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## FROM HOME SAFETY TO INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM: HOW ITALIAN TALK SHOWS FRAMED MIGRATION AFTER THE PARIS ATTACKS

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### Abstract

*This article investigates the migrants' representation in the Italian talk shows and how new reading frames are developed after the Paris terrorist attacks in November 2015. The theoretical framework is composed by studies on migrants' representation in media. After recognition of all the primetime Italian talk shows that have been broadcasted in the period between 14 November 2015 and 14 January 2016, we have chosen three: *Ballarò*, *Quinta Colonna* e *Piazza Pulita*. The selected corpus has been analyzed using the typical tools of the content analysis as investigation applied to the narrative-conversational structure of talk shows.*

*Key words: migration; talk show; media representation; terrorism; social inclusion*

### INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

This article aims to analyse how the image of migrants in Italian television has changed after two important events where foreigners threatened European cities' safety. On 13 November, 2015, suicide bombings and mass shootings killed 130 people in the streets of Paris. Since an Islamic State militant group claimed responsibility for the offence, the climate of fear linked to international terrorism fed by *Charlie Hebdo* shooting was magnified. On the

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<sup>1</sup>Although this article is the result of a joint research effort of the three authors, Melissa Stolfi wrote Sections 1 and 3, Alessandro Ricci wrote Section 2, and Giovanni Brancato wrote Sections 4 and 5.

New Year's Eve, numerous sexual assaults were reported in Germany, mainly in Cologne, and men of Arab or North African appearance were indicated as perpetrators. European citizens' security was now threatened not only by organized terrorists, but also by isolated foreigners. The common trait was the belonging to "the Arab world", and therefore to Islamic religion.

### ISLAM AS A UNIVERSE OF MEANING

After the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting, there were undoubtedly huge changes in the media representation of Islam as a universe of meaning, affecting that of the flow of immigrants coming to Europe. For universe of meaning, we intend to share a culture, language, religion and practices. As far as we know, events like Paris and Cologne can polarize public opinion and generate a sense of distance (Saeed 2007) between two different cultures, separating the public's perception of a social phenomenon into an unproblematic "Us" and an unfamiliar, distant "Them" (Bourdieu 2001). The juxtaposition of "we versus them" became stronger in 1989, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when the division brought by the Iron Curtain was gone and the world returned to a cultural distinction, no longer based on economic systems, but rather on cultural universes (Marletti 1995). Thus, the public started to talk about Islam concerning the recent *ethnicization* of conflict - Muslims become enemies because of their religion rather than their different ethnic culture.

This return to bias based on ethnicity seems to be rather unusual, especially in a world that is based on a globalized economy. In fact, paying attention to the economic side, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world started moving toward a reduction of barriers, at least in terms of goods (Sardar 1999).

Moving to the media representation's territory, it is interesting to analyse the Van Dijk's perspective on the revival of inter-ethnic relations and racism in the media. The media discourse on racism, is now acknowledged that the concept of this feeling being a form of domination spreads from a negative characterization in the public discourse, which comes from the white elite in Western European countries. In fact, non-Europeans are often described not only in consideration of physical attributes, but even more on a cultural base, so it would be correct to consider this phenomenon a matter of "ethnicity". It builds fence between the in-group and out-group, shaped by religion, culture and language (Van Dijk 1991). This idea is linked to what Said (1978) calls *Orientalism* and its definition of "in" and "out-group", and is connected to ethnicity as a social system based on ethnic characteristics perpetrated by the Western white majority.

Following this path, one would assume that ethnicity is consolidated by stereotypes built up over the years and, above all, must be reproducible to continue their function. Examples of reproduction of stereotypes are the media (Bourdieu 1973). They have a strong position concerning the transmission and articulation of speeches that represent minority groups such as migrants (Cottle 2002; 2006). In support of this thesis, taken up by other scholars, it is argued that the media often act like an elite that sends messages, under its cultural hegemony (Zelizer and Allan 2002; Poole and Richardson 2006).

In summary, the three key ideas that emerge in the relationship between media and immigration are the presence of stereotypes, their reproducibility and the dramatization of events typical of media logic, in this case leading to misrepresenting the image of immigrants.

This trend is often found in the agenda setting of media reporting facts related to migrants only in a negative meaning or focusing on illegal and deviant behaviour. Moreover, we certainly cannot underestimate the framing of the news. Thanks to this process, events are placed in a broader context of meaning and linked to other events, thanks to semantic references (Goffman 1974), and Entnam (1993) argues that the framing technique is the selection process of some aspects of perceived reality to make them more salient in a communicative text.

The media representation of Islam in Italy has been characterised by some vices, distortions and mystifications. Italian media tend to represent this “alien” world as monolithic, not plural and poor of cultural experience (Binotto and Martino 2004) and to narrate Islam as a world from which most migrants originate, thanks to a repetition of stereotypes. Because of their pervasive development, the role of the media is critical in building a public sphere in the dialogue and the development of an intercultural society (Musarò and Parmiggiani 2014). In particular, Binotto (2004) introduces the concept of emergency leading to two different frameworks: the humanitarian and the securitarian one, both linked to an exceptional situation. Therefore, this representation provides not only the concept of emergency, but, also, a polarization of public opinion. Over these two frameworks we can recognize two types of immigrants, the ones to help and the ones to reject. The securitization process transforms discursively immigration to a security problem and the migrant in a potential criminal (Cutitta 2012). In securitarian terms, migrants are classified into one category and labelled as outcasts or even dangerous individuals for the society. This causes a person’s depersonalization process, ignoring the individual and relegating him symbolically in the legal category of non-person (Dal Lago 1999).

The immigrant imagined by the media is usually a desperate person and therefore potentially dangerous, bearer of problems and degradation, so that words as “immigration” and “landings” are brought into the field of emergency thanks to the link with terms like “invasion”, “despair”, “crime” and even “terrorism” (Colombo 2012). According to Dal Lago (1999) this particular asset undertaken by the Italian media would contribute to circulation and confirmation of a kind of fear that derives from the link between terrorism and immigration, expressed in reference to the foreign presence in Italy as a grey area where Islamic fundamentalists could be hidden (Binotto and Martino 2004).

### **THE MIGRANTS’ REPRESENTATION IN THE ITALIAN MEDIA**

The data collected by *Carta di Roma* in the *Third Report* show that in 2015 there was a increase of different informative products – newspapers and TV programs - which have talked about immigration. In the first ten months of 2015, there are about 3.437 news dedicated to this topic, the highest number in the last 11 years of survey (Associazione Carta di Roma 2015). News items related to migration are a simple and immediate way to add it on the agenda; moreover, immigration is set on the top of the Italian media and political agenda because of the exponential growth of migrant flows that involving Italy in the last year. But as for any topic, immigration is told in different manner by the media (Sciortino and Colombo 2004a; 2004b; Bruno 2008; Morcellini 2011, 2013). From the studies conducted by *Carta di Roma*, we can identify three main frames which is themed the migration: hospitality, security and terrorism.

The *hospitality frame* includes all the debates focused on the problems and the possible solutions related to the integration of the *foreigner*. The *security frame* is connected to arguments concerning crime, social, political and economic instability perceived as a result of migration flows. The *terrorism frame* refers to the tendency to create links between immigration and the roots of Islamist terrorism on the territory of Occidental States (Associazione Carta di Roma 2015).

The main theme is *Fear*, the feeling shared by the three frames proposed. This could have several meanings: fear due to the lack of safety on the streets, fear due to the inefficient politics that is not able to administrate the country, fear due to the lack of cooperation between the European States for the resolution of problems.

The research carried out by the *European Observatory on Security* proves that the way in which media speak about fear is central in encouraging fear itself: since tv discourses are built on the *us-them* opposition (Benveniste 1974), individuals could be led to read the migration in a logic exclusion rather than inclusion.

Speaking of frame construction, the Carta di Roma report shows that, compared to the analysis carried out in 2007 and 2009, in 2015 there is an important change: the replacement of duo *immigrant-criminal* with *immigrant-competitor* (Associazione Carta di Roma 2015).

In earlier years, mass media have told about news items and immigrants in terms of ethnicity and religion (for example, media underline ethnicity or credo of criminals). Nowadays, with the worsening of living conditions, people believe that immigration is one of the causes of economic crisis, unemployment, social and political problems of Italy (for example media speak about immigration, reforms, unemployment, social inclusion at the same time and in the same space).

In both periods, media system has described migration leveraging on *security frame*, but shifting between two different meanings: in the past, security was related to crime and daily life of people; now it should be interpreted in its wider meaning, as connected to the incompetence of the State to restore geopolitical balances. This puts the current situation into the profound break between East and West cultures.

According to Marletti (1995), it is not possible to talk about migration without contextualizing the topic with current events. During 2015, immigration received permanent coverage, and episodes linked to it have been emphasized as relevant news items. The year begins with the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting that leads to the preliminary combination of terrorism and immigration. But media system has been using *terrorism frame* to influence public opinion for a short time, since the high number of landings and the sea slaughters induced to emphasize the *hospitality frame*.

From February to June, the increase of incomings forces European Union to plan a strategy of cooperation to help Countries – Italy first of all – that are most affected by the migrant flows. Immigration reaches a large visibility thanks to lots of informative products talking about it in connection with the tragedy of the Sicily Canal on 18 April<sup>2</sup>. The closing of borders by some European members, the inefficiency of Triton Operation to control borders in Mediterranean area lead to both a permanent coverage of immigration issue and a narration in terms of hospitality from the media for a good part of the year.

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<sup>2</sup> The night of 18 April 2015 the shipwreck of an Eritrean boat caused the death of about 800 migrants trying to arrive in Italy. The incident is considered one of the worst maritime tragedies of the Mediterranean in recent years.

In September, the publication of the picture of Aylan Kurdi, the Syrian child found dead on a Turkish beach, produced lots of new discussions about immigrants and policy options in European Union both in public sphere and media space.

Since October, issues regarding national politics such as “Mafia Capitale”<sup>3</sup>, “Vatileaks 2”<sup>4</sup>, and the resignation of the Major of Rome, Ignazio Marino, took the place of immigration into the informative products. This situation continues until the terrorist attacks of Paris on 13 November, after which the media treated again immigration using the *terrorism frame*. Now, the latter is the main reading frame adopted by Italian media; but, after the sexual assaults in Cologne, it is mixed with *hospitality* and, in particular, *security frames*.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING TV TALK SHOW

Since immigration has become a leading issue, political leaders have been called to speak about this issue in TV talk shows. Talk shows try to rebuild settings similar to the spaces of viewers’ experience. In this way, home-viewers feel more involved in the interaction and are influenced by the guests’ opinion (Pezzini 1999). The discursive interaction is the narrative engine of these format: the exchange of points of view, the conflict, the polarization of positions, but also the role of guests and hosts are essential to define the interpretative frames used (Ruggiero 2014). Thanks to the framing, talk show is able to influence viewers’ opinions. The attention given by talk shows to immigration depends on the particularity of the issue that is able to polarize guests’ opinion during the interaction and to build a functional debate into the program.

To investigate the migrants’ representation in the Italian talk shows, we made a recognition of all that programs that have been broadcasted in prime time on so-called “generalist” channels, in the period between Friday, 13 November 2015, and Friday, 15 January 2016<sup>5</sup>.

The large number of TV shows that have dealt with the immigration issue albeit with a frame different from the one presented before the Parisian tragic events. Only in the analysis’ early stage, it was also examined *Quarto Grado* - an Italian talk show in prime time, which usually takes up almost exclusively of current events relating to disappearances and cases of crime news. On 13 November, because of being aired in the same hours of the Parisian attacks, a part of the program has been exceptionally dedicated to breaking news, including debates with in studio guests, telephone calls and video reports by experts and journalists from the French capital. After the “emergency”, the TV show returns almost completely to its typical connotation, although with some episode segments dealt with terrorist attacks in the French streets and at the Bataclan theatre.

In the primetime talk shows aired after the Paris events, the issue of immigration has been the main theme. In some of these cases it was the only subject of the episode, and only a few times it was a topic discussed marginal than others. The quick response of the television medium to the disruptive power of breaking news has been made possible on the one hand thanks to the special newscast and, the other hand, thanks to the subsequent schedule changes.

<sup>3</sup> The inquiry about supposed association between politics, business and organized crime, operating in Rome since 2000.

<sup>4</sup> The inquiry based on confidential information leak in Vatican.

<sup>5</sup> *Ballarò* (RaiTre), *Dalla Vostra Parte* (Rete4), *DiMartedì* (La7), *La Gabbia* (La7), *PiazzaPulita* (La7), *Porta a Porta* (RaiUno), *Quarto Grado* (Rete4), *Quinta Colonna* (Rete4), *Virus – Il contagio delle idee* (RaiDue). In the same period was aired a single episode of *In Onda* (La7), but it dealt with issues far from that of interest in this study.

Only two of the selected talks (*DiMartedì* and *La Gabbia*) didn't realize any special episode. Four of them have transmitted one special television episode (*Ballarò*, *Dalla vostra parte*, *Piazza Pulita*<sup>6</sup>, *Porta a Porta*). *Virus-Il contagio delle idee* transmitted two episodes.

The TV broadcasting schedules analysis has identified two different periods during which almost all of the primetime talk shows' agenda was related to immigration, although presenting it in two different frames. The first period is between the beginnings of the analysis, the day after the Paris attacks, up to the Sunday, 6 December 2015. The second one goes from the week following New Year's Eve, specifically from 4 January 2016, coinciding with the emergence of news concerning the acts of violence that took place in Cologne, up to the end of the analysis.

We have proceeded with a further selection that allowed us to choose three talk shows: *Ballarò*, *Quinta Colonna* e *Piazza Pulita* - are primetime TV format transmitted respectively on RAI3, Rete4 and La7. In the typologies identified by Haarman (1999), they fall into the *issue-oriented format* category: two or more guests express their opinions on current issues that are considered more important by the public, while the TV presenter manages the interaction between all participants. Here, the pluralism is ensured through the presence of guests with different opinions, often highly polarized, that can be represents different interpretations of the speech's subject (Pezzini 1999).

#### *First period: after the Paris attacks*

Since the terrorist massacres of 13 November, the national media analyze the migration phenomenon in the Islamic international terrorism frame. However, it is not easy to identify the different frames used because of the many hours in live television that dealt with this topic. In this first period, it is almost impossible to argue about immigration in terms of hospitality, but it is "normal" the drift towards the international security issue: Third World War became increasingly a real possibility. This is clear examining the same title of the 19 November episode of *Piazza Pulita* ("The evil's roots"), and the video caption of *Quinta Colonna* aired 23 November ("The terror alert in Europe and security in Italy").

**Table 1: Talk shows episodes between the next day Paris attacks and first week of December 2015.**

Date	Talk show	Title/Themes of episode
16/11/15	Quinta Colonna	"Paris Attacks"
17/11/15	Ballarò	Terrorism, security, ISIS, war, Jubilee
19/11/15	Piazza Pulita	"The evil's roots"
23/11/15	Quinta Colonna	"The terror alert in Europe and security in Italy"
24/11/15	Ballarò	Terrorism, security, ISIS, war, immigration, taxes
26/11/15	Piazza Pulita	"The end of innocence"
30/11/15	Quinta Colonna	"Alarm terrorism and security in the country a few days before the opening of the Jubilee"
01/12/15	Ballarò	Terrorism, security, ISIS, war, immigration, economy, Vatileaks, retirement benefits, eighteen-year-old bonus, taxes
03/12/15	Piazza Pulita	"The Wall"

<sup>6</sup> *Piazza Pulita* also broadcasted an Islamic State video-report in the late evening, after the end of the weekly regular primetime episode, on January 7, 2016.

In the first period, the episodes are almost entirely focused on Islamic terrorism at the international level (Table 1): starting from the Paris events and passing through the Bamako hotel attack in Mali. However, we can see as the narration of these events arises, in particular, from the element of possible “proximity” of the topic. On the one hand we talk about violence in the streets of France, our “cousin” country, and the death of a young Italian scholar, Valeria Solesin, who has become a simulacrum of “foreign invasion”. On the other hand, the imminent opening of the Jubilee in Rome becomes the perfect place for a future terrorist attack against his own best interests. These are just some of the themes that underpin the television public debates. The effective possibility of an international conflict is the element of the common background to all examined talk shows. This topic is become even more nearby to the “common sense”. It has been possible thanks to the choice to deal with it within television arenas, usual to debate about taxes, retirement benefits and the labor market. The issues related to the socio-political national life, together with economic ones, gave rise to public television debate during the period from 7 December 2015 and 5 January 2016, where the migration topic has been almost totally abandoned (Table 2).

**Table 2: Talk shows episodes in the middle analysis period between the first week of December and the New Year’s Eve.**

Date	Talk show	Title/Themes of episode
07/12/15	<i>Quinta Colonna</i>	“Christmas will be, once again, skinny and poor for most of the Italians”
08/12/15	<i>Ballarò</i>	Jubilee, Vatileaks, ISIS, populism, economic crisis, banks, retirement benefits, world of work, taxes
10/12/15	<i>Piazza Pulita</i>	“Cheated”
15/12/15	<i>Ballarò</i>	Banks, Renzi government, taxes, retirement benefits
17/12/15	<i>Piazza Pulita</i>	“The panther”
22/12/15	<i>Ballarò</i>	Renzi government, banks, taxes, world of work, tax evasion

Here, media agenda topics were strictly focused on political and policy issues: citizens’ security relating to Jubilee opening ceremony, extra-parliamentary debates about 2016 Law of Stability<sup>7</sup>, and “Save-Banks” legislative decree<sup>8</sup>.

### *Second period: after the sexual assaults in Cologne*

Since the beginning of 2016, the immigration issue has returned central in the Italian talk shows debates because of New Year's Eve sexual assaults in Cologne. In addition to the security frame, a new one is added to the migration phenomenon: social inclusion. As an important international issue, social inclusion has always been considered crucial, because it's based on cultural differences related at religious and political reasons that can have consequences on international social equilibrium. In this context, television arenas were focused on dichotomy of the women socio-cultural image, particularly in the differences between the East and the West. In using it as a frame for immigration topic, the focus in the

<sup>7</sup> The financial law regarding terms for the formation of the annual and multi-annual State budget.

<sup>8</sup> The government has allocated a fund to resolve a crisis regarding four banks: Banca Marche, Banca Etruria, Carife, and CariChieti.



media debates was placed on a sociological analysis of the social inclusion issue, even if it was never disconnected from security theme. Instead of being an international level, now, the fear is related at the safety in the cities.

**Table 3: Talk shows episodes from Cologne events up to the end of the surveys.**

Date	Talk show	Title/Themes of episode
07/01/16	<i>Piazza Pulita</i>	“Crack – The hate”
11/01/16	<i>Quinta Colonna</i>	“What can we expect in 2016? Politics, taxes, immigration and social crisis under microscope”
12/01/16	<i>Ballarò</i>	Cologne, Turkey, Quarto, Italian politics, immigration, integration, taxes evasion, retirement benefits
14/01/16	<i>Piazza Pulita</i>	Italian politics, Quarto, public administration, civil unions, ISIS

Although they gave so much attention to the facts of Cologne, Italian talk shows have taken faithfully the subjects media agenda by examining the most relevant domestic issues from the first days of the year. Specifically, they discussed issues related to the political life of the State that have repercussions on citizens (public administration, retirement benefits), issues with social background (law on civil unions), but also subjects such as judicial scandal that involved the Municipality of Quarto<sup>9</sup>, small town near Naples (Table 3).

## CONCLUSION

After the Paris attacks, talk shows have focused on immigration-security dichotomy, which is typical of today's multicultural society. Even before of it, international media have treated the immigration issue in terms of safety as well as hospitality and social inclusion. But in the selected period, the media narration talks about migration phenomenon performing a forced change of symbols and meanings, using clichés and moving the debate topics towards more sensitive issues to the public. Ordinary crime and citizen security are linked, almost “naturally”, to the increasing of migrants’ landings that are out of police control. The large presence of illegal immigrants is identified as one of the most important problem of the nation. If before the Paris events the security frame was crystallized within the issue of security in streets and houses, after it takes a new meaning: it talks about an international danger that threatens the entire West. The *Charlie Hebdo* shooting on 7 January 2015 is a fundamental element of the media narrative of which the Paris attacks are just a sign of continuity. It is the simulacrum of a Western unpreparedness proposed again after one year and that makes us even more vulnerable in the public eye. After the Cologne events, the fear grows even more because it has fallen into a cultural stereotype: the foreigner, in the role of the executioner, makes violence against women, who represents the victim but is, at the same time, guilty. Islamic terrorists attack women as the embodiment of Western cultural progress opposed to the Middle Eastern one. Although the media debate is centred on the security issue as well as linked to terrorism, now, it spills over into the area of social inclusion issue between two cultures both diverse and ancient, which can hardly coexist in a peaceful manner without any violence.

<sup>9</sup> Giovanni De Robbio, city council member of Quarto, is accused of aggravated vote trading and attempted extortion against the Mayor Rosa Capuozzo. After that, they were expelled from their political party, the M5S.

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