



Moving Stories

International Review of How Media Cover Migration



Ethical
Journalism
Network

EDITED BY AIDAN WHITE

Moving Stories

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PHOTO CREDITS

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A group of children, likely refugees, are shown in a line. In the foreground, a young boy is holding a piece of light-colored fabric. The children are wearing simple, worn clothing. The background shows more children and a clear sky.

FOREWORD

Beyond the headlines

» JAN EGELAND



For years, the Norwegian Refugee Council and other humanitarian actors have called out – too often in vain – to the international community, to the media, the decision makers and the public opinion about the sufferings of millions of civilians fleeing war in Syria.

As the conflict escalated, and the humanitarian disaster with it, creating the biggest refugee crisis in our generation, our appeals for wider media attention, with some notable exceptions, fell on deaf ears with an apparent lack of interest on the part of the vast majority of television and radio companies and major newspapers.

It was arguably only with the tragic death of Aylan Kurdi and the publication of pictures of his body on a beach in Turkey that Western public opinion and global media finally woke up. Immediately, media lenses focused sharply on the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean and both politicians and ordinary people had to respond.

What about the many other humanitarian crises beyond the media's radar? Every two minutes another South Sudanese child becomes severely malnourished. But these stories are seldom told.

But this incident only raised another question. What about the many other humanitarian crises beyond the media's radar? In war-torn South Sudan, for example. This country is rarely in the limelight. In 2011, it gained independence from Sudan ending a generation of war. Two years later, the civil war broke out resulting in massive forced displacement and today the country is one of the world's impoverished places. Every two minutes another South Sudanese child becomes severely malnourished. But these stories are seldom told.

A South Sudanese colleague told me it was strange to see how things can change from one day to the other only because of international media attention.

“In Europe, it was that boy on the beach. Maybe we need a picture of a boy like that in South Sudan,” she said while preparing to go on a new mission to one of the world's hardest-to-reach areas where dropping food from World Food Programme airplanes is the only way to provide hungry people with something to eat.

Too often not even stories about children dying of starvation are enough to make headlines on the nine o'clock news. Humanitarian disasters that deserve our attention often go uncovered because there is no photographer or journalist on the ground to tell the story. Only a couple of conflicts receive our attention at any given time, while most dramas get none at all. Why is that?

The reasons are complex. It is not just a lack of humanity on the news agenda or a matter of luck or a matter of caring more about some people at the expense of others. We need a broader lens to see what really is going on.

In the Norwegian Refugee Council we annually publish a list of the world's 10 most neglected displacement crises. This year the Rohingyas have topped the list. This minority Muslim community under pressure in Myanmar is also found in neighbouring Bangladesh where hundreds of thousands have sought protection.

One criterion to be on the neglected crises list is a lack of media attention. Other factors include lack of funding, little humanitarian presence and difficult access to the victims of the conflict. Often, there is a strong correlation between the different factors: access problems can lead to lack of media attention, which again can lead to lack of donor concern, which again leads to even bigger access issues. This completes a vicious circle that is not easily broken.

But there is an important truth in all of this – decision makers pay attention to the media, and independent journalists reporting with care, humanity and professionalism have enormous power to tell stories that create a new path.

But, as this report reveals, mainstream media is currently under pressure with news companies struggling to adapt to a new reality with plummeting revenues and competition from new media. Often media will simply say they cannot afford to cover these stories.

But this should not be an excuse for adopting a herd mentality – where media follow each other to cover a small cluster of the most obvious stories. Media around the world are now reporting on the disastrous humanitarian consequences of the civil war in Syria and the exodus to Europe and they are going beyond the numbers story which has dominated news coverage so far.

Yet as the poignant human tragedies from Syria takes centre stage, where is the coverage of the second largest humanitarian crisis and war on our watch: in Yemen? Here, around 21 million people are in urgent need of emergency relief. They suffer from external and internal bombardment, blockade and totally inadequate assistance and protection.

Also the journalists themselves need to be protected to be able to report on the atrocities. For journalists reporting from conflict and war 2015 is another deadly year. Like humanitarian workers, journalists are not only at risk of becoming so-called collateral damage during military operations, they are also increasingly targeted.

It is therefore essential that the international community focus on the protection of journalists in armed conflicts to allow for less casualties in the imminent future.

In Europe we talk about a sharing of responsibility in terms of coping with the growing influx of migration. Maybe it is time to talk about a media “burden sharing” where media institutions, rather than chasing the same stories, divide the coverage of the human suffering so that children in grave risk in South Sudan or Gaza do not continue to stay in life-threatening situations without the world knowing.

This EJN report *Moving Stories* is a welcome step to allow journalists get an overview of the problem areas as well as promoting best practices when it comes to reporting on the wider migration story.

Without media attention, humanitarian crises, with their horrifying impacts, will continue to be learned by the outside world way too late.

Jan Egeland is the Secretary-general of the Norwegian Refugee Council



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INTRODUCTION

Moving stories

» KIERAN COOKE AND AIDAN WHITE

Migration is part of the human condition. Ever since humankind emerged out of East Africa it has been on the move – searching for a better climate, looking for supplies of food and water, finding security and safety.

Migration has suddenly jumped to the top of the news agenda. During 2015 journalists reported the biggest mass movement of people around the world in recent history.

Television screens and newspapers have been filled with stories about the appalling loss of life and suffering of thousands of people escaping war in the Middle East or oppression and poverty in Africa and elsewhere.

Every day in 2015 seemed to bring a new migration tragedy: Syrian child refugees perish in the Mediterranean; groups of Rohingyas escaping persecution in Myanmar suffocate on boats in the South China Sea; children fleeing from gang warfare in Central America die of thirst in the desert as they try to enter the US.

In response to this crisis the Ethical Journalism Network commissioned *Moving Stories* – a review of how media in selected countries have reported on refugees and migrants in a tumultuous year. We asked writers and researchers to examine the quality of coverage and to highlight reporting problems as well as good work.



The conclusions from many different parts of the world are remarkably similar: journalism under pressure from a weakening media economy; political bias and opportunism that drives the news agenda; the dangers of hate-speech, stereotyping and social exclusion of refugees and migrants. But at the same time there have been inspiring examples of careful, sensitive and ethical journalism that have shown empathy for the victims.

In most countries the story has been dominated by two themes – numbers and emotions. Most of the time coverage is politically led with media often following an agenda dominated by loose language and talk of invasion and swarms. At other moments the story has been laced with humanity, empathy and a focus on the suffering of those involved.

What is unquestionable is that media everywhere play a vital role in bringing the world's attention to these events. This report, written by journalists from or in the countries concerned, relates how their media cover migration.

They tell very different stories. **Nepal** and the **Gambia** are exporters of labour. Thousands of migrants, mostly young men, flock from the mountain villages of Nepal to work in the heat of the Gulf and Malaysia: often the consequences are disastrous. People from the Gambia make the treacherous trip across the Sahara to Libya and then by boat to Europe: many have perished on the way – either in the desert or drowned in the Mediterranean.

In these countries reporting of the migration of large numbers of the young – in many ways the lifeblood of their nations – is limited and stories about the hardship migrants endure are rare. Censorship or a lack of resources – or a combination of both – are mainly to blame for the inadequacies of coverage. Self-censorship, where reporters do not want to offend either their media employer or the government, is also an issue.

The reports on migration in **China**, **India** and **Brazil** tell another story. Though large numbers of people migrate from each of these countries, the main focus is on internal migration, a global phenomenon often ignored by mainstream media that involves millions and dwarfs the international movement of people.

What's considered to be the biggest movement of people in history has taken place in China over the last 35 years. Cities are undergoing explosive growth, with several approaching 20 million inhabitants. Similar movements are happening in India and, to a lesser extent, in Brazil.

In Africa the headlines focus on people striving to leave the continent and heading north, but there is also migration between countries, with many people from the impoverished central regions heading for **South Africa** – a country where media also deal with problems of xenophobia and governmental pressure.

In Europe migration and refugee issues have shaken the tree of European unity with hundreds of thousands trekking by land and sea to escape war and poverty. The reports here reveal how for almost a year media have missed opportunities to sound the alarm to an imminent migration refugee crisis.

Media struggle to provide balanced coverage when political leaders respond with a mix of bigotry and panic – some announcing they will only take in Christian migrants while others plan to establish walls and razor wire fences. Much of the focus has been on countries in South Eastern Europe which has provide a key route for migrants and refugees on the march. In **Bulgaria**, as in much of the region, media have failed to play a responsible role and sensationalism has dominated news coverage.

In **Italy**, a frontline state where the Mediterranean refugee tragedy first unfolded, the threat of hate-speech is always present, though this is often counterbalanced by an ethical attachment of many in journalism to a purpose-built charter against discrimination. In **Britain** the story has also often been politically-driven and focused, sometimes without a sense of scale or balance: this has been particularly evident in reportage of the plight of refugees in Calais.

In **Turkey**, seen by many European politicians as a key country in stemming the onward rush of migrants, most media are under the thumb of a government that punishes dissident journalists, so the public debate is limited.

Like their Turkish colleagues, journalists in **Lebanon** live with the reality of millions of refugees from war-torn Syria within their borders which makes telling the story more complex and it is not helped by confused mixing of fact and opinion by many media.

At the same time in the **United States** media have helped make the migrant and refugee issue an explosive topic in debates between Republican Party candidates for the presidency. Media time has focused on heated and often racist exchanges. This has obscured much of the good reporting in some media that provides much-needed context. South of the border, in **Mexico** media also suffer from undue political pressure and self-censorship.



“Open the world more equitably so we all may walk freely. Or close the borders and let each one return to his house and see how much poorer and drearier and darker the world is when we all stay at home.” – Chibundu Onuzo

In **Australia** the media in a country built by migrants struggles to apply well-meaning codes of journalistic practice within a toxic political climate that has seen a rise in racism directed at new arrivals.

These reports cover only a handful of countries, but they are significant. The problems of scant and prejudicial coverage of migration issues exist everywhere. Even reporting of migration in the international media – with a few notable exceptions – tends to be overly simplistic.

Migrants are described as a threat. There is a tendency, both among many politicians and in sections of the mainstream media, to lump migrants together and present them as a seemingly endless tide of people who will steal jobs, become a burden on the state and ultimately threaten the native way of life.

Such reporting is not only wrong; it is also dishonest. Migrants often bring enormous benefits to their adopted countries.

How would California’s agricultural industry or the Texan oil fields survive without the presence of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans and Central

American workers, often labouring on minimal wages? How could the health service in the UK continue without the thousands of migrant nurses and doctors from the developing world? How would cities like Dubai, Doha or Singapore have been built without labourers from Nepal or Bangladesh – or how would they function without the armies of maids and helpers from the Philippines and Indonesia?

These reports underscore why media need to explain and reinforce a wider understanding that migration is a natural process. No amount of razor wire or no matter how high walls are built, desperate migrants will find a way through. People will still flock to the cities, drawn by the hope of a better life.

The migrant crisis is not going to go away: the impact of widespread climate change and growing inequality is likely to exacerbate it in the years ahead.

The inescapable conclusion is that there has never been a greater need for useful and reliable intelligence on the complexities of migration and for media coverage to be informed, accurate and laced with humanity. But if that is to be achieved we must strengthen the craft of journalism.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND USEFUL LINKS

1. Ethical context

Migrants and refugees are a vulnerable minority who can quickly become scapegoats for the ills of society – social and economic decline, crime and unemployment, pressure on health and welfare services and lack of security.

Media can counter this threat and help people better understand the complex migration story by applying ethical principles, avoiding crude stereotypes, developing good newsroom practice and engaging with the audience. In particular, journalists should apply and respect the following five core principles of journalism in their work:

- ▷ Accuracy: fact-based reporting, analysis and commentary;
- ▷ Independence: journalism free from self-censorship and political pressure;
- ▷ Impartiality: fair reporting that tells all sides of the story;
- ▷ Humanity: sensitive and careful journalism that avoids doing undue harm;
- ▷ Accountability: media transparency and commitment to correct errors.

2. Newsroom practice

Media companies and journalists' unions and associations should prepare concise guides to best practices for the reporting on refugees and migrants. In addition, all media should examine their internal structures to make sure they are telling the story in the most effective way.

News organisations can:

- ▷ Appoint specialist reporters with good knowledge of the subject to the migration and refugee beat.
- ▷ Provide detailed information on the background of migrants and refugees and the consequences of migration. It is especially important to note that some major studies reveal how migration can strengthen national economies in the longer term, even where there are short-term challenges.
- ▷ Avoid political bias and challenge deceptive handling of the facts and incitement to hatred particularly by political, religious or other community leaders and public figures.
- ▷ Respect sources of information and grant anonymity to those who require it most, particularly

those who are vulnerable and most at risk.

- ▷ Establish transparent and accessible internal systems for dealing with complaints from the audience over coverage of migrant and refugee issues.
- ▷ Review employment policies to ensure newsroom diversity with reporters and editors from minority communities.
- ▷ Provide training for journalists and editors covering everything from international conventions and law to refugee rights and what terms to use while covering refugee stories.
- ▷ Monitor coverage regularly. Organise internal discussions on how to develop and improve the scope of migration coverage.
- ▷ Manage online comments and engage with the audience to ensure that migration stories are not used as a platform for abuse or intolerance.

Media associations and journalists' unions can also support national structures for independent regulation or self-regulation of journalism, such as press councils. Where there are industry-wide codes of conduct and guidelines dealing with non-discrimination these should cover reporting migration.

3. Engage with the media audience and connect with migrants

Refugee groups, activists and NGOs, many of which provide vital information for media, can be briefed on how best to communicate with journalists and media can explain to the audience their policies and editorial approach which may encourage readers, viewers and listeners to contribute useful additional information.

4. Challenge hate-speech

Hate-speech is widespread in the media. Often it can't be prevented when it comes out of the mouths of prominent public figures, but journalists should always remember that just because someone says something outrageous doesn't make it newsworthy. The Ethical Journalism Network has developed a 5-point text for hate-speech as a useful tool for newsrooms. (See below).

5. Demand access to information

Media cannot report without access to reliable information and facts. When access to information is restricted, such as not being allowed to enter

refugee camps, media and civil society groups should press the government both nationally and internationally to be more transparent. Media and journalists' unions should meet regularly with police and state authorities and agencies to ensure journalists have safe conditions in which to work and access to the information they need.

Some Useful Links

Glossaries

International Organization for Migration (IOM Key migration terms)

United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) Media Friendly Glossary for Migration

Statistics

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Statistics and Operational Data

International Organization for Migration (IOM) World Migration Report

Internal Displacement Monitoring Center Global Estimates 2015

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) Resources Publications

Sources

International Refugee Law – Everything you need to know from the UNHCR

Institute for the Study of International Migration (ISIM)

Refugee Studies Centre (RSC)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

Council of Europe (COE)

European Network Against Racism (ENAR)

European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)

Forced Migration Online

The Journal of International Migration and Integration (JIMI)

The Global Migration Centre (GMC)

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)

Red Cross Global Campaign on Migration

Middle East Migration Issues (Migration Policy Institute)

Resources for journalists

Accountable Journalism Database

Africa's Media Silence over Migration Crisis

BBC: Migration in Figures

Climate News Network

Dart Centre Covering Migration Tips for Journalists

Ethical Journalism Network: Migrants or Refugees?

Ethical Journalism Network Five-Point Test for Hate-speech

Europe: The Migrant Files

Jean Paul Marthoz: "How to cover migration"

Getting the Facts Right: Ethnicity and Religion (ARTICLE 19)

Media Diversity Institute

Statewatch

UK NUJ Migration Reporting Guide for Journalists

Data-Based Study into Characteristics of Migration Coverage in Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States – Summary report and Full presentation

Why Al Jazeera will not say Mediterranean Migrants

David Cameron: "Swarm" of Migrants crossing Mediterranean

Ten myths about migration

Guardian Special Report:

Hardline Australia, confused Scandinavia and tense Russia: The global immigration picture

Generation E – Data Driven Project Report on Youth Migration from Southern Europe

The Med: One final danger in a migrant's odyssey

The Arduous Journey of Colombian Migrants Headed for Chile

What crime have I committed to be held like this? Inside Yarl's Wood

Risking their lives to cross the border: Europe or Die

Jimmy Breslin: "The Short Sweet Dream of Eduardo Gutierrez"

Giovanna dell'Orto/Vicki Birchfield: "Reporting at the Southern Borders Journalism and Public Debates on Immigration in the U.S. and the E.U."

Peter Andreas/Kelly Greenhill: "Sex, Drugs and Body Counts"

Fabrizio Gatti: "Bilal"





SOUTH AFRICA

Compelling tales of afrophobia and media selective blindness

» ANTON HARBER

A South African woman living in a building called Fatties Mansions in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, with her Burundian boyfriend and three-month-old daughter was woken one night in May by the police and soldiers of Operation Fiela kicking down their front door.

Fiela means “to sweep away, to clean up, to remove dirt” in the Sotho language. This was a joint operation launched by the police, municipal police and the military in response to a wave of xenophobic violence which had taken seven lives. It should be seen, said Gwede Mantashe, secretary-general of the ruling African National Congress, as “an attempt to rid the country of illegal and undocumented immigrants”. In other words, it was aimed at the victims rather than the perpetrators of the violence that had gripped the city a week earlier.

Documents filed in court over the next few weeks said, “They asked for the boyfriend’s papers and he was slapped when he showed his passport. She tried to show them her South African identification but they refused to look at it, she says. They were sent downstairs with the baby, but with no blankets, nappies or food, and taken to the police station where she says people had to sit on the floor without food or access to toilets. Eventually, she managed to show an officer her ID book and was released around 12.30am.”

Little of this was reported in the mainstream media, and only cursorily covered was the fact that lawyers had to return to court twice to get access to those detained in Operation Fiela. In its first few days, the security forces took journalists with them to make a public show of their clenched-fist response to the violence. Pictures that emerged showed the humiliation and degradation of scores of people – the documented and the undocumented, local and foreign. Front-page images of many being made to lie down half-naked in the corridors of their buildings as police searched their belongings were reminiscent of security force action at the height of apartheid. Media response, though, was muted, in line with public sentiment, which is strongly anti-crime and anti-immigrant.

Operation Fiela began as a short-term response to the violence, but quickly morphed into a prolonged crime clean-up which targeted both locals and migrants. Policemen on the ground were less circumspect in their description of what they were doing than the politicians. Before a raid in Bellville, Cape Town, a police spokesperson said: “The focus for today will be on illicit goods, whether it is firearms, illicit cigarettes, counterfeit products, drugs ...” There was little mention of immigrants. The reporter said they then “tore” through the area. An officer was

quoted saying: “We are here to protect the businesses, to ensure that business is conducted in a way that is free, so that ... the economy can grow.”

Stephen Faulkner of the SA Municipal Workers Union said at a media conference called to decry the operation: “With the chronically misnamed Operation Fiela, we have witnessed a terrible assault on what had become a symbol of refuge and asylum and a symbol of safety for those who most needed it ... migrant communities are being compared to rubbish at the same time as our government at all levels is declaring itself in favour of tackling xenophobia.”

There was little media questioning about how a short-term operation became open-ended, how it came to widen its scope to take in a range of crime, how it failed to discriminate between the undocumented and the documented and how it packaged this so that it gave the impression that crime and migrants were part of the same problems.

Hard-pressed media as idle myth-makers

“The media is lazy,” said Prof Loren Landau of the African Centre for Migration and Society at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, “and it perpetuates many myths about migrants. If the government says there are 30,000 cases a year of child trafficking then it is reported without questioning, and the figure is out there – even though the government’s own figures don’t support this. If a minister says that migrants are stealing jobs, then that is how the problem is framed: people are naturally upset because they are unemployed and blame foreigners for taking the jobs. The myth is perpetuated, even if the evidence is that migrants create more jobs than they take.”

Laziness is not the only explanation. Newsrooms are depleted, having seen large-scale retrenchments in recent years, and newspapers are unable to do the kind of day-to-day reporting they did a few years ago. 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.

Another factor that counts when the media are under financial pressure: immigrants, particularly the undocumented, seldom feature in the audience surveys which increasingly hold sway over editorial strategy as traditional media grapples with diminishing audiences. This means that migrants are largely invisible both as consumers and subjects of the media.

One would have thought that bringing soldiers onto the streets, which had not happened since apartheid, would be questioned in the media, but strong anti-crime sentiment meant the operation had public support, and media attention quickly faded. Reports of whole townships being surrounded and of house-to-house searches, with hundreds of people caught up in them, were only rumours recounted by activists, because the media was not there.

This stood in strong contrast to the coverage just a week earlier of the xenophobic violence. Professor Landau and Rashon Dadoo, who runs the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (Cormsa), agree that coverage of the violence that drove many people out of townships and into temporary refugee camps was generally quite good and mostly sympathetic. It also gave more context and explanation than during the previous such outbreak in 2008, when the media were caught completely off guard and struggled to understand what was happening.

A company called ROi Africa, which monitors media, said the level of reporting and social media conversation during the week of violence was “incredible”. Tracking it against other major trending stories, xenophobia monopolised 66 per cent of the news media. On social media, this was on the hashtags #NoToXenophobia and #NoToAphobia. The most popular theme – in about 40 per cent of the discussion – was calls for the government to act.

This is the pattern of media treatment of migrants: when there is a wave of xenophobic violence it is on the front page and coverage is full and detailed. It is often accompanied by campaigns for assistance for victims and coverage of those who volunteer to assist or who protest the violence. For the rest of the time, migrants largely appear only in reports of crime.

The overwhelming majority of mentions of non-South African origins are when criminals are identified. While South African media has developed a sensitivity towards identifying the race of criminals and has largely broken with the apartheid tradition of describing “black” criminals and “white” victims, there is less hesitation in labelling criminals as foreigners, particularly “Nigerians”. Because there is strong anti-crime sentiment, this has major implications for the way foreigners are seen.

In addition, there is seldom any differentiation between refugees and other migrants, or between those who are documented and those who are not. They are simply “foreigners” or “aliens”, even if they have citizenship or permanent residence. Interest-



The myth is perpetuated, even if the evidence is that migrants create more jobs than they take.

ingly, this applies mainly to black Africans. White middle-class immigrants are quickly integrated into the society and seldom labelled as foreigners.

Justice denied for an invisible community

Johannesburg is a city transformed in the last two decades by immigration from the rest of Africa since the end of apartheid, turning a city of segregation into a richly cosmopolitan and multicultural one. It is not clear exactly how many migrants there are, but significant sectors of the city and the informal settlements which surround it have strong populations of recently-arrived immigrants.

There are some quarters where more French is spoken than English and there are areas known as Little Addis and Little Kinshasa, alongside the older Chinatown. The official census figure is 2.2 million immigrants across the country, but *The New York Times* recently stated as fact that it was 5 million, a figure now often quoted. *Africa Check*, a fact-checking website based in Johannesburg, showed that there was no research basis for it and, while the census figure may reflect some undercounting, it is unlikely to have been so great.

This population is visible around Johannesburg – in fact, it is impossible to miss. It is evident in boardrooms and lecture theatres, on the streets and online, where there is a significant presence of bloggers writing about being what is routinely – and derogatorily – called “makwerakwera”, a black immigrant from elsewhere in Africa.

But this significant segment of city life is largely absent from mainstream media, other than in crime reports or where there are outbreaks of violence. Read the newspapers or watch television and these areas are near-invisible. Part of this, according to Dadoo, is because – like migrants of uncertain status in many countries – they often choose to keep a low profile and avoid media attention. But they are vulnerable to abuse and maltreatment and there is little interest until it blows up into a major conflagration, threatening the peace of middle-class suburbia.

What coverage there is often feeds the view that migrants bear responsibility for joblessness and crime, two of the country’s most severe problems. Alfani Yoyo from Cormsa said of Operation Fiela and its media coverage: “It feeds the perception that migrants are to be blamed for the social ills of this country ... It cements the attitude of ‘us’ and ‘them.’”

Operation Fiela was presented as a clampdown on illegal immigration and the crime associated with it, but the majority of those arrested were locals. Police reported that by the end of June, 1,650 foreign nationals and 2,264 South African citizens were arrested for crime including drug possession, murder, rape and robbery.

“They would say that they had arrested hundreds of illegal immigrants and found large amounts of drugs, as if the two were conflated. Many of those arrested were just caught without their papers and many of those involved in drugs were South Africans as well as foreigners, but an impression was

created of a successful clampdown on illegal activities by illegal immigrants,” according to Dadoo.

It was photographs of those two outbreaks that defined them, raised public horror and galvanised official reaction. And the debate around those photographs, overlaid with the concerns and issues of a young democracy with a troubled racial past, tell us a great deal about how the country grapples with the issues around migrants.

During the anti-immigrant violence of 2008, it was a photo of a man being burnt alive that brought attention to the horrors of what was happening. Ernesto Nhamuave, 35, was one of the many Mozambicans living quietly in South Africa and largely invisible in the media until his neighbours set upon him and the image of him being burnt alive was sent around the world. The use of that picture on many local front pages brought accusations that the media, still largely white-owned, treated black bodies, particularly dead ones, with less circumspection than white bodies.

Such pictures are seldom used as prominently if the person in them is white, it was argued. This sparked furious debate, overlaid with the accusation that the media is insufficiently transformed from its apartheid days. But it was the media investigation into the burning man and his identity that changed the coverage from that of “others” being attacked, to someone with a face, family and history. It brought horrified citizens out on the street to demonstrate their repugnance.

Attention faded, though, until the fresh outburst of anti-immigrant violence in 2015. And again it was a photograph – of three thugs knifing a foreigner to death in Alexandra township – that brought it home and galvanised the government into action. The picture was splashed over the front page of *The Sunday Times*, the country’s biggest newspaper. “Kill thy neighbour. Alex attack brings home SA’s shame,” was the headline.

Journalists had been sent to Alexandra to cover attacks against migrants when they came on this scene. Emmanuel Sithole, a street trader from neighbouring Mozambique, had asked these three for some money he was owed for cigarettes he had sold them earlier in the day. They turned on him and stabbed him repeatedly in front of a crowd, including photographer James Oatway.

The journalists took Mr Sithole to a local clinic, where the doctor was absent because he was from the Congo, and had stayed away presumably because he feared for his own safety. By the time they got Sithole to a hospital, he had bled to death.



An immigrant and three township thugs, characters normally absent from our media, were suddenly thrust onto the front page of a leading family newspaper. Within days, all their names, ages and backgrounds were known and for a brief moment this segment of South African life was in the public eye. Some of the best coverage came from *The Sunday Times* delving into the dead man’s background, friends and family, as well as those of his killers.

The political response: pressure on media

President Jacob Zuma leapt quickly into the furore, saying that the picture “made us look bad”, fuelling a common government accusation that an overwhelmingly anti-government media focused on the negative. Speaking at a Freedom Day rally, marking the anniversary of SA’s first democratic election in 1994, Zuma said: “When we listen to media who sometimes exaggerate, we might think we have a problem, but it’s not true.”

He described the murder as “callous” but pointed out that Sithole was an illegal immigrant who had adopted a local name to disguise his origins. The implication was that Sithole deserved different treatment because he was one of many undocumented migrants forced to hide their identities.

Deputy Police Minister Maggie Sotyu said the problem was misinterpreted and exaggerated by the media, calling on them to show a patriotic bias: “There are worse things happening in other countries but you will never see them in the media. The media is part of the community, so please, it must be biased when it comes to South Africa,” she reportedly said, adding that she now understood why there was a call for greater media regulation.



This is part of a broader and consistent government-driven narrative: a news media insufficiently transformed since apartheid needs to adopt a developmental agenda. This would mean playing the critical watchdog less and being more positive about the country and its transition, including being less obsessed with issues such as crime and giving more coverage to the country's achievements since the advent of democracy. This is accompanied by calls for – and often threats of – greater regulation, including a statutory tribunal.

A parliamentary committee that launched an investigation into this year's violence against foreigners took issue with the media's depiction of it as xenophobic violence. It was an ordinary act of thuggery, the kind of crime that happened all too often in areas like Alex, they argued. It was abhorrent, but it was wrong to suggest Sithole was targeted because he was foreign.

“South Africans are not xenophobic,” said the committee chair, Ruth Bhengu, citing the number of legal foreigners who lived in the country without problems. Bhengu argued that “xenophobia means having extreme hatred, which we don't have as South Africans.

“We must move away from this xenophobic word because it brings us to the wars, and makes it seem like South Africans hate foreigners,” she said. She was reflecting a general discomfort in government at accusations that other Africans were not welcome, especially since many now in government had been given refuge elsewhere on the continent during the fight against apartheid.

Underlying it, though, was another uncomfortable reality. It was not that South Africans targeted foreigners, but that they targeted certain of them,

notably those from Africa who were setting themselves up as township traders and allegedly taking business from locals. Some commentators argued that we should talk about Afrophobia, rather than xenophobia, though even this was not quite accurate, as some of the targets were not from Africa – such as Pakistani and Bangladeshi shopkeepers – and not all Africans were targets.

What was clear was that the primary target were those seen to be taking trade and jobs in a troubled economy. Locals most hit by high levels of unemployment were targeting the most visible and vulnerable of those that were easy to blame for taking those jobs – the foreigners, both documented and undocumented. One only has to spend some time on the streets of Johannesburg to pick up that xenophobia is rife and any attempt to disguise or rename it feels like denial.

During these outbreaks of violence media coverage is extensive and detailed, along with coverage of anti-xenophobic activities and calls for assistance for the affected. It is very different, though, the rest of the time.

When the Somali community drew attention to a wave of killings of their compatriots, particularly in the Eastern Cape in 2011, one local newspaper known for its investigative bite, *The Daily Dispatch*, took up the story. It reported over 100 Somalis murdered in their region alone, and told of 400 graves of murdered Somalis in the cities of East London and Port Elizabeth. Some were put down to intra-Somali rivalries, including fighting over business territory. The national newspapers barely reported it and the story slipped away.

As one activist, who asked not to be named, told me: “When there is an outbreak of violence, it seems to come from nowhere. But that is because the incidents that are happening all the time are not reported or noticed until they burst into something big and can't be ignored. But when we try and get coverage of some quite serious incidents then we can't interest the media because they are not directly affecting them or their target readers.

“There is no sustained coverage. It is hard to get space in the newspaper, and they send junior reporters to cover these things. There are series issues of diversity here, but we cover the issue in Europe more than here.” To cover it in Europe is both easier and cheaper, as the material is bought from agencies or international media. To cover it locally is politically challenging because of the issues in our media and expensive, at a time of newsroom cutbacks.



Migration: It's the same old story

'The enormous change in human conditions to which nearly all our present stresses are due, the abolition of distance and the stupendous increase in power, have flung together the population of the world so that a new way of living has become imperative ...

'The elaboration of methods and material has necessitated a vast development and refinement of espionage, and in addition the increasing difficulty of understanding what the warfare is really about has produced new submersive and demoralising activities of rumour-spreading, propaganda and the like, that complicate and lose contact at last with any rational objective ...

'The uprooting of millions of people who are driven into exile among strangers, who are forced to seek new homes, produces a peculiar exacerbation of the mental strain. Never have there been such crowds of migrating depressing people.

'They talk languages we do not understand ... they stimulate xenophobia without intention ... Their necessary discordance with the new populations they invade releases and intensifies the natural distrust and hostility of man for man – which it is the aim of all moral and social training to eliminate ...

'For the restoration and modernisation of human civilisation, this exaggerated outlawing of the fellow citizen who we see fit to suspect as a traitor or revolutionary and also of the stranger within our gates, has to be restrained and brought back within the scheme of human rights.

– H. G. Wells, *The Rights of Man* (1940)



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