Chapter 6
The Media Representation of Refugee Women in Spain:
The Humanitarian Crisis of the First Female Refugees in the Press

Francisco Javier García Castaño
Universidad de Granada, Spain

Ariet Castillo Fernandez
Universidad de Granada, Spain

Antolín Granados Martínez
Universidad de Granada, Spain

ABSTRACT

Research on the migratory phenomenon has produced many studies and from various disciplines. However, the knowledge that citizens have of this phenomenon is linked to the discourse by the media. It is not different in the case of refuge and asylum. The contribution of the authors involves questioning to what extent the media are present in shaping the image of migrations. Until now, the image presented is negative, problematic, conflictive, ethnic, and alarming. But this chapter focuses on refugees and, in particular, refugee women. In the same way that research on the migratory phenomenon shows that immigrant women have not been the subject of notable media coverage, it is to be expected that refugee women are not either. For this reason, it is interesting to check the degree of media coverage of the migratory phenomenon in the press (including the mobility of refugees) during the so-called "refugee crisis" in Europe. The chapter focuses on the news that include the refugee woman. For this purpose, the news published in the Spanish newspaper El País are used.

INTRODUCTION

Research on news media has shown it has the power to set the news agenda. It also shows the close relationship that exists between what they publish and the general public's degree of knowledge regarding any physical, social or cultural phenomenon (Castells, 2009, Ramonet, 2003, Van Dijk, 2009). It should therefore be hardly surprising that for a large part of the public the phenomenon of migration should also be constructed in a way that reflects how it is conveyed by the news media. And it is important to state this fact about the public's sources of information when constructing their perception of migratory processes. The reasons for this will be set out in what follows.

Research into the phenomenon of migration has produced thousands of studies, reports, doctoral theses and publications in prestigious publications and indexed journals with high impact rates. It has been analysed from the perspective of economics, demographics, anthropology, sociology, medicine, social psychology and political science. Nevertheless, the knowledge of this subject held by the general public is closely linked to the discourse that the media have been propounding throughout the period in question (Granados-Martinez & Granados-Lerma, 2013). This is the case for refugees themselves as well as for the phenomena of refuge and asylum.

But refugees issue have not had the same media coverage as foreign immigrants have received in Europe. Owing however to the tragic situation of countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, Eritrea, etc., and the flight of thousands of their citizens towards European borders, European public opinion and consequently the news media have been in a state of high alert. This has meant that the refugee issue has acquired the same news status as that of the immigrant; so much so that, in pursuit of their own agenda, many media have created serious confusion between the two categories, confounding the demographic with the legal dimension, and vice versa. Some countries as Germany and Sweden for example overwhelmingly used the terms "refugee" and "asylum seeker", whereas the Italian and British press preferred the concept of "migrant". The dominant expression in Spain was "immigrant" (Berry, Garcia-Blanco & Moore (2015).

The authors of this study focus on refugees and, in particular, on female refugees. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees [UNHCR], 2020, there were almost 80 million people "forced to migrate" for reasons utterly distinct from those who did so for work, education, leisure, etc. It is what this United Nations agency refers to as "forced global displacement". To gain a clearer idea of the size of this phenomenon, it is worth noting that rather more than 20 million (48% women) of the 80 million people "forced to migrate" are deemed to be refugees, slightly more than 6 million of whom are to be found in Europe.

Just as recent research into the phenomenon of migration shows that women immigrants have not been the recipients of particularly notable media coverage (Adel, 2019, Castagnani, 2009, Creighton, 2013, Masanet & Ripoll, 2008, Román et al., 2011), it is hardly surprising that the same applies to female refugees. But the present authors seek to provide rather more. Studying the presence or absence of refugee women and the ways in which this presence/absence is represented in the news media may shed light on the social inclusion policies, or lack of them, for female refugees in the host countries. On this issue it is worth reading a brief which suggests that news media were guiding or impeding the process of refugee inclusion, in terms of the way they were covered, their direct and indirect messages and their impact on public opinion (Gancheva, 2017)

Viewing the media as moulders and amplifiers of certain public preoccupations regarding specific social phenomena, the present contribution involves questioning the extent to which the news media are

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