = 1,512. Source: Field data, 2015/16.

“other problems after migration” 32 articles (2.4%), “people’s attitudes towards migration” 26 articles (1.9%), “asylum procedures” 24 articles (1.8%), and “violence against migrants” 21 articles (1.6%).

The tone of the coverage was analyzed in our study as well (see Figure 4). While a “neutral” tone is dominant in European media with 752 of 1,337 articles (56%), positive coverage was rare (with only 105 articles/7.9%). The relatively large share of articles describing migration in a negative light (480 articles/35.8%) may indicate that migrants from African countries have been portrayed in a somewhat less “welcoming” manner as compared to refugees from the Syrian civil war, even in the early phase of the 2015/2016 refugee crisis. The UK has a highly negative tone (114 of 170 articles/67.1%) shortly before the “Brexit” vote in June 2016. Italy, a key entry point for African migrants into Europe also has a large share of articles with a negative connotation (106 of 262 articles/40.5%). Spain was less affected by immigration from African countries in 2015/16 and had a higher share of positive articles (31 of 109 articles/28.7%).¹⁵

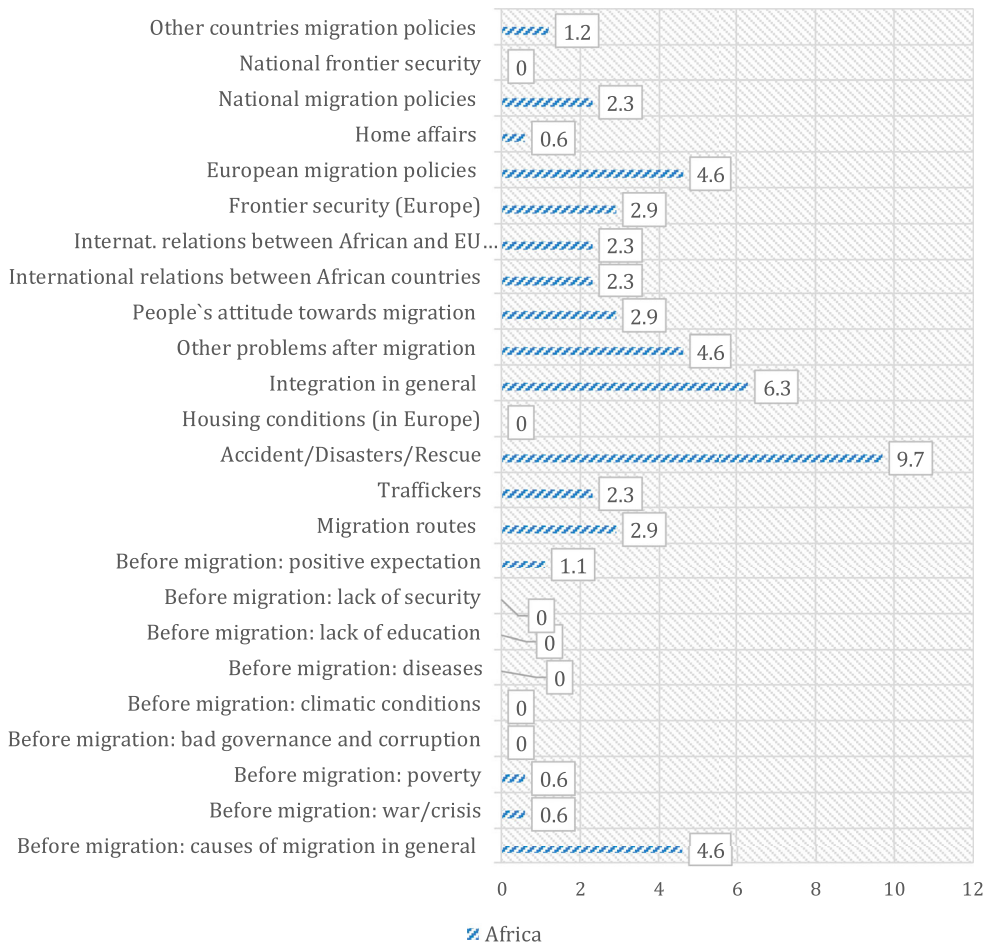


Figure 5. Selected main topics of migration coverage by percentage (%) in African media outlets. Note: n = 175. Source: Field data, 2015/16.

Migration coverage in African media

Answering RQ2, the danger of migration is emphasized in the media coverage in African countries, in line with prior studies (see Figure 5). Spectacular boat accidents and disasters—involving many African victims—in the Mediterranean Sea receive by far the highest attention in African media with 17 articles (9.7%). Also answering RQ3, there is more attention devoted in African media to “European migration policies” (8 articles/4.6%) and “frontier security (in Europe)” (5 articles/2.9%) in African media than to the coverage of “national migration politics” in 4 articles (2.3%) pertinent for each African country. While the African media outlets do pay attention to the situation of African migrants in Europe—topics like “integration in general” are the main topics in 11 articles (6.3%) and “other problems after migration” in 8 articles (4.6%)—, many other aspects potentially relevant for an African audience receive little coverage. Causes of migration in general, bad governance, poverty, climate change, lack of security and other key push factors are only rarely covered as main topics by African media in the context of migration to Europe (10 articles/5.8%), underlining prior studies on the limitations of migration coverage in Africa. “Migration routes” received more attention from European media with 71 articles (5.3%) than African media with 5 articles (2.9%). Further more, neither African media— 4 articles (2.3%)—nor European media—31 articles (2.3%)—paid much attention to traffickers. In line with prior studies indicating that migration is being framed negatively in sending countries, the majority of articles in African media outlets was coded as negative (86 from 175 articles/49.1%) or neutral (73 from 175 articles/41.7%). Migration is especially negative in Ethiopia (Figure 4). Elsewhere amongst the African media, the shares of positive articles were minimal: Ghana produced 1 article (3.3%), Uganda 2 articles (7.1%), Kenya 5 articles (19.2%) and Tanzania 8 articles (25.8%).

Similarities and differences in migration coverage

As the sub-sample sizes in Africa and Europe differ substantially, our data may only allow tentative conclusions, especially for the African media outlets. Answering RQ3, our data seem to indicate that the European media’s news agenda influences the African media’s-coverage. While we can only speculate about reasons like a lack of newsroom resources in Africa, European countries did feature most prominently in African news coverage. The African media outlets in 93 articles (59.2%) featured European countries as “main countries”, compared to only 60 articles (38.2%) which presented African countries as “main countries”. African media covered Italy with 13 articles (7.4%) and Germany with 11 articles (6.3%). Among African countries, Libya with 10 articles (5.7%) and Eritrea with 7 articles (4%) as key countries involved in migrants’ transit and origin during the study receive at least some media attention, as they do at the hands of the European media. The high share of articles in African media focusing on Ethiopia with 43 articles (24.6%) stands out, and can be explained by Ethiopia’s domestic challenges as outlined above. Also, in terms of actors covered, African main actors outnumber their international counterparts—like international relief organizations—but only by a relatively small margin: African media outlets produced 69 articles (39.9%) featuring Africans as main actors, as opposed to the 58 articles (33.5%) found in African media featuring Europeans

as main actors. This may again point towards missed opportunities to transfer the debate to a domestic political context.

Representation of key actors in European and African coverage

Answering RQ4, our data show that the actual migrants receive more attention in destination than insending countries. Articles by European media outlets refer to “citizens” (EU residents as well as refugees and migrants) as “main actors” in 376 articles (28.4%) and “political actors” (i.e., heads of state, governments, opposition actors) in 358 articles (27%). Within the category “citizens”, we found the European media produced 183 articles focusing on refugees as main actors (13.7%) and on migrants 139 articles (10.4%). Furthermore, European media produced 47 articles (3.5%) that feature EU residents as the “main actors” and 7 articles (0.5%) feature citizens in general.

In contrast, coverage by African media centered around politicians in 35 articles (20.8%) and representatives of international organizations in 40 articles (23.8%). Citizens, including actual or potential migrants, played a main role in only 21 articles (12.5%), as did civil society representatives in 25 articles (14.9%). Our study found African media produced only 9 articles (5.2%) featuring refugees as main actors and only 10 articles (5.8%) featuring migrants as main actors. This may reflect the variations in the nature of public debate in many African societies shaped by highly hierarchical structures. But this result could also point towards a lack of capacity for original reporting needed to reach out to potential and actual migrants in sending countries as suggested by prior studies.

Limitations and Discussion

Our data can only provide a spotlight on migration coverage in sub-Saharan Africa and Western Europe. In addition to the many obstacles encountered in our field work, we did not have the resources to include broadcast and social media, the many forms of mediated communication in African countries about migration in French, Portuguese and ethnic languages, and we had no access to research institutions in conflict-ridden countries like Eritrea and Sudan who saw the largest numbers of migrants and refugees in the time of study. Also, attention for the context in African countries might have risen in European and African media in the years after the study period, as a result of increasing political initiatives seeking to address the “root causes” of migration. While our research design was quantitative, we fully recognize the potential of additional qualitative research in future studies to provide more nuanced results.

We also could not triangulate our results with additional qualitative interviews in African newsrooms. Yet, our data point towards a lack of coverage and a dependency of African newsrooms on the material of European news media, as suggested by researchers like Serwornoo (2019), Zappe et al. (2020), Asante (2013), and Wa’Njogu (2009), as well as Balabanova and Balch (2010). The quantitative lack of coverage in the African sending countries we studied—no more than one in ten of the articles we retrieved was published by an African news outlet—may be partly caused by the many limitations of press freedom, as Jaiteh (2015) suggests, as well as by insufficient newsroom resources as Serwornoo (2018) argues. Our data also confirm studies by Caviedes (2015), Eberl et al. (2018), Esses, Medianu, and Lawson (2013) and Georgiou and Zaborowski (2017) who conclude

that migration coverage in destination countries is to a large extent domesticated, and dominated by the discussion of security and economy, while the situation in countries of migrants' origin remains largely unreported. We also find support for many of the shortcomings of foreign coverage in general, as described by Hafez (2002). Besides negativism, politicization and elitism, de-contextualization was especially evident. Economic and cultural aspects were almost invisible, as were structural problems of migration. But we found considerable concern for humanitarian aspects in (Western) European coverage, which both Berry, Garcia-Blanco, and Moore (2015) and Fotopoulos and Kaimaklioti (2016) argue. European news media also do not neglect migrants and refugees as actors according to our study, with almost one in five articles featuring migrants and refugees as main actors. This differs to some extent from the results of Ramasubramanian and Miles (2018).

In contrast to Horsti's (2008) observation about an increase of political issues requiring supra-national decision-making, our study data underline the widening gap between the demands of globalization and the structural capacities for foreign coverage not only of African, but also of European newsrooms. The obvious lack of background information on the causes and contexts of migration in African countries in the European media under study—fewer than one in twenty of the European articles in our sample tackled the seas main topics—may hinder an informed but critical public debate, which may instead be easily exploited by populists both from both political extremes. Thus, our results may also be read as confirmation to Hafez' observation that "(m)edia capital's lack of global reach is, alongside the political persistence of the nation-state and the major differences that mark the media discourses of the world's nation-states or cultural areas, the key reason why the globalization of the media today is taking place to a far more modest degree and at a far slower pace than is generally assumed" (Hafez 2007, 159). Our study also indicates that African newsrooms still need to start telling the "African migration story", emphasizing the perspectives and actors in the sending countries. This would also imply that coverage in Africa starts to include the actual migrants and refugees—in our sample, less than one in ten articles published by the African news outlets featured a migrant or refugee as main actor. The topic needs to be discussed much broader in African societies, explains the former president of the African Media Initiative, Chinje (2016). Comprehensive and professional coverage of all issues pushing migration may be an essential prerequisite towards building a critical public sphere in African countries, which in turn can demand more accountability from African decision-makers, and better perspectives on the continent.

The project consortium has started to use the results of the study to organize training conferences and research grants for African and European journalists, in order to facilitate cross-border collaboration and promote a more nuanced coverage of migration in African as well as European countries. In order to support journalism educators teaching migration coverage across continents, the consortium has also developed a model curriculum "Covering Migrants and Refugees" which is available online.¹⁶

Notes

1. The use of terms like "crisis" in this context has been critically discussed by scholars like Peterson and Kainz (2017).

2. A refugee, according to the Refugee Convention's Article 1 A. (2) is a person who, "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality (...)." (UNHCR 2010, 14) UNHCR defines an (international) migrant as "any person who moves, usually across an international border, to join family members already abroad, to search for a livelihood, to escape a natural disaster, or for a range of other purposes." (UNHCR 2018). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has published contradictory definitions simultaneously until 2019, when it settled on defining migration as the umbrella term for both, migrants and refugees (IOM 2019).
3. See for long-term analyses and background on the provisional camp e.g. <https://info.arte.tv/de/nadeloehr-calais>.
4. Among them arrangements with transit countries like Morocco, Egypt, and Libya to enhance border control, and the G20 Compact with Africa to promote economic development on the African continent. For a detailed overview see: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/migratory-pressures/history-migratory-pressures/>.
5. Gimenez-Gomez, Walle, and Zewdu (2017) recapitulate that a combination of push and pull factors influence the migration decisions of individuals to leave their countries of origin, in particular: rising political persecution, ethnic cleansing, human rights violations, political instability and civil conflicts in addition to economic determinants. In a "global society", transnational migration is also considered beneficial for crowded labor markets in countries of origin, and destination countries in need of labor (Sassen 2007).
6. Spain has been included in the sample as a traditional destination country for migrants from Africa. Lower shares of asylum applications in Spain from African countries in 2015/16 resulted from a tightened border regime introduced in 2014 after several critical incidents with refugee and migrants at the Ceuta and Melilla borders with Morocco (see <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/pdfscache/37449.pdf>). Spain, Italy and Greece are also transit countries for refugees and migrants heading to Northern Europe.
7. UNHCR (2019) notes 3.5 million "persons of concern" (combined numbers of refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, stateless persons and others) in Ethiopia, 1.3 million in Uganda, 0.5 million in Kenya, and 0.3 million in Tanzania.
8. A follow-up study involving Eastern European countries is being conducted by members of the consortium.
9. Problems associated with comparative research in mass communication (Esser and Thomas 2012) have been observed in this project to an even larger extent. African partners had only very limited access to scholarly literature, library material, and databases. Due to the severe lack of reliable and reasonably fast Internet access in African countries – even scholars in Ghana and Uganda often need to wait for several hours for a single attachment to download, and some university departments lack a steady paper supply for the printers – electronic communication was severely inhibited. Sometimes, we could not provide consortium partners with any PDF files. With these restrictions, the consortium leaders were forced to skip the effort to conduct an intercoder reality test prior to the actual coding. As a working solution, project directors in African countries and their PhDs finally coded the material after detailed briefings and with constant possibilities for further queries regarding the codebook and the coding process.
10. In Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, most national newspapers are published in English. For Ethiopia, the sample included one newspaper in English (The Ethiopian Herald) and one newspaper in Amharic (Addis Zemen), to reflect that the majority of newspapers in Ethiopia is published in Amharic.
11. Due to space limitations, we refer to an overview of the timeline of events as described in footnote 4.
12. Because articles frequently included mentions of "migrants" and "refugees", articles about refugees are also included in the sample. The international debate about definitions (see footnote 2) were also a challenge within the consortium.

13. Although we are aware that internal search engines might work differently, we considered this the option which provides us with the most homogenous sample compared to other methods, and carefully checked for particularities of search engines like the use of wildcards.
14. An article was coded as containing a positive evaluation if the phenomenon of migration is either clearly presented in a positive context e.g. personal or social success, advantages, or is clearly connected with positive connoted words e.g. success, gain, diversity. Coders were advised to take into account the complete article and accompanying pictures when making their decisions.
15. Free health insurance for non-status migrants mainly from Africa was a key issue in public debates in Spain 2015/16. Results for Greece may be explained by the political alignment of politics and media and the impact of the less restrictive migration policy of the Syriza party in charge of government in 2015/16, according to consortium partners.
16. Project information and downloads will be added after the review process.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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