

**MEDIA, MIGRATION, POLARIZATION: CAN JOURNALISTS HELP
MITIGATE POLARIZATION REGARDING
MIGRATION IN TÜRKIYE?**

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ABSTRACT

For an area of journalism that reports on people on the move, refugees, asylum-seekers and immigrants (RASIM); the gaze of migration reporting has been ironically unmoving, fixating on what locals wish to learn about migration, and in disregard of RASIM's right to 'represent oneself to society' (Benhabib, 2018). Globally, communication scholars have observed that news media frequently portrays RASIM as threats to host communities (Seo & Kavakli, 2022). Despite many professional resources for journalists wishing to produce migration news stories, news media continues to deliver sensationalized stories, serving only to drive polarization.

This dissertation examines the impact of polarization on journalistic practices with a focus on Türkiye, a nation hosting one of the largest RASIM populations in the world. Following a mixed-methods approach, it combines qualitative and quantitative content analysis of 1,000 news articles -selected from a pool of 11,000- from Türkiye's top ten outlets (2022–2023) with semi-structured interviews conducted with 14 journalists experienced in migration reporting. The findings reveal dominant themes and formats in migration reporting shaped by ideological and institutional pressures and the multilayered challenges in producing equitable migration reporting.

For my beloved parents, Serap & Sezai.

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CHAPTER 1

REPORTING MIGRATION FROM A POLARIZED CONTEXT: THE CASE OF TÜRKİYE

1.1 Introduction

It has been six years since Benhabib (2018) looked back at the changes the turn of our new century brought and observed that it was “astonishing that the fate refugees and asylum seekers would emerge as a worldwide problem”. In just six short years after she penned these words, by 2024, the number of forcibly displaced people around the world went up from an already alarming 70 million to 122 million (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], n.d.-a). United States` post 9/11 wars had single-handedly contributed 37 million, so about half, of this number (Vine, Coffman, Khoury, Lovasz, Bush, Leduc, & Walkup, 2020); however, other wars and armed conflicts between political elites that disregard the human cost of their actions added to the list (UNHCR, 2024-a):

- In Afghanistan, the Taliban takeover in August 2021 intensified an ongoing refugee crisis, leaving us with still-vivid images from Kabul airport (Seir, Akhgar, Gannon, & Gambrell, 2021) and leading to a total of 6.4 million forcibly displaced by the end of 2023 (USA for UNHCR, n.d.-a).
- In Tigray, Ethiopia, years of increased tension led to a civil war between the federal government and Tigray People`s Liberation Front (TPLF), culminating in forced displacement of more than 4 million (USA for UNHCR, n.d.-b).
- Russia`s war on Ukraine starting in 2022 and continuing to our day led to forced displacement of one third of Ukraine`s population, with an estimated 14.6 million needing humanitarian assistance in 2024 (USA for UNHCR, n.d.-c).
- Israel`s war on Palestine, as gruesome as the naked truth can get, have led to either death or forced displacement of all civilians in Gaza and surrounding regions. With more than 400 attacks on health care only since October 7, 2023 (Principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2023; Muro & Najjar, 2023), Gaza`s Health Ministry released a report of names of all those who died in these attacks, the first adult appeared on page 215 of this report (Zerrouky, 2024; Graham-Harrison, 2024).

Incompetent governments, decade-long feuds, and military disregard for civilians in critical regions are to blame for these violent moments in history, and their ‘human cost’ including death and starvations of numberless children. Of course, there are climate crises and natural disasters that momentarily push these numbers higher. However, in the cases I listed above, it is only the failure of governments, or so-called ‘leaders’ such as Syria’s Assad, Russia’s Putin and Israel’s Netanyahu, that give birth a new ‘class’ of people (Benhabib, 2004, 2018) involving refugees, asylum-seekers and other immigrants in need of international protection (RASIM). Once civilians with predictable lives and rights to pursue such lives, RASIM pays the price of politicians’ failure.

If not with their own or loved one’s lives, RASIM pays with their future when nation states fail. They lose their communities, homes, pets, their favorite coffee house; and more importantly, enter a period in their lives where attaining these things appear luxurious for an unlimited amount of time. In many cases, they find themselves stuck in the bureaucratic limbo of processing with ever-present risks such as confinement (in a deportation center cell or camp etc.), relocation to an unpredictable future (where they face exploitation by extreme work hours and criticism for actually delivering those services by “stealing jobs”), and separation from family. Even though it is the state and political elite’s failure that led to the war and its traumatic aftermath for civilians, their absence also means life at the mercy of others which is sometimes as bad as living under the shadow of previously mentioned genocidal men, giving birth to the predicament of statelessness of our times.

As such, a predicament is born, the predicament of evoking ‘human-rights’ (which may or may not be implemented with no one to oversee) as opposed to civil rights (which are guaranteed by those in political power).

In the disciplines of philosophy and political science, such predicaments give rise to discussions on “human-rights”, civil rights and the right of a nation to governance (particularly, to decide who gets to share their land and resources); and most importantly, reformulations of principles by which these rights are claimed and practiced (Arendt, 1966; Benhabib, 2004, 2018; Fliskschuh, 2000). With 122 million forcibly displaced people across the globe, 122 million minds that knew their “feet couldn’t touch [their] homeland” (Azaiza, n.d.), the need for an awareness or understanding of RASIM as a ‘class’ of people with backgrounds, demands and needs becomes apparent.

The apparition of RASIM as a new class of people gives way to scholarly attempts at reconsidering what sort of civil rights this group held. Scholars such as Seyla Benhabib call for a dynamic iteration process between RASIM, host communities and governments where all parties affected could assume a role in crafting equitable migration policies, preventing or alleviating some of the injustices that come forth from civil rights frameworks that exclude RASIM.

In the field of media and communication, the rapid growth in numbers of RASIM is matched by the increase in scholarly research (Seo & Kavakli, 2022). An abundance of subjects regarding RASIM are studied, involving discussions from news media’s framing (Entman, 1993; Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Scheufele, 2006; Cacciatore, Scheufele, Iyengar, 2016), i.e. “packaging” (Gitlin, 1980) of the information concerning RASIM (Lakoff, 1966; Marinescu & Balica, 2021) to questions on what it means to be spectators

of such ‘distant suffering’ (Chouliaraki, 2006, 2008). There are commendable research and resources for ethical migration reporting, as I will review in the theoretical framework of this dissertation.

Particularly in journalism studies, a lot of resources seem to exist and a great many of them moves from a ‘humanitarian’ concern to arrive at recommendations to implement a ‘human-rights’ approach (Plaut, 2014; Bunce, Scott & Wright, 2019), advocating that journalism has the capacity “to advance social justice and appeal to collective solidarity,” (Varma, 2019). However, whether and how such approaches can in fact be implemented amidst a ‘crisis of representation’ (Osman, 2024) and the challenges embedded in the area of migration reporting remains as a question waiting to be resolved.

Throughout this study, I argue that these ‘humanitarian’ efforts are in vain unless they are grounded on a universal ‘principle’ by which journalists must act, explaining ‘the right to represent one’s self to society’ (Arendt, 1960; Benhabib, 2004; Kant, 1795) that all humans have; and, as a right that most of the time can only be implemented by endorsements and collaborations with journalists, i.e. the ‘public service’/fourth estate function of journalism.

Engaging with pertinent political science literature, I believe there is ample opportunity for media and communication scholars to pursue somewhat more consistent inquiries into base assumptions of migration reporting and reconsider whether existing migration reporting practices satisfy the many needs of their time, of their contexts and most importantly, what can be called RASIM’s ‘right to represent themselves to society’.

For this reason, I seek to learn how migration is talked about in Türkiye and whether journalists can help mitigate the polarization I observe in the discourse

surrounding RASIM. In order to explore how journalists can help mitigate polarization, the barriers and facilitators of achieving such a goal, I employ a mixed methods approach. I combine qualitative content analysis of news regarding RASIM in Türkiye (which were collected from 10 most popular news outlets between 2022 and 2023) with semi-structured interviews with 14 Turkish journalists who have experience covering migration in this context. My aim is to evaluate the status-quo of migration reporting through my data and discuss ways of improving it in engagement with the existing literature and existing resources for journalists reporting on migration.

1.1.1 Migration Reporting and Polarization

Globally, a good number of studies argue that news media coverage leans toward negative depictions of RASIM, making “national-security” oriented frames salient, reinforcing stereotypes and contributing to polarization of attitudes around the subject (Abrajano, Hajnal & Hassel, 2017; Hameleers, 2019; Ogan, Pennington, Venger & Metz, 2018; Seo & Kavakli, 2022). For example, different researchers in Italy, France and elsewhere in Europe (Matar, 2017; Schneider-Strawczynski, 2023; Tuomola, 2021) have all identified at least one major news outlet with a blatant tendency to repeat stereotypes that construct RASIM to be ‘parasitic’ to their host communities, not contributing to communal welfare in any shape of form beyond using resources. Each country had at least one major news outlet that regularly opted for painting RASIM in a negative light.

Research that reports high levels of polarization over questions surrounding RASIM is easy to come across within a plethora of host countries (Lakoff, 1966; Ozduzen, 2020; Ozduzen, Korkut & Ozduzen, 2021; Ozerim & Tolay, 2021; Splendore & Piacentini, 2024; Suiter & Fletcher, 2020), showing that problems standing in the way of

peaceful co-existence are similar across geographies. These and other examples that position RASIM as dangerous “others” as opposed to parts of a communal “us” contribute to a dominantly negative media representation of RASIM.

A meta-analysis of media and communication literature on migration (Seo & Kavakli, 2023) also underscored the dominance of reports that identify news media representation of RASIM to be “polarized in sentiment”, framing RASIM either excessively negative (threats/occupiers/influx...) or extremely positive (victimization/overtly emotional...). Similarly, a panel study in France between 2013 and 2017 (Schneider-Strawczynski & Valette, 2023) found that increase in the salience of immigration, particularly migration to France, gave way to polarization of attitudes around the subject, as citizens with initially moderate views became more likely to report either extremely positive or negative attitudes concerning the subject. Increase in salience of news on migration to France would mean more negative attitudes against RASIM while news regarding migration to other host countries would drive pro-immigration attitudes. Through this study with French populations, migration reporting has been shown to moderate the relationship between RASIM and people of the country, bringing them closer together or further apart, depending on the framing of the costs of migration as discussed in the news story.

Observing problematic practices in migration reporting such as the dominantly negative portrayal of migrants and migration, and the ‘polarized’ outlook of RASIM as either victims or threats; and moving from an assumption that migration reporting can moderate the relationship between RASIM and citizens of their host community; I see value in taking a deeper dive into the practices that make up migration reporting, i.e. the

mechanisms by which the issues relating to RASIM gain salience, as seen from the production side of the news. I believe it would be particularly useful to take up this inquiry within the framework of a country that hosts a sizeable RASIM presence and whose news media landscape has been reportedly polarized politically in ways that also affect depictions of migration.

1.2 The case of Türkiye

In Türkiye, RASIM are welcome by law and the government, yet undesired by a large portion of the public¹. There has been flurry of research that reports high levels of polarization in Turkish politics and media landscape in many topics with migration often being in top three problems identified in public opinion polls (Yavuz, 2023; Bozdağ & Koçer, 2022; Bozdağ, 2020; Coskun; 2020; Keyifli & Akdede, 2020; Somer, 2019; McCoy, 2018). Public opinion as seen on responses to news on social media regarding RASIM is severely polarized with those that are in favor of deporting refugees being more vocal.

For RASIM, such polarized political and media environments result in contested imagery in media discourses about themselves. On one hand, the government embraces Syrian refugees on the grounds of a religious solidarity and humanitarian concern, or as Yeşil (2024) puts it, through ‘morally inflected narratives’ around humanity, compassion, and shaming of the EU. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has repeatedly referred to Syrian nationals as ‘muhacir’ while referring to Turkish citizens as ‘ensar’, two groups

¹ The statement on the law being welcoming requires further debate. Due to recent changes in the migration laws of Türkiye, Syrians (and future mass populations that have been displaced due to events resulting in the East) are not considered to be refugees. Instead, newly formulated terms such as conditional refugee and temporary production have been adapted. Still, Turkish Law on Foreigners and International Protection (Law No 6458) does not de jure deny protection to such persons.

that stood in solidarity during a migration context in the early days of Islam. Similarly, he opted for reference terms such as ‘our Syrian brothers’ in his speeches to foster bonds between the two populations. There are also clear efforts to implement equitable practices in hosting RASIM: the recent establishment of Presidency of Migration Management and the plethora of much needed advances this office brought to migration policies and regulations, the push back on anti-immigrant rhetoric as seen in political speeches and prosecution of hate speech producers, and the efforts to prevent the spread of misinformation regarding RASIM through fact-checking portal Teyit.org (Farooq, 2021) can be counted just to name a few.

However, the religiously motivated embrace by the government has seemingly not been the common pattern across news media outlets. Even among pro-government outlets such as Hürriyet, Milliyet, and Sabah, references to religious solidarity are rare. Instead, a muffled nationalism can be detected in their coverage as can be seen in their critique of Syrian restaurants that do not provide checks in the Turkish language (Show TV, 2023 June 15), and Afghan refugees who take over jobs (Tavus, 2021 July 26) among other examples. Moreover, the humanitarian concern visible in the work of PMM and NGO personnel that work closely with RASIM do not always pass due to governmental pressures to frame issues in specific ways (Dimitrova & Aksak, 2023).

On the other hand, oppositional political parties fuel discrimination against RASIM (Bozdağ & Koçer, 2022; Göksel, 2024). News outlets such as Sözcü, representing secular-liberal segments of the population, have been openly critical of RASIM’s presence. Sözcü has been identified as a manufacturer of hate speech directed at RASIM throughout the years, targeting Syrian refugees for “stealing” jobs, holding

their presence responsible for the economic regression Türkiye has been facing while portraying them as a “parasitic group” that does not keep up with social life and values of Turkish citizens (Göngen, 2022). Misinformation regarding RASIM spreads rapidly among citizens on social media (Bozdağ & Koçer, 2022; Bozdağ, 2020; Özdüzen, 2020; Özdüzen, Korkut, Özdüzen, 2021; Özerim & Tolay, 2021).

In this sense, polarization on the subject of migration is easy to observe yet difficult to frame. While one side of the population endorses RASIM’s presence in the country and appear to be willing to work towards a harmonious future together, the other side does not wish to tolerate this presence or share their resources with RASIM in the future. The multiplicity of reasons giving birth to these attitudes add to the difficulty of framing this problem as the outcome of actions by one “hate group” or a few “bad” apples among journalists.

The literature is clear on one thing: that Turkish news media of 2010s and 2020s have been marked by divergences in opinion on migration and RASIM (Kavaklı, 2020; Sarılar, 2018; Sert & Daniş, 2021; Sunata & Yıldız, 2018). Whichever side of the break the news producers were, they were still required to cover migration news stories and do so multiple times a day. For example, just to match their “least productive” competitors in the top 20 Turkish newspapers², a news outlet would need to publish around 27 articles per day. This means that migration reporting, particularly reporting that involves

² A rough estimate reached by counting the number of articles selected news outlets publish in a random week containing the keywords göç OR mülteci OR sığınmacı OR Göçmen. In this case I selected the week of October 22-28, 2024 where search on their own news sites for Takvim returned 193, Milliyet 335, and on Sözcü 959 articles. This number is achieved without conducting a close-reading of the texts, thus it is possible that not all of these studies are strictly migration reporting, and some just mention migration in passing.

discussions on RASIM is a fertile ground for journalists in Türkiye, which is another reason why I believe it is important to conduct this study within its context.

1.3 Research Questions

Moving from these observations, I set out to explore common themes that surface in migration reporting in Turkish news media in recent years; and, examine the journalistic practices that go into making of such news. Adopting a grounded theory approach, I ask what the content of migration reporting is, and why do journalists choose to produce them in the ways they do. I ask whether they hold themselves responsible in the production of a polarized media landscape. Lastly, by way of identifying common inhibitors of equitable representation, I explore what “better” coverage would look like for a journalist working in polarized contexts. Three questions guide this study:

RQ.1: What are the overarching themes in the coverage of refugees, asylum-seekers, and immigrants (RASIM), and how do journalists in Türkiye interpret and utilize these themes in their reporting?

This question aims to identify and analyze the dominant narratives and themes in the media's portrayal of RASIM, offering insights into the framing of migration-related issues. It also serves as a jumping point for some of the discussions I will pursue with journalists addressing the remaining two questions central to this study:

RQ.2: How do journalists in Türkiye perceive their role within a polarized media landscape? What are some professional and personal challenges posed by polarization, if any?

This includes exploring their self-perception as journalists, the typical nature of their workdays, the challenges they face, and their views on the impact of polarization on their

work. The last question, informed by insights from the journalism guides in the literature, bridges the inquiry into journalists' views on root causes, drivers and impact of polarization to an inquiry into prospective solutions.

RQ.3: What are the barriers and facilitators to improving the coverage of migration?

This question seeks to understand the drivers of polarization from the journalists' perspective, how news organizations approach migration coverage, if and why they believe polarization exists around migration reporting and the public response to such coverage. It addresses the external and internal factors that influence how migration is covered, including journalists' perception of public sentiment and organizational policies.

These three research questions are central to understanding how polarization impacts journalists' professional practices. To address these questions, the study employs a combination of methodologies including a corpus-based qualitative analysis of news coverage from January 1, 2022, to August 1, 2023, and in-depth interviews with pertinent journalists.

1.4 Research Design

While the direct effects of disparity in framing of RASIM on public opinion may be evaluated with surveys and other methodologies customized to gauge public opinion, I believe a grounded theory approach is necessary if the goal is to uncover what creates these frames in the framing of RASIM by news producers in the first place. Many factors such as perceived cost, demands and challenges in migration reporting could be contributing to proliferation of one form of migration reporting over the other and I

believe a grounded theory approach could help me uncover these factors and recommend ways to improve the shortcomings of migration reporting.

First, I report findings from a systematic review of literature on representation of RASIM in Turkish news media. This review of literature allows me to understand the progression, current trends, and nuances in the media portrayal of RASIM. Next, I collect a corpus of 1,000 (randomly selected from a total pool of approximately 11,000) news articles coverage from top ten Turkish news outlets from January 1, 2022, to August 1, 2023- and look for overarching themes. For that purpose, I manually code each story that show up within this timeframe.

Some of the codes I use such as “hate-speech”, “crime”, “economy” and frames such as “negative/neutral/positive” are taken from the existing literature on representation of RASIM, whereas others emerge organically as I search for repeating words, phrases and metaphors. Most importantly, this coding process helps me identify which journalists to interview. It allows me to see the most prolific authors, reporters, photojournalists as they are listed in the data spreadsheet alongside the headline, outlet, url, date, author, fulltext, and other research-specific codes.

Once I code the data, I move to examine the discursive construction of RASIM (Foucault, 1981; van Dijk, 1991; Fairclough, 2003; Baker, Gabrielatos, Khosravini, McEnery & Wodak, 2008; Wodak, 2011) and explore how “truth” regarding RASIM is being constructed. This analysis is guided by several questions such as how are RASIM portrayed? Through which names and descriptions? What style of reporting can be seen in these news stories? Most importantly, what are the main topics of discussion in these stories? What sort of information gain salience (McCombs and Shaw, 1993) in migration

reporting?... These and other sub-questions guide me through reading and analyzing news content on the topics relating to refugees, asylum-seeker and other immigrants in Türkiye.

Following the textual data analysis, I move onto a series of interviews with journalists who have experience covering migration in Türkiye. These interviews aim at understanding the relationship between polarization and work of journalists. A narrative analysis approach (Quinsaat, 2014) helps with not only delivering the words of journalists in response to our questions but also with capturing the individual context through which such words are uttered.

In the final stage of the research, insights from journalists on barriers and facilitators to improving coverage of RASIM are synthesized with findings from literature and news content analysis. One of the main goals of this research is to offer recommendations for improving journalistic practice within a polarized context. In line with this goal and in light of our data, I present an overview of scholarly guidelines and report insights on what journalists (participating in this research) view as best practices for covering RASIM. The research concludes with a discussion on whether such recommendations for best practices are practical within polarized contexts such as Türkiye and suggestions for policy and practical changes.

1.5 Terminology and Theoretical Framework

Several key concepts that are used throughout the research and theories that underpin this study are explained in connection to stated research questions in the following section.

1.5.1 RASIM: A Comprehensive Framework

Throughout this study, refugees, asylum-seekers and other immigrants in need of international protection are referred to with the acronym “RASIM” which I chose to adopt for two reasons: First one is simply out of reverence to the line of corpus based social science researchers who pursue corpus-based analysis methods when dealing with the large amounts of data one ends up collecting with all the different names and keywords that go into defining various groups of displaced people (Baker et al., 2008, Wodak, 2009, Koshravinik, 2009; Van Leeuwen, 2013).

Corpus based content analysis approaches allow researchers to pay particular attention to language processes such as genericization (Van Leeuwen, 2013), the act of representing people as belonging to a homogeneous group, and categorization, the act of representing an individual with characteristics they share with a social group. Analyses of these processes are conducted by way of comparing the representation of the subject of interest (for example Syrians, or Ukrainians) to others in the larger data set. This comparison, I believe, is a critical ground to cover for discourse researchers working on displaced or other marginalized groups, to not only see how their representation is construed differently than a dominant group but also to see how the marginalized groups are differentiated within themselves.

The acronym RASIM was tokenized by Baker et al. (2008) for “reasons of economy” in their research on UK press coverage of refugees and asylum-seekers (RAS) on one leg and immigrants and migrants (IM) on the other and they used the term RASIM when they referred to all collectively. This research was organized around these keywords since these terms, in law, pointed to different groups of people, yet they meant the same

group of people for the news media. The density of shared collocates between refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants (frequently adjacent to another word like ‘illegal’, ‘irregular’) showed that these terms were used interchangeably which could be particularly problematic given that even the closely linked terms illegal (i.e. entering to country via unlawful means) and irregular (entering legally, but overstaying/missing essential documents/ in the process of obtaining legal statuses) can refer to two completely different groups of people with different needs.

Focusing on the overlaps in the way the terms refugees, asylum-seekers, and immigrants are represented, Khosravini (2010) explained that similar “negative macro-structures” surrounded them. These could be exemplified by the use of dehumanizing metaphors and adjacent stereotypes such as “boat people” or “illegal aliens” (Samuseva, 2022; Seo & Kavakli, 2022; Taylor, 2021) alongside these reference terms. This shows that the stigma around displacement does not start after one arrives in the land of another and assumes either one of these terms. It has less to do with what the displaced demands from the host (e.g. to become a citizen, an expat, an asylum seeker...) but more to do with the fact that the displaced is in the demanding position. The stigma starts once a person becomes displaced and loses “the right to have rights” (Benhabib, 2004).

The second reason why I chose to adopt RASIM in my research is to highlight the plurality of human conditions that are affected by forced migration and displacement. I believe it is important to make a case for keeping journalists accountable to not only dominant groups of tax paying citizens but also for marginalized people and minorities (Plaut, 2014). With the abundance of research indicating that mainstream media fails to incorporate RASIM’s voice into their narratives (Abrajano, Hajnal & Hassel, 2017;;

Lippi et al., 2020; Seo & Kavakli, 2022; Tirosh & Klein-Avraham, 2019), the need to address RASIM's rights for equitable representation becomes clear. I believe that adopting the framework of RASIM allows me to emphasize the plurality of groups that are impacted by media production on topics of migration and thus contribute to a more equitable practice of journalism.

1.5.2 The Right to Present One's Self to Society

Along with the RASIM framework, this dissertation draws from the line of political science theories that reformulate the contract between people who arrive on another's land and people of the host community; later to bring them into conversation with pertinent critique from communication studies. This line of theory can be traced back to as early as 18th century, to philosopher Immanuel Kant; and has recently been revived by other important thinkers, namely Hannah Arendt (1966) and Seyla Benhabib (2004; 2018).

Striving for equitable migration reporting requires basing a journalist's duty towards migrants over a universal principle of practice. An exemplary principle can be found in Immanuel Kant's *Perpetual peace: A philosophical essay* (1795). Here, Kant's argumentation for a principle of 'universal hospitality' is grounded in the existence of 'cosmopolitan rights' that, in theory, allow us to travel and disperse around our globe without needing to enter conflicts with others on our paths. "Bounded territoriality", the fact that the space we have on earth is limited and contact is unavoidable, served as a precondition upon which the idea of "universal hospitality" (Kant, 1795) and "a right for all nations (*ius gentium*)" was built (Benhabib, 2004; Fliskschuh, 2000; Kant, 1795;); and a right of "temporary sojourn", the right of any human being to visit a new place and "present oneself to society", was grounded. While the principle of universal hospitality

and the right to temporary sojourn did not mean one can move into the other's estate freely and permanently, Kant envisioned a world where it was possible to meet people at the border and not need a gun.

Clashing with this idealist formulation, Hannah Arendt, a stateless person and one of the most important philosophers of 20th century herself, put forward the term “the right to have rights” (1966) and explained that Kant's principle of “universal hospitality” does not function in a world where an individual's loss of membership to a state means the loss of all types of civil rights; and a pursuant erasure of agency and autonomy. In the absence of an omnipresent “world federation” to oversee the enactment of international human rights; refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless and all other titles of displaced people are at risk of malpractice and violations. Once rendered stateless, they find themselves ‘at mercy’ of host states.

While inheriting Arendt's formulation of the right to have rights, Benhabib's (2004) view of statelessness was not as bleak. Reviewing the improvements to international law, she recognized that great advancements were made to the international protection regulations and practices thanks to the work of many actors including UNHCR, the active participation of RASIM themselves. Yet, she believed these were not enough to meet their conditions.

Refugees, asylees, IDPs—internally displaced persons—PRs, and stateless persons are new categories of human beings created by an international state- system in turmoil and are subject to a special kind of precarious existence. (Benhabib, 2018)

This precarious existence, as Benhabib later explains in her book, was unjust not only because of a loss of rights point of view but also because it relied on rules that were set in stone at antiquated times that did not match the needs and demands of our current day.

Countries, as my overview of Turkish laws and regulations in Chapter 2 will also show, rarely introduce fundamental changes to their migration policy, let alone reconsidering their criteria for citizenship or international protection. However, Benhabib believes the rapid growth, massive numbers and uncertainty of RASIM's lives necessitates iterations of these laws and policies and argues for adaptation of 'porous borders' that would allow these iterations.

This branch of literature at the overlap of philosophy and political science is central to the study I pursue in this dissertation as it offers a critical questioning of the base assumptions in migration contexts, particularly the one that asserts the hosts get to decide whatever they may wish to do with the arrivers. Instead of a state-oriented view of migration management, this view proposes an actionable principle through which peaceful contact can be pursued. Granted there is no intention to harm others, this principle of hospitality asserts that any individual who enters the other's land holds 'the right to present themselves to society'.

Adopting this line of thinking into media and communication studies, I believe positioning RASIM as people whose 'right to represent themselves to society' is put to test by migration reporting, would be a useful practice. Afterall, in cases where people never encounter a RASIM yet are cognizant of changing migration trends in their country, it is only the work of journalists through which RASIM are talked about and 'presented to society'. In light of this, I wonder how journalists process the weight of such responsibility, if they are aware of and/or embracing, enabling RASIM's 'right to present themselves to society' at all. Most importantly, if one adopts the line of thinking presented by Arendt and Benhabib, I wonder what media rights are lost once one loses

their rights as citizens and find themselves in the limbo of asylum? The right to represent oneself to society may appear to be challenging to secure even for the citizens of one country, however, the current status-quo of migration reporting show a clear and almost total absence of RASIM voices in the news, indicating to a bigger need.

In parallel to the work of these three political theoreticians, the exclusion of RASIM's voices and experiences in media narratives of displacement is a subject that did not escape the attention of media scholars and there are remarkable works in literature that scrutinize sidelining of RASIM by dominant ideologies embedded in our global media systems.

Osman (2024) explains that a 'crisis of representation' can be seen in our current media systems, one that pertains to the question of who gets to be the producer of knowledge on marginalized and subaltern people. She writes:

At the root of the 'crisis of representation' that has plagued many academic disciplines is the question of who has the right to study, speak for, and produce knowledge about whom.

For example, criticizing the CBS's sitcom *United States of Al*; Osman, Zeweri, and Karzai (2021) discuss how the first mainstream Afghan character on a major American TV show, *Al*, fails to reflect lived experiences of Afghan refugees and instead "embodies the resilient refugee, the good immigrant, who assimilates without issue and does not complain" (Osman et al., 2024). By doing so *Al* creates standards that are not easily met by refugees upon immediate arrival, letting alone ever as integration does not run such a straight course for many. Moreover, the article highlights the erasure of Afghan refugees, immigrants, army interpreters such as *Al*'s history and trauma of displacement caused by the US's war in Afghanistan. This critique serves as an example of a common practice

where little community in-put is sought after while curating a mass-circulated media narrative of refugees.

With the ‘crisis of representation’, Osman (2024) draws our attention to the politics of representation in media production, particularly the challenges of self-representation that media makers in exile and RASIM face on a daily basis. For example, studies that look into narrative uses of refugee selfies, find that even selfies -once remediated- could serve highly different goals, particularly if they were to be mentioned in the mainstream news or considered as refugee-authored media as testimonies to their experiences in a scholarly work (Chouliaraki, 2017; Zimanyi, 2017).

Osman’s 2007 documentary *Postcards from Tora Bora* is a good reflection of the situated epistemology in media making, with scenes such as views of Kabul from a ‘three-pronged female perspective’ through the gaze of a North American woman, an older Afghan woman and Afghan-American’s point of view, each reminiscing a memory of Kabul whose authenticity is situated in its narration (Osman & Redrobe, 2022). Contrary to narratives of collaboration in works such as *Postcards from Tora Bora* who are produced by RASIM artists, writers, directors; news media still dominantly excludes refugee voices.

News are produced by the citizens, for the citizens, about the RASIM, but rarely *for or by* the RASIM; a practice that draws volumes of criticism yet is repeated across geographies (Abarajano et al, 2017; Schneider-Strawczynski & Valette, 2023; Siegel, 2021; Taylor, 2021). For the most part, negative representations of migration and RASIM dominate the news (Seo & Kavakli, 2022) although scholars discuss that such

representations could culminate in a “politics of pity” (Chouliaraki, 2010) and a concomitant compassion fatigue (Seppala et al., 2017; Sirriyeh, 2018;).

Resisting this status-quo, a number of scholars and media producers champion the idea that journalists can and should be held accountable to the communities they cover, acting as intermediaries rather than consistent watchdogs.

Media practices can motivate empathy, acceptance and peace between groups when they intend to promote a culture of co-existence and mutual understanding in their portrayals of minority and vulnerable groups. That is to say, the media is both part of the problem and the solution, for media representations can produce effects toward the inclusion or exclusion of refugees. (Pandir, 2020)

With this in mind, it becomes essential to examine not only how migration is covered but also what practical affordances and structural challenges prevent journalists from enabling RASIM to represent themselves in the media. Before addressing these barriers, however, I see value in first outlining best practices in migration reporting—standards and ethical guidelines that offer insights into what more inclusive and responsible reporting might look like.

1.5.3 Insights on ‘Best Practices’ of Migration Reporting

Journalists should help enable RASIM to represent themselves to society as part of a universal principle of hospitality; absolutely, however, is this an easy goal let alone a possible one?

In evaluating journalistic practices, there are many general guides, particularly in North America and Europe, that offer ethical frameworks beyond the subject of migration before moving onto more specific recommendations. Practice oriented guidelines such as stylebooks from Associated Press (AP) help assess the quality of journalism across different contexts. Some of these guides are useful in addressing polarization and distrust

towards news and journalists in general, without necessarily focusing on the work of migration reporters. For example, an interview guide (Resolve Philly, 2022) outlines methods for journalists to incorporate transparency and engagement in their interviews with private citizens, promoting trust and accountability.

For journalists working in polarized contexts, the U.S. journalist Amanda Ripley's *Complicating the Narrative* framework provides valuable insights on avoiding simplistic, binary storytelling, urging journalists to embrace complexity in conflict reporting (Ripley, 2018) which I believe is particularly useful to think about when reporting from polarized contexts.

Additionally, Wenzel (2020) emphasize the importance of local journalism in building trust within communities. Her study demonstrates how participatory processes between journalists and community members can reshape local news to better reflect the histories, concerns, and needs of those communities (Wenzel & Crittenden, 2021). These general interventions are important reminders of the journalists' responsibility to produce nuanced, accurate, and community-centered reporting, regardless of the subject. When turning to migration reporting, similar ethical concerns arise, though the context brings additional layers of complexity.

The term "better" in the context of media coverage of migration raises a series of critical questions: *better for whom*, and *in what sense*? Defining the agent for whom the coverage is improved is essential. News coverage at times could be construed as 'better' than other examples for the sake of RASIM, of Turkish citizens, or better for the practice of journalism, and many more, making it impossible to reduce the idea of "better" migration news, to a singular definition. Still, there are several scholarly research and

professional guidelines and stylebooks that locate themselves as reviews of “best practices” or “reference” sources. Interestingly, a consensus to promote a ‘human-rights’ approach can be seen across these sources.

1.5.3.1 Review of Scholarly Literature on Migration Reporting. There is a good number of scholarly literature that develops theoretical frameworks and empirical research on migration reporting (Seo & Kavakli, 2022), and three of them seem to be particularly useful to adopt within the framework of this dissertation for their close alignment with my research goals.

First one, is Lotero-Echeverri (2023)’s study exploring recommendations from journalists on how to report on forced migration within the context of Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, Peru, and El Salvador. Although the research is located in Latin America, this study is useful for its review of professional tools for reporters working on migration in any geographical context around the world. It offers a detailed list of recommendations, including key strategies and tools for mitigating negative media frames and a checklist aimed at combating xenophobia. Other studies had argued (Kogen, 2017) that solutions-oriented information can be introduced in reporting on humanitarian crises without showing bias and that it should be included for ethical coverage that would inform the political engagement surrounding the subject. Similarly, some of the guides introduced in Lotero-Echeverri’s work (2023) such as Ethical Journalism Network’s Migration Reporting Toolkit (Law, 2019) proposed strategies through which solution-oriented information could be introduced in migration reporting without necessarily losing the view of migration as a complex phenomenon. Despite not specifying the total number of guidelines in their sample, the study (Lotero-Echeverri, 2023) provides a

seemingly comprehensive overview of sources relevant to migration coverage such as strategies for mitigating “threat” frames or an 8-point “combating xenophobia” checklist’; and thus becomes a key point of engagement in my theoretical framework.

Next is Arcila-Calderón et al.’s article (2021) published as part of the EU Journalistic Role Performance Project where authors held interviews with 94 Greek, Italian and Spanish journalists. It provides important insights on practice of journalism on critical issues such as coverage of minors; and reports on journalists’ thoughts and expectations from such migration coverage. For example, referring to an undeclared portion of their participants, it states:

They demand migration journalism that is able to “highlight the positive aspects” (19-IT) and to show normalized elements of migration “related to the education of migrants and refugees, their interaction with local communities, and personal human stories” (11-GR), because “the core is to talk about people, that is, to talk about migrants and refugees as human beings” (13-IT).

This emphasis on personal human stories as construed from interviews with journalists here is highly different than the one we are used to think of when we talk of human-interest stories³ (Hughes, 1980; Beyer & Figenschou, 2004; Chouliaraki, 2008). It is instead one that frames RASIM in day-to-day life, not necessarily through their ‘mediatized suffering’ (Chouliaraki, 2006; 2008) but through their day-to-day successes. This study was also useful to learn about journalistic insights on migration reporting in other contexts, and the European sample of journalists represented in this research called for debunking urban myths when it comes to migration, and avoiding ethnicity in description all together.

³ A feature story that zooms in on the case of a single individual, commonly by using emotional appeal.

Lastly, Özdora-Aksak & Dimitrova`s article (2021) is a good resource more so for the civil organization and social workers but there are insightful takeaways for journalists working with RASIM. For this research, they hold interviews with 22 civil society organization (CSO) staff from Istanbul and Ankara in Türkiye, exploring their role as strategic actors of advocacy. Interestingly, many of the civil society organization workers they interviewed also had strong experience in print and broadcast media. While their larger findings are on the communication mechanisms surrounding CSOs, they also find that “CSO representatives feel negative about media relations” (p.380) and are actively working towards creating connections with journalists. They argue that negative public attitudes towards migration creates a hostile environment which pressures CSOs to come up with adaptive media-messaging strategies. This does not mean CSOs should always work with journalists, to the opposite, authors suggest working with media -in its current state- is a decision CSO staffs should make strategically, knowing “when to stay silent”. I believe that it is journalists` responsibility to help ease the work of CSOs in accessing media, and Özdora-Aksak & Dimitrova`s (2021) study presents a good scholarly base of engagement for future efforts in this direction.

1.5.3.2 Professional Journalism Guidelines. Several well-established news cooperatives and organizations have recognized the power of language in shaping public perceptions of migration. One of the largest news agencies in the world, and the authoring agency for the dominant stylebook followed by most news organizations in the US, the Associated Press (AP) went through a change in their stylebooks (Colford, 2013), to discourage the use of the term *illegal* in reference to humans. It stated “Except in direct quotes essential to the story, use *illegal* only to refer to an action, not a

person: *illegal* immigration, but not *illegal immigrant*.” (Beaujon & Thomas, 2013). This change reflected the industry's recognition of the ethical responsibility to avoid dehumanizing language, which could otherwise perpetuate harmful stereotypes, and have been taken up by several other organizations and initiatives.

A nonprofit racial justice organization, Race Forward, also published both a Style Guide⁴ and Stylebook⁵ presenting a blend of a dictionary of references journalists use for terminological choices and themes when covering migration. The Diversity Style Guide⁶, an initiative with a companion stylebook with the same name by Kanigel (2019), whose website allows users to search through a database of more than 700 terms, each entry presents a blend of definitions, and professional recommendations related to that entry. The entries “illegal alien”, “illegal immigrant, illegal aliens, illegals” and “illegal, illegals” are listed separately, yet a clear recommendation is placed under each of them: “Avoid.”

The Diversity Style Guide is also interesting to show that criticism of adaptations of the word *illegal* dates back much earlier than AP’s change in 2013, with four minority journalism groups issuing a statement highlighting the pejorative nature of the term in 1994. The attempts towards discouraging the adaptations of certain words in migration coverage, and thus attempts towards intervening in news production for “better” migration reporting continued after AP’s formal change in discourse.

⁴ https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/DTIW_update_JournalistStyleGuide4.pdf

⁵ https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/DTIW_Stylebook.pdf

⁶ <https://www.diversitystyleguide.com>

In 2015, Ethical Journalism Network (EJN) published a report outlining the risks of falling into sensationalism and propaganda that journalists face when covering migration⁷. In 2016, in response to UN General Assembly's disregard for the subject, it released new guidelines that would help mitigate these risks (Law, 2016⁸). Their five-point guide for migration reporting recommended prioritizing fact-based legally-informed and inclusive narratives while avoiding victimization, over-simplification, and inflammatory content⁹.

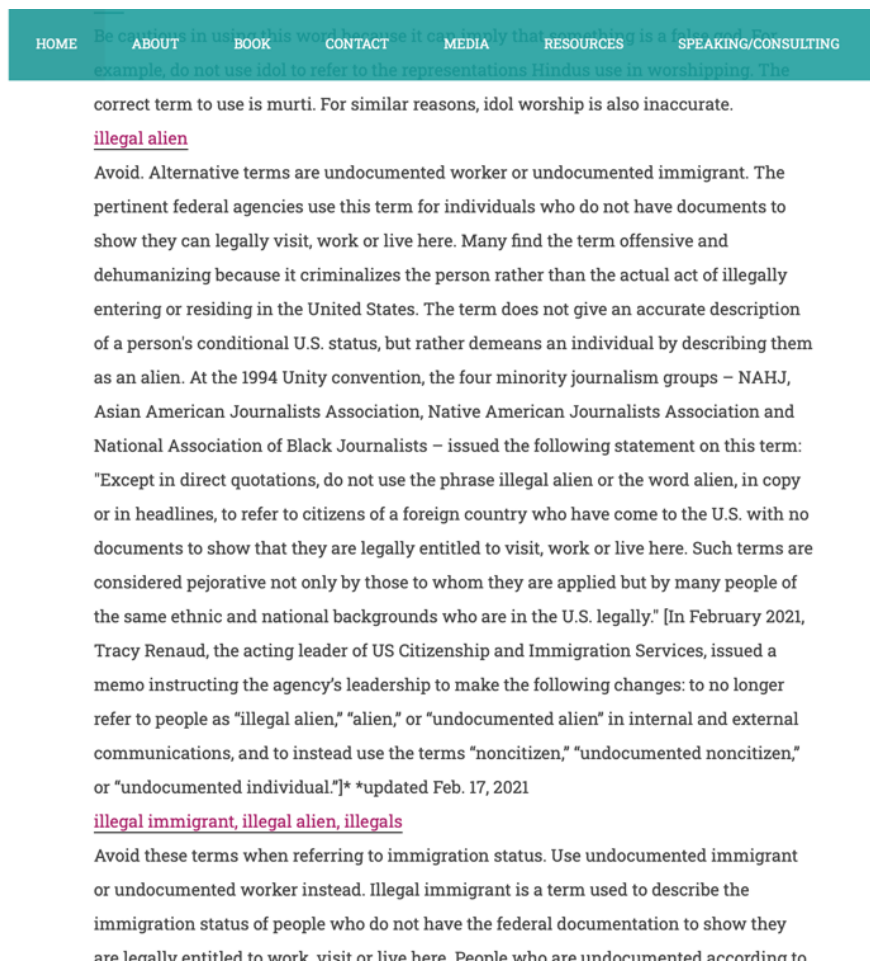


Figure 1. The Diversity Style Guide's Entry on Illegal Aliens.

⁷ <https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/moving-stories-introduction?swcfpc=1>

⁸ <https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/ejn-launches-new-migration-reporting-guidelines-gfmd>

⁹ <https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/ethical-guidelines-on-migration-reporting>

In 2017, EJN collaborated with International Centre for Migration Policy Development¹⁰ and researched the state of migration reporting in 17 countries in Europe, Middle East and Africa spread across two sides of the Mediterranean. This report stated that in all 17 of these countries, journalism served as “a distorting lens as much as a magnifying glass”, referring to examples such as the media coverage of Lesbos (Siegel, 2021¹¹) where news media helped garner global attention as and coverage of racist remarks by Greece’s right-wing/nationalist party ANEL. As such, this report highlighted the duality of ways within which news media narratives can shape public opinion. It is an invaluable resource for not only professional journalists covering migration, but also for scholars and researchers interested in learning the historical and sociopolitical trajectories of each country.

There are also numberless IOM-led publications and resources, one being the IOM Glossary on Migration. This document is described to be a “living document”¹² as IOM officials make changes as required to the document online to keep their terminology up-to-date. Thus, journalists who will refer to this source are asked to periodically check for updates. This glossary is a user-friendly and valuable tool for journalists to familiarize themselves with legal terms that are central to migration terminology such as “acquisition of nationality” with direct links to official documents that source these terms.

In 2018, Global Investigative Journalism Network¹³ (GIJM) released a website that served as a collection of resources for migration reporting, drawing from resources

¹⁰ <https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/how-do-media-on-both-sides-of-the-mediterranean-report-on-migration?swcfpc=1>

¹¹ Siegel, D. (2021). The ‘Crises’ of Lesbos. *Utrecht Law Review*, 17(4), 10–18. <https://doi.org/10.36633/ulr.745>

¹² <https://publications.iom.int/books/international-migration-law-ndeg34-glossary-migration>

¹³ <https://gijn.org/resource/migration-reporting-sources-guidelines-contests/>

such as EJN's 2016 guidelines, information on journalism prizes concerning migration and most importantly, for this research, drawing from examples of "good source of inspiration"¹⁴ such as The New Humanitarian. Their collection, i.e. sample of stories related to migration are particularly useful in highlighting how investigative and well-structured stories can be produced at outlets as mainstream as LA Times¹⁵ or alternative as the news-site Medien Diest Integration¹⁶.

In 2019, on June 20 World Refugee Day, EJN collaborated with the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and launched the Migration Reporting Toolkit¹⁷. Just like GIJM's EJN's guide incorporates common materials like EJN's five-point guide on migration reporting or the 2017 17-country review by EJM-ICMPD. With the toolkit, however, journalists can receive training on a variety of subjects relating to journalistic training such as a 35-minute interactive course on balancing impartiality for citizens' journalists or a 15-minute course on a news report on freedom of information and data protection, to other pertinent topics such as guardianship for unaccompanied children. The 15-minute training on the impact of news stories where newspapers can save lives is particularly important in my subjective view, yet each of these concise and well-designed trainings are worthy of our time. 2020 and onwards, attempts towards proliferating resources on migration reporting and training more and more journalists with these tools continue with collaborative efforts from researchers, NGOs and media.

¹⁴ <https://gijn.org/stories/recent-investigative-journalism-migration/>

¹⁵ <https://www.latimes.com/projects/la-me-a-dream-displaced-uncertain-future/>

¹⁶ <https://mediendienst-integration.de/artikel/zentrale-mittelmeer-route-libyen-italien-iom-ngo-seenotrettung.html>

¹⁷ <https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/press-release-migration-reporting-toolkit>

Overall, the resources journalists can draw for forming their style when covering migration are plenty, and strong repetitions in emphasis for a humanitarian approach can be observed across these guidelines. In the context of this research, these guidelines offer an important framework for understanding how media coverage of migration can be improved.

The resources I reviewed show that better migration news is not merely a matter of avoiding harmful language but involves a deeper commitment to fact-based, legally sound, and context-rich journalism. The need for standardized migration reporting guidelines across media outlets is evident, as they provide a foundation for consistent, ethical reporting. By fostering a more responsible approach to migration coverage, these guidelines have the potential to influence not just individual news stories, but also the larger societal discourses around migration and most importantly the livelihoods of RASIM.

At the same time, not all of these insights are applicable -or sadly desired- in practice. Particularly, in contexts with high levels of xenophobia and hostility towards changing demographics, the applicability of these resources should not be taken for granted.

1.5.4 Polarization

Before delving into the complexities of the practice of migration reporting in polarized contexts, it is important to pin down the theoretical framework that informs the definition of polarization within this study. Scholarly literature offers a plethora of definitions, each dissecting different dimensions of this complex phenomenon, with reported increase in research interest on polarization (Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021). In

media and communication studies, again a plethora of research exist studying various forms of it including mass, affective and elite polarization (Arora, Singh, Chakraborty, Maity, 2022; Wilson, Parker, Fainber, 2020).

Elite polarization (Baldassari & Gelman, 2008; Fletcher, 2020; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Splendore & Piacentini, 2024; Suiter & Tucker et al., 2018; Wojcieszak et al., 2015;) is used to refer to the growing ideological chasm between the leaders or representatives of political factions. This form of polarization is characterized by an increasing divergence in the attitudes and beliefs of political elites, often setting the tone for broader societal divisions. I believe this form of polarization, i.e. elite polarization, is easy to predict and identify within the context of Türkiye and migration debates with the incumbent Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Democrat Party (DEM) being the only political parties to publicly endorse welcoming RASIM whereas representatives from others can be frequently seen making public calls on their plans towards deporting large groups of RASIM.

On a wider scale, mass polarization (McCarty & Poole, 2006) refers to a similar ideological drift among the general populace. Here, the focus shifts to the everyday citizen, highlighting how individual political beliefs are becoming more extreme and more rigidly aligned with specific ideologies. Particularly, the issues of trust

At its heart, questions swirling around polarization and news are questions of trust...As Zuckerman (2017) has pointed out, a growing mistrust of media is only part of a larger loss of trust toward established institutions, leading 'citizens into polarized media spaces that have so little overlap that shared consensus on basic civic facts is difficult to achieve'. (Wenzel, 2020)

This form of polarization is particularly relevant in understanding how societal divisions permeate through different layers of the population. As Wenzel (2020) points out, media fragmentation can coincide with a growing mistrust in established institutions, pushing

citizens into polarized media spaces and complicating the possibility of shared consensus on basic civic facts. This does not, of course, mean everyone in these pockets of views such as Muslim or secular groups experience polarization at the same levels.

While enabling people to construct an ideologically congruent information environment, media fragmentation also allows those most susceptible to media influence to select out of political information altogether... By filtering out of political information entirely, rather than selecting into an ideologically congenial source, people dilute the effects of polarized political communication. (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2010)

Not everyone is exposed to same content on media, some limit their news engagement purposefully to mitigate the feelings of helplessness, anxiety or isolation that is at times experienced after receiving negative news. However, the fact that people can 'opt out' of political information altogether due to perceived levels of polarization and mistrust is concerning, which could mean that chances of the two poles in masses of people forming a polarized public opinion, the middle-ground gets smaller and smaller with people not wanting to engage more with what they construe as ideologically charged information coming from a person or a group that is perceived to be the political opposite.

Next, affective polarization (Boxell, Gentzkow, Shapiro, 2024; Iyengar, 2019), delves into the emotional aspects of political division. It's not just about differing opinions on policies; it's about how these opinions shape personal attitudes and emotions towards those who hold opposing views. In today's media-driven world, this emotional divide can be both a reflection and a driver of how polarized a society can become.

Finally, in addition to these established forms, recent scholarship introduces the concept of media polarization, which focuses on how editorial decisions and market forces can intensify polarization (Splendore & Piacentini, 2024). In media systems where selective exposure is prevalent, news outlets often avoid contradicting audience views,

reinforcing pre-existing biases. This dynamic, particularly relevant in Türkiye's polarized media landscape, will be a key consideration in exploring how journalists perceive and navigate polarization in their work.

Throughout this dissertation, the concept of polarization is explored primarily through the lens of mass polarization and media polarization (McCarty & Poole, 2006; Splendore & Piacentini, 2024), with a specific focus on its implications for journalistic practices. This form of polarization, characterized by growing ideological divides within the general populace, provides a crucial backdrop against which the role of media and journalism in Turkey can be examined.

Particularly, I define polarization as "the shrinking of middle ground" between opposing political factions, and I apply this definition to explore how journalists in Türkiye perceive polarization in their coverage of migration. In the Turkish context, where Somer (2019) highlights the stark divide between conservative Muslims and the secular opposition, understanding mass polarization and the pursuant loss of 'middle-ground' become essential in assessing how journalists navigate and respond to these societal cleavages. While my initial focus was on polarization between citizens and RASIM, the theoretical frameworks outlined above broadened the scope of inquiry to include polarization among political elites, the general populace, and even within journalists' personal and professional circles.

Furthermore, drawing on the concept of affective polarization as discussed by Boxell et al. (2022) and Iyengar (2019), this study considers the emotional dimensions of polarization and their impact on journalistic integrity and practices.

In Türkiye, polarization is characterized by several identity related divides across different ideologies. A major divide was between ethnic Turks and people from different ethnicities; this distinction was central to the country's founding principles, as reflected in the 1934 Resettlement Law (No. 2510), which granted foreigners the right to settle only if they were of Turkish descent or demonstrated “adherence to Turkish culture.”

Another was based on religious identity. Türkiye, being a secular country that sits at the crossing point of many other religions, while having a dominantly Muslim population, naturally witnesses some political conflict in the ways religions are practiced. Somer (2019) characterizes the most recent divide as a polarization between conservative Muslims and the secular opposition, with both groups exhibiting strong in-group identification and mistrust of out-group members within society. AKP’s succession to incumbency in 2002 was a turning point for this divide, with the rise of a political party with roots in political Islam to power after long years of rule by secular military governments. (Coskun, 2020; Over, 2021; Somer, 2019).

Beyond the ethnic and religious versus secular polarization, the divides are further complicated by intersecting factors such as urban-rural disparities, and ethnic tensions, particularly involving Arabic (Doğan Akkaş, 2023) or Kurdish communities. These layers of division highlight the broader sociopolitical and cultural fragmentation shaping Türkiye's societal landscape.

1.6 Dissertation Overview

This dissertation sets out to explore the impact of polarization on journalism, with a particular emphasis on its impact on migration reporting in Türkiye. After laying down the theoretical framework, research questions and design, and the key terminology here in

Chapter 1, the study delves into its primary objective: understanding how polarization influences journalistic practices in the context of Türkiye.

Chapter 2 offers a literature review on media and migration policy in Türkiye, laying the groundwork for understanding the broader context of the study. This chapter begins by outlining the historical evolution of migration trends and policies in Türkiye, highlighting the significant changes in the country's approach to managing migration. The combination of this policy and historical overview provides a background for understanding the government's response to RASIM. Additionally, this chapter illuminates the complexities of the relationship between the government, the public, and journalists in the context of migration.

Chapter 3 is the methods chapter of the dissertation. It provides the methodological steps taken as part of data collection and analyses processes, highlighting a mixed-methods approach, which combines content analysis and semi-structured interviews to gather both quantitative and qualitative data in line with my research questions.

Chapter 4 reports content analysis findings, following the analysis of 1000 randomly selected articles from a larger pool of Turkish migration news stories collected between January 1, 2022, to August 1, 2023. It describes the content, the form and style of news that talk about RASIM and lists the dominant trends in this discourse.

Chapter 5 continues the content analysis shared in Chapter 4 by focusing the analysis on the types of news produced and practices that go into making of this news. It incorporates interviews with journalists detailing patterns in migration reporting and discussing why these patterns exist.

After identifying common practices of migration reporting in Türkiye's context, Chapter 6 takes a deeper dive into processes of news making, particularly on the subject of migration. It explores the complex challenges faced by journalists particularly reporting on migration in Türkiye. These challenges are multi-dimensional, encompassing personal, professional, social-familial, and violence-related obstacles.

While Chapter 6 discusses the challenges of migration reporting, Chapter 7 zooms in on polarization, asking how polarization affects journalists' day-to-day work, pushing them to navigate between professional standards and public or political pressures.

Finally, building up on the insights on challenges and prospects of reporting on migration in polarized contexts, Chapter 8 explores recommendations for improving media representation of migration, asking what 'better' migration reporting would look like. An overview of main takeaways from analysis reported in Chapters 5 to 8, and the synthesis of recommendations on how to mitigate polarizing narratives in the news can be found in Chapter 9 Conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

MEDIA AND MIGRATION POLICY IN TÜRKIYE: CONTEXTUALIZING CURRENT TRENDS

This chapter provides an overview of the historical and current dynamics at play in the Turkish context, providing essential background for the subsequent research and analysis on journalistic practices, particularly in the realm of migration reporting. This investigation begins by a brief historical overview of media ownership in Türkiye, discussing its relations to socio-political changes in the country.

The chapter starts with a historical overview of media ownership and law, highlighting the limitations to press freedom and main regulations on news production in the country. It continues with a systemic review of laws, regulations, and policies concerning refugees, asylum-seekers and immigrants (RASIM) in Türkiye including the Turkish Settlement Law of 1934, the Geneva Convention of 1951, the introduction of the Law no 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection in 2013, the EU-Türkiye agreement of 2015; and, the International Workforce Law no 6735. I select these legal frameworks since I believe each of these policy milestones has played a critical role in shaping Türkiye's response to migration and they are crucial in understanding the backdrop against which the media narratives and journalistic practices concerning RASIM have been shaped in Türkiye.

Following the historical policy insights, the second section transitions to a review of literature focusing on the media coverage of RASIM in Türkiye from 2011 to 2023, following the largest RASIM intake in its Republic Period (Presidency of Migration Management, n.d.). It reviews the scholarly reports on the media representation of

RASIM in Türkiye and provides insights into the evolution of this discourse, noting a transition from a humanitarian approach to RASIM, to a security oriented one. The chapter comes to an end with a note on current state of practice of journalism within its context, highlighting recent research on daily working conditions of journalists in Türkiye.

2.1 Constraints and Capture: A Brief History of Turkish News Media

While the success of Turkish TV dramas places the country among the leading television media exporters for another year (AP, 2024), the news media sector in Türkiye is still in its toddler days, with serious constraints to its growth. Although there are recent advances (such as the systemic loss of media freedom and limitation to freedom of expression rights) making the status quo bleaker than it was 20 years ago, it could be said that Turkish news media, since its founding days, has never enjoyed freedom from the state or been allowed to bloom and grow to its full capacity.

Throughout Türkiye's history, the government and the military's shadows hovered over media either through patronage or direct involvement - as the power to rule went back and forth between the two, making censorship and a dash of propaganda the two consistent ingredients of news making. Early Republic Period (1923-1950) was marked by a progressive push towards replacing censorship practices and regulations that continued from Ottoman Empire while instilling its own nation-building efforts. By the decision of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM), a decree on abolition of martial law and censorship was issued in 1923 (İskit, 1939; Bingöl & Maraşlı, 2023). This was a short-lived freedom. In just two short years, a much heavier regulation called Takrir-i Sükun Kanunu (Law on the Maintenance of Order) was introduced, proposing

the right of the government to ban those publications that ‘disturbed’ the public peace (Bingöl & Maraşlı, 2023) with first of the many vague statements to be added to media law.

In 1950, Türkiye’s second major media law was issued. Law No. 5680 symbolized a return to the freedom efforts in 1923, the first sentence of this law read “The press is free.” (T.C. Resmi Gazete, 1950). However, with more than 15 amendments (Günaydın, 2005) and introduction of other laws adjudicating this one, Law No. 5680 also failed to deliver on its promise of press freedom.

First, restrictive laws such as Anti-Terror Law of 1990 has made it possible for government to shut down news agencies and incriminate journalists once again, upon suspect of ‘propaganda harming unity of the nation’ (Ataman, 2009; Tanör, 1991;). Second, following a “neoliberal turn” in economy and political scene, and an initial privatization of media channels; media companies became integrated to nonmedia conglomerates with a government or army ‘consultant’ in their executive board (Yeşil, 2016). Fledgling Turkish media developed the vital organs to maintain its freedom, such as the first statement of Law No. 5680; however, being adopted by profit-oriented foster parents, it did not see significant gains to journalistic freedom building to 2000s.

The Law No. 5680 remained in action for 54 years before its amendment and replacement by Press Law no. 5187 in 2004 (T.C. Resmi Gazete, 2004). In the meantime, Türkiye had seen a major shift in its political scene, with Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, hencefort AKP) rising to incumbency. AKP systematically incentivized the media takeover by pro-government entities by either imposing harsh penalties or direct orders, forcing previous media owners to sell or shut down their media

companies. State advertising funds were funneled to government-aligned publications, making serious cuts to revenues for oppositional or alternative media (Spicer, 2022).

During the early years of AKP, several steps such as the right to obtain information were secured; and, several other ‘media rights’ (e.g. Law No. 5651 on the Regulation of Publications Made in the Internet Environment) were lost. At the same time, media ownership was abruptly changing hands from formerly family or privately owned news media companies’ forcible sale to business owners with close ties to incumbent party.

The government takeover of major news media outlets that started with the purchase of *Dogan Medya Grubu* in 2011, continued with a series of lawsuits that has been filed against one of the oldest independent newspapers, *Cumhuriyet*, and imprisonment of more than 100 journalists on varying charges within the same year (Human Rights Watch, 2016; Reuters, November 6 2016). To make sense of these radical shifts in ownership (from left leaning media owners to conservative ones) and- its pursuant impact on practice of journalism, Yeşil (2018) used the term ‘media-capture’ and argued that a handful of strategies were pursued by the incumbent party to monopolize news production.

Other scholars (Altınörs & Akçay, 2022; Coşkun, 2022; Tansel, 2018) also argued Türkiye to be transitioning through a process of “democratic backsliding”, and such forced takeover of news media were ‘silent’ marks of this process. They explained that

since 2011, increasing authoritarian tendencies have impacted media freedom, with state interventions in media ownership and legal constraints suppressing dissent.

The last major media takeover occurred in 2018 when Aydın Doğan, a vocal critic of Erdoğan, sold Hürriyet and other outlets to the Demirören Group, another business conglomerate with strong pro-government affiliations (Spicer, 2022). These shifts have enabled the consolidation of power, limiting press independence and fostering a pro-government media landscape that marginalizes opposition voices. Commenting on the outlook of Turkish news media's future, Kandiyoti (2020) wrote, "Any vestige of media freedom and the independence of the judiciary had evaporated... A politics of polarization that demonizes all opposition as treason has become the regime's weapon of choice". Returning to the affects embedded in journalistic practices (Miles, 2024), and moving from Kandiyoti and others' views on the outlook of press freedom, it was intuitive to expect journalists I intend to recruit for this research would also be affected by the aforementioned governmental constraints.

At the same time, the government did not stand back from proposing further restrictive regulations for media use. A new media law, Law No. 7418, that aims to criminalize the spread of misinformation was put into action in October 2022, allowing the government to block social media platforms such as Twitter or Facebook whenever it deems necessary and calls for imprisonment of any person who creates or shares posts that are identified to be spreading misinformation up to three years (Aydintasbas, 2022). Recently, the country was stirred up by a draft proposal that would enable the government to easily target

protesting citizens and incriminate them as ‘agents of influence’ (Amnesty International, 2024).

I believe this historical background is important to keep in mind as I dig deeper into understanding current media practices in the country. Currently, it is reasonable to estimate governmental control to have mitigated polarization, by a forced unification of media voices after its mass buyouts and media company closures. After all the government has utmost control over the knowledge production mechanisms and can shut down a media entity at will, may it be on TV, or the internet; and it does not appear to have any intentions of backing down from regulating what the political leaders at the time find to be controversial.

Yeşil (2016) explained that the Turkish media landscape ‘operates under the conditions of a polarized and politicized structure’ and that the media capture does not erase journalism from the country but repurposes it for state agenda. Years later, she reminds us that this systemic suppression continues under AKP’s rule (Yeşil, 2024). For this dissertation, media capture has a particularly important place, since some of the news outlets I intend to engage with are those major outlets that first got merged into business conglomerates later to be fully handed to AKP’s allies.

Furthermore, this historical overview helps to illustrate the political background that shape the media production in Türkiye. In the next section, I provide a similar historical overview, this time focusing on the progression of migration law and policies.

2.2 Policy Overview

The earliest formal regulation of foreigners' settlement in Republic of Türkiye was governed by Law no. 2510 issued by the Turkish National Assembly on June 14, 1934. This law distinguished between 'muhacir' and 'mülteci' which can be translated as

immigrants and refugees respectively, with the former term specifically referring to those who wished to settle in Türkiye and were required to show adherence to Turkish culture, among other criteria. Intriguingly, this law also specified the identities that would not be granted the status of 'muhacir'/'immigrant', including those who did not adhere to Turkish culture, anarchists, spies, nomadic Romanians, and those who were banished from the country due to political reasons.

Untouched until 2006, Law no. 2510 served as the main legislature by which foreigners were allowed into the country (Şakacı , 2020). This law is particularly important to keep in the back of our mind for two reasons: First, it shows that Turkish migration policy was not always biased against populations originating in the East, a point which drew heavy criticism until recently when Türkiye introduced an even more complex classification of RASIM. Second, while there is seemingly no country-based restriction to the intake of RASIM, a predilection for identities that are assumably easier to integrate into Turkish society can be seen with the emphasis on adherence to Turkish culture.

Following the establishment of the initial framework for the settlement of foreigners under Law no. 2510, The Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (henceforth the 1951 Convention) laid down the foundational principles for refugee rights and protection. Article 1 of the Convention, as amended by the 1967 Protocol, defines a refugee with no reference to their country of origin and as

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)

Türkiye signed this convention on August 24, 1951, with specific reservations that mirrored its national policy orientations and socio-cultural considerations. These reservations are worthy of underlining for stating that refugees would not be granted more rights than Turkish descendants and the implementation of a first-ever 'geographical limitation.'

With its geographical limitation, Türkiye introduced a new-term “asylum-seeker” to the definitions offered by the 1951 Convention and differentiated between those who fled European countries, i.e. refugees, and those whose country of origin was outside the European countries, i.e. asylum-seekers. The distinction made between refugees and asylum-seekers, based on geographic origin, underscored Türkiye’s strategic approach to managing migration flows, particularly in light of its location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia (Barkın, 2014; Çilekli, 2016; Eksi, 2021). Signaling towards a fear of influx of migrants from the East, this geographical limitation served not only to distinguish between RASIM based on their geographic origin (European vs non-European), but also allowed Türkiye to push back on an international law that was designed to be implemented by all but, in my opinion, was not upheld on fair ground¹⁸.

Despite discussions and plans for possibly lifting it after 2012, as outlined in the National Action Plan, Türkiye’s maintenance of the geographical limitation, as outlined in the 1951 Geneva Convention, continues to be a subject that drives controversy

¹⁸ The 1951 Convention and pertinent agreements asked of their signatories to all take part in aiding UNHCR with management of humanitarian crisis and yet these were clearly disregarded by leading countries in the EU -such as Britain (a member at the time) and Greece- who shut their borders on the first sight of a mass-migration (as I will discuss when I get to 2015). I believe, in some respect, these agreements were designed without considering for particular stressors for their signatories, thus leaving those who are actually at risk of being overpopulated at a vulnerable state while giving the upper hand to countries such as Britain, Germany, France and Greece in diverting attention away from their isolation policies and pressuring others to do more.

(Ganiyeva, 2023). Moving from Türkiye's insistence on this limitation, I argue that it has been instrumental in fostering stigmatization of RASIM, particularly those from the East, leading to polarized views on who deserves asylum and protection. This argument is supported by research that shows differences in reported hostility towards RASIM, particularly between public displays of acceptance towards Western European and Eastern European 'refugees', 'immigrants' from Turkic states and 'asylum-seekers/those under temporary protection/irregular migrants/...' from Middle East, North Africa and South Asia (MENASA) (Sengül, 2022).

Discussions on geographical limitation bring with it negotiations with European countries, with some arguing that the European Union should shoulder more of the burden, while others believe Türkiye needs to align more closely with international standards. On one hand, people believe that Türkiye has become a playground for European policy makers dictating who can and cannot stay in Türkiye, while Türkiye has contributed more than the majority of its European counterparts in international endeavors to assist RASIM. This is a discourse proliferated commonly by representatives of opposition parties, news and citizens on social media (Yeşil, 2024). Public figures such as Ümit Özdağ openly challenge EU to help Türkiye return RASIM to their home countries,

The Pakistanization of Türkiye and the Afghanization of southern Türkiye will have disastrous effects for the EU. The solution is not to gather all refugees in Turkey, nor make Turkey more middle eastern, the solution is to strengthen the European fortress with the Anatolian Fortress. (Özdağ, October 15 2023)

Statements such as this fuel stigmatization of RASIM from the East, instill xenophobia and call 'fellow' western countries to arms in this battle against the threat of becoming "more middle eastern".

The next significant development in Türkiye's migration policy was the 1994 Regulation on Asylum-Seekers. The 1994 Regulation emphasized the distinction between refugees and asylum-seekers based on geographical origin. Asylum-seekers from outside European borders were to be protected until a third country of settlement could be found, positioning Türkiye primarily as a transit country. This approach was accompanied by measures such as suspending people at the border at "security zones" and preventing their crossing, reflecting a more security-oriented and restrictive stance towards migration (Danış, 2009; Öztığ, 2016). The fact that this law was issued in the years that followed the mass-migration of Iraqi Kurds in the aftermath of Gulf War (Öner, 2014) also shows the responsive nature of the migration policy. This means that, Türkiye took a turn for being more security oriented in its migration policy when met with a mass-migration wave from the East. Some level of this security orientation can also be explained by the military takeover of the political scene in the country at the time and the internal conflict with Kurdish populations in Türkiye; however, it is still telling of a latent unwillingness towards those whose country of origin fall outside Europe.

A landmark change, maybe the most important moment in Turkish migration policy, occurred with the Law on Foreigners and International Protection No. 6458 (YUKK) in 2013. This law marked a shift towards a more inclusive and protection-oriented approach. Central to this change was the establishment of the Directorate General of Migration Management, now known as the Presidency of Migration Management, as of 2022, which centralized and streamlined all migration-related activities.

YUKK introduced several key provisions that brought Türkiye's migration policies in line with international standards. It introduced new legal definitions for protection statuses, including 'refugee', 'conditional refugee', 'subsidiary protection', and 'temporary protection', each catering to different needs of migrant groups. This law also emphasized rights and services for migrants and asylum-seekers, ensuring a more structured and humane approach to their management. I also argue that it introduced a more humanitarian and professional approach to treatment of RASIM by taking away the response responsibilities from security forces of the country such as the police who used to be responsible of taking their records and instead paving the way for the establishment of Presidency of Migration Management with personnel trained particularly to work with displaced populations. By replacing the fragmented and security-focused policies of the past, YUKK represented Türkiye's commitment to a balanced migration policy that considers both humanitarian obligations and national security concerns. YUKK continues to serve as the main legislation by which foreigners are handled in Türkiye.

The Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) was founded in 2013 as part of YUKK and as a response to the increasing complexities of migration and the need for a more structured approach to managing it. The Syrian refugee crisis was a catalyst for the Turkish government to reevaluate and restructure its migration management strategies. Prior to the formation of PMM, migration issues were managed by various government bodies and security forces (Emniyet Genel Müdürlüğü, EGM), leading to a fragmented approach. Recognizing the need for a more unified and professional management of migration, the Turkish government enacted the Law on Foreigners and International Protection No. 6458 in 2013. This law laid the groundwork for the establishment of

PMM, which officially began operations in 2014. The PMM was envisioned as a central authority to oversee all aspects of migration, including asylum processing, refugee support, and integration initiatives.

The PMM has been instrumental in implementing effective coordination to respond to the needs of RASIM in Türkiye. This coordination is crucial in managing the diverse and often complex requirements of RASIM, ensuring that their needs are met in a timely and efficient manner. More importantly for this dissertation, PMM provides the official data on RASIM, oversees all policy production, regulation and enactments concerning RASIM and thus becomes one of the key, if not the key, institution for journalists to engage with to understand migration trends better.

Outside major laws and legislation, there have been international agreements and national enterprises that have further shaped Türkiye's approach to migration. A prominent example of this is the 2015 joint action plan between the European Union and Türkiye. The 2015 agreement tasked Türkiye with several responsibilities, including enforcing stricter border controls, combating human trafficking and passport forgery, and potentially repatriating refugees who did not meet the necessary criteria to enter EU (European Council, 2016; Yeşil, 2024). This positioned Türkiye as a critical 'buffer zone' in preventing the movement of refugees towards Europe, highlighting its strategic role in the broader European migration context (Şenyuva & Ustun, 2016). Some scholars believe this agreement enhanced Türkiye's leverage (Haferlach & Kurban, 2017; Krumm, 2016) whereas others believe it jeopardized Turkey-EU relations (Şenyuva & Ustun, 2016). This complex dynamic is further complicated by mutual distrust between signatories. For example, EU policy analysts Marcilly & Garde (2016) observe,

Finally, a succession of provocations in the media by the Turkish President lead us to doubt seriously Turkey's absolute desire to implement the measures set out in the agreement. The Union is caught in a trap of false stability.

Earlier I argued that a large portion of Turkish citizens believed Türkiye has done enough in efforts to aid RASIM, that EU should be more involved in the process; and that this resentment towards EU was, in part, driving polarization with reducing the ground within which pro-RASIM citizens could voice their opinions. The statement above enables a broader critique of the EU's approach, which seemingly relies on financial incentives to 'bribe' Türkiye into managing the refugee crisis on behalf of Europe, while simultaneously casting doubts on Türkiye's stability and reliability as a partner.

In summary, Türkiye's migration policy has evolved through various phases, reflecting a balance between national interests and global humanitarian responsibilities. The policy shifts from a security-oriented perspective to a humanitarian one with increasing institutionalization through establishing of PMM and standardization of treatments. Moreover, I see an increasing variance to the classifications, i.e. legal names, assigned to RASIM that may be better suited to the changing needs of the state to better manage migration in time yet a strategically cautious stance towards migrants from non-European countries is still noticeable. At the same time, agreement and tensions with European countries introduce new responsibilities for the country. Overall, the changes I see in Turkish migration policy underscore the complexities of migration management in a global context, where policies not only respond to immediate challenges but also shape long-term societal attitudes and international relations.

2.3 Media Representation of RASIM in Türkiye: 2010 Onwards

The literature on media representation of RASIM in Türkiye shows that the media representation of RASIM evolves in the opposite direction of the migration policies, starting from a humanitarian emphasis and becoming more and more security oriented as the time progresses.

Examining the work of print press between 2011 and 2017, Gölcü & Dağlı (2017) found that the discourse surrounding RASIM has evolved from humanitarian emphasis for the sake of RASIM to concerns regarding well-being of Turkish citizens. The longer the refugees remained on the news agenda, the more discriminatory language emerged. For example, the stories that talked about the Syrians “taking lodging on the streets” and “dark guests on the streets” (Milliyet, August 25 2012) were also present in the earlier phases of migration of Syrians into Türkiye. These stories were problematic for implying that the presence of RASIM could cause danger for the locals, yet this implication was subtle and the events were presented as local ones. However, similar reports in 2015 use a directly accusatory language with headlines such as “Syrian Wars in Istanbul” (Alkaç, 2015) that repeatedly insinuate Syrians forming gangs and causing violence in the neighborhoods in which they accommodate and generalize the problems to the whole population in the body of the text. This observation on the deteriorating quality of reporting is supported by other longitudinal studies (Doğanay & Kenes, 2016; Efe, 2015; Şen, 2017;) that look into the question of how the representation has evolved within the context of various news outlets from more conservative ones to more secular ones.

Apart from the consensus on the increasingly stigmatizing outlook of news media, several case studies (Erdogan, 2017; Göker & Keskin, 2015;; Tunç, 2015; Yıldız, 2013;)

ask what type of themes and frames are used to represent RASIM and find the dominance of negative framing overall. A comprehensive list of themes of discussion is offered by Göker & Keskin (2015); these themes are namely: war, poverty, crime, social developments, conflict, legal issues, life in camps/outside, economic worries, health concerns. Göker & Keskin (2015) also move to code the way the newspapers approach RASIM, namely through “criticism, hatred, exaggeration/dramatization, joy, praise and problematization” and argues that newspapers approach to issue from an ideological stance, showing Syrians as “scapegoats”.

Such negative portrayals of RASIM seem to be the norm for mainstream news media in Turkey; however, scholars are divided on what drives negative portrayals of RASIM. Some scholars (Calik & Baykal, 2020; Sarılar, 2018) point to ideological breaks in the way conservative news outlets focus on human interest stories whereas secular ones foreground themes such as “economic burden”, “threat” and “violence”. Others (Baykurt, & Akalın, 2017; Cambay, 2019; Ramasubramanian & Miles, 2018; Yavçan,) point to more subtle yet common overlaps in the way these news outlets from seemingly opposing political views represent RASIM, particularly through emphasizing nationalistic concerns. Reviewing a collection of content analyses on the subject, scholars (Yavcan et al., 2017) argue that strong overlaps can be found in Turkish news media’s coverage of RASIM “beyond ideologies”. This debate is particularly important for our study as the unity in media voices, as suggested by Yavcan et al. (2017) contrasts with not only government policies but also with the polarized views among civilians.

Finally, there are studies that look into differences through which various groups of RASIM are presented. In an earlier work, I looked into framing of Syrian refugees

between 2014 and 2017 (Kavakli, 2020) and compared it to the representation of Bulgarian Turks and Kurds in different periods, only to find that Syrians occupied this dual space that was not as positively curated as Bulgarian Turks (a population that was deemed to be descendants of Turkish populations) yet was not as discriminated against as Kurds (a minority group with whom controversies continue to this day). Examining how Ukrainian refugees are represented in Turkish news media, scholars (Demir & Oklu Yildirim, 2023) find the dominance of human-interest frames such as “children in need” or “women in distress” over “threat” frames that we commonly see with more Easterner groups. Looking into the way Afghan refugees are represented, Erol & Yaylacı (2022) identify a hyper-sexualization and thus weaponization of the young male Afghan population to build a case against harboring refugees.

As such, the distinct treatment of different RASIM groups in Türkiye’s media becomes observable, reflecting deep-seated biases and societal divides. Syrian refugees are depicted in a dual light, not as favorably as Bulgarian Turks, yet less negatively compared to Kurds (Kavakli, 2020). Contrastingly, Ukrainian refugees often receive humanitarian-focused coverage, a stark difference from the more security-oriented depiction of Eastern groups (Demir & Yildirim, 2023). This unequal portrayal not only reinforces existing prejudices but also challenges the notion of equitable representation, suggesting a need for more balanced and fair media narratives in migration coverage.

While the above insights could be drawn from the literature on migration reporting in Türkiye, these do not tell us enough on why such negative discourses are proliferated by journalists. To get to that, I first need to take a step back and look into the daily practices of journalism in Türkiye and how news are produced in this context.

2.4 Practice of Journalism in Türkiye

Scholars have long been divided about whether it behooves journalists to advocate for human rights. A hesitancy to perceive journalists as advocates can be seen in the codes of conduct for journalists in Türkiye. Written and adopted by the Association of Turkish Journalists (TGC) in Istanbul in 1998, Turkish Journalists' Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities serves as an important document that provides an official definition for a journalist, and designates their responsibilities, duties and rights. This declaration defines a journalist as “any individual whose job is to gather, process, communicate news or express ideas and views regularly...and whose main employments of livelihood consists of this job...” (Association of Turkish Journalists in Istanbul, 1998). Within its scope, the only responsibility of such individuals is to use press freedom “conscientiously and honestly to further the public's right to be informed” and have access to accurate news. For this purpose, the journalist should fight all kinds of censorship and self-censorship and inform the public concerning this question.” (ibid.). While there is no mention of advocacy within this document, it states that a journalist defends “the universal values of humanity, chiefly peace, democracy and human rights, pluralism and respect of differences” (ibid.) under its duties and principles section. Thus, it is fair to say that the Turkish code of conduct for journalism- by principle- privileges the acts of investigating and informing the public with a subtle bias towards objectivity above advocacy or all else. At the same time, there is growing suspicion among Turkish journalists (Genç, 2016) on whether it is still possible to pursue investigative journalism or norms of non-partisan journalism within the recent political climate in Türkiye.

Researching Turkish reporters' perception of investigative journalism, Genç (2016) found that reporters were critical of the current conduct of journalism, which they believed was heavily influenced by political and economic agendas of media owners. It was argued that editorial and self-censorship coupled with low job security and undervaluing of reporters hampered the process of investigative journalism deeply.

Similarly, investigating how journalism is performed within the daily lives of journalists in Istanbul, Miles (2019) argued that the recent geo-political and cultural shifts brought upon by political events such as the rise of right-wing authoritarianism and refugee crisis have pushed journalists to adopt what she names "embodied detachment".

She writes;

How my participants described their roles as journalists was connected to how they related to and navigated Turkey's socio-political history and contemporary environment. This inevitably created a tension in their work, as they struggled to negotiate their desire for a critical, democratic, and objective sort of journalism, while also embodying lifestyles, perspectives, and identities that might potentially work against this goal. As a result, they turned to ideals such as neutrality, professional solidarity, and unbiased reporting. These principles were attachments they utilized as a way of validating their work in the hope of mitigating any culpability they might have in polarizing or isolating people through their reporting. (Miles, 2019, p. 223)

There has not been a study of journalists' perceptions of polarization in Türkiye yet, which is more the reason to carry out our proposed research here; however, Miles's (2019) words indicate that journalists are indeed aware of some level of polarization in Türkiye and have developed strategies of working in a polarized political environment. The quote indicates that journalists wish to distinguish their work from polarizing discourses which drives them to favor norms such as neutrality or unbiased reporting. Miles (2024); however, discusses that the practice of journalism is hinged upon 'spatialized affects', as affective relations embedded in urban life such as isolation, and

fear of exclusion find their reflections in the work of journalists. I agree with this view, and believe that perception of increased polarization could lead journalists to produce more polarizing content which will be discussed more in length in the following chapters.

The bigger problem here is not that journalists favor such norms of neutrality, but the forced detachment from their work for the sake of validation. This means that even when the topic journalists wish to investigate is something they are personally interested in, journalists are obliged to remain detached from the issue, fearing they might feed into polarization. Particularly for journalists who work under strenuous conditions, such detachment could pose a serious challenge in defending universal values of humanity or pluralism to the fullest. As I move from the theoretical exploration of polarization and its influence on journalism, it becomes vital to anchor these concepts in tangible examples.

In a recent report titled “Journalism in Turkey: Perception and Profile Survey”, Journalists’ Union of Türkiye (2023) announced its findings from its survey with 285 journalists across Türkiye. While this number appears to be low with only 11% of the targeted population is surveyed, researchers do a good job explaining the difficulties of accessing the journalists. This survey revealed that a strikingly high rate of 47.7% of journalists stated that they feel political pressure while practicing their jobs, 42.8% said they experienced censorship and 25.3% said they regularly practice auto-censorship in their work. When asked about the top three news people/organization/agency they trust, it was seen that 10% of the participants abstained from responding at all whereas the top choice among the options, Anadolu Agency, only gathered support from 12% of participants, both of which are indicative of the mistrust towards news resources even among journalists.

When asked about the challenges and barriers they face, while 43.8% said they did not encounter any barriers, it was found that a strikingly high 39.7% were sued over their writing at least once in their lifetimes. Judging by this, it is fair to say that being taken to court is a common practice in the Turkish context. What might be more concerning is the violence that journalists face as 14.9% reported to being battered on the job, 13.2% received death threats, 9.8% said they faced torture and 8.7% received threats of sexual assault.

Apart from the political pressures, most journalists face highly strenuous working conditions. It is found that majority of journalists worked over 45 hours a week, that they were paid low salaries which could not keep up with the inflation, only 28% of journalists were paid for overtime work and suffered from frequent burnouts with lack of satisfactory annual leaves. Commenting on the outcomes of this report, Tuna (2023) wrote that Turkish journalists must either be activists or simply mad to endure such a taxing profession.

The current state of journalism, especially in regions like Türkiye, indicates that journalists may continue to face significant challenges in their professional environments.

2.5 Discussion

In this chapter, I have journeyed through the multifaceted landscape of migration trends and management in Türkiye, examining historical migration policies, media portrayals of RASIM. These components collectively offer a nuanced understanding of the challenges and dynamics within Türkiye's historical background with migration policy and trends.

The historical policy review revealed Türkiye's evolving approach, shaped by socio-political and global influences. The implementation of the 'geographical limitation' in the Geneva Convention and the transition to more inclusive policies through the Law on Foreigners and International Protection No. 6458 (YUKK) highlighted a dynamic policy landscape, influenced by both international agreements and internal socio-political pressures.

The media's portrayal of RASIM in Türkiye, as explored through the literature review, shows a concerning shift from humanitarian perspectives to a more security-oriented and often discriminatory approach. This change in media narrative not only impacts public perception but also reflects and potentially reinforces societal attitudes towards migration. The uniformity in media narratives across ideological lines, as suggested by Yavcan et al. (2017), contrasts with government policies and the polarized views among civilians, indicating a complex relationship between media portrayal and public opinion.

These observations and background information inform the pursuant steps of research and analyses in the following sections.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter describes the methods used in my investigation of polarization and its influence over the practice of journalism within the framework of news coverage of migration in Türkiye. To briefly restate my research questions and goals, I ask how journalists are impacted by growing polarization in Türkiye and what might be the barriers and facilitators to improving their coverage of migration, a subject where severe polarization of attitudes among the general populace can be observed. A methodical, mixed-methods approach underpins this exploration, blending qualitative and quantitative analyses to paint a comprehensive picture.

Corresponding to research question 1 of this dissertation, I conduct a content analysis of the recent news media coverage on migration. Rather than a formal report, this section serves to identify major topics of discussion when it comes to migration, identify journalists working in this field and familiarize myself with their individual styles of reporting. A qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of news stories coupled with quantitative content analysis guide this initial process. This analysis of news media serves to equip me with the necessary information on the context and individual news outlet dynamics, allowing me to have points-of-discussion that are directly related to their productions during my next step, the interviews.

I then conduct a series of semi-structured interviews with journalists who have experience covering RASIM and pertinent issues. These interviews serve to respond to research questions 2 and 3, asking how journalists' understand their role in polarized contexts and what might be the barriers and facilitators of equitable coverage on the topic

of migration. A purposive expert sampling methodology guides my decisions on participant recruitment and once again qualitative thematic analysis is utilized for the analysis of the data collected through these interviews. Lastly, I present a synthesis of these findings (news content and interviews) and insights gained from the literature. Overall, this chapter serves to report the steps that were taken in line with the data collection and analysis methodologies adapted throughout the research process.

3.1 Research Design

The research conducted for this dissertation encompasses three phases which are namely the inductive mixed-methods analysis of news content regarding RASIM (which is supported by quantitative empirical findings), the qualitative thematic analysis of interviews with journalists, and synthesis of findings from the earlier two phases. Figure 1 presents an overview of the steps taken to carry out the proposed research.

3.1.1 Selection of Targeted Turkish News Media

In the first phase, I collected news articles from a wide range of Turkish media outlets, targeting for the top circulated mainstream news outlets (i.e. well-established, commercial newspapers addressing a large group of readers) such as Hürriyet, Milliyet, Cumhuriyet, Sözcü and Sabah, as well as independent online news outlets (i.e. alternative media) such as Bianet and Birgün. The focus on circulation was important, as I aimed to capture the readily available discourse—the content that the average person would likely encounter when seeking news, such as during their morning routine.

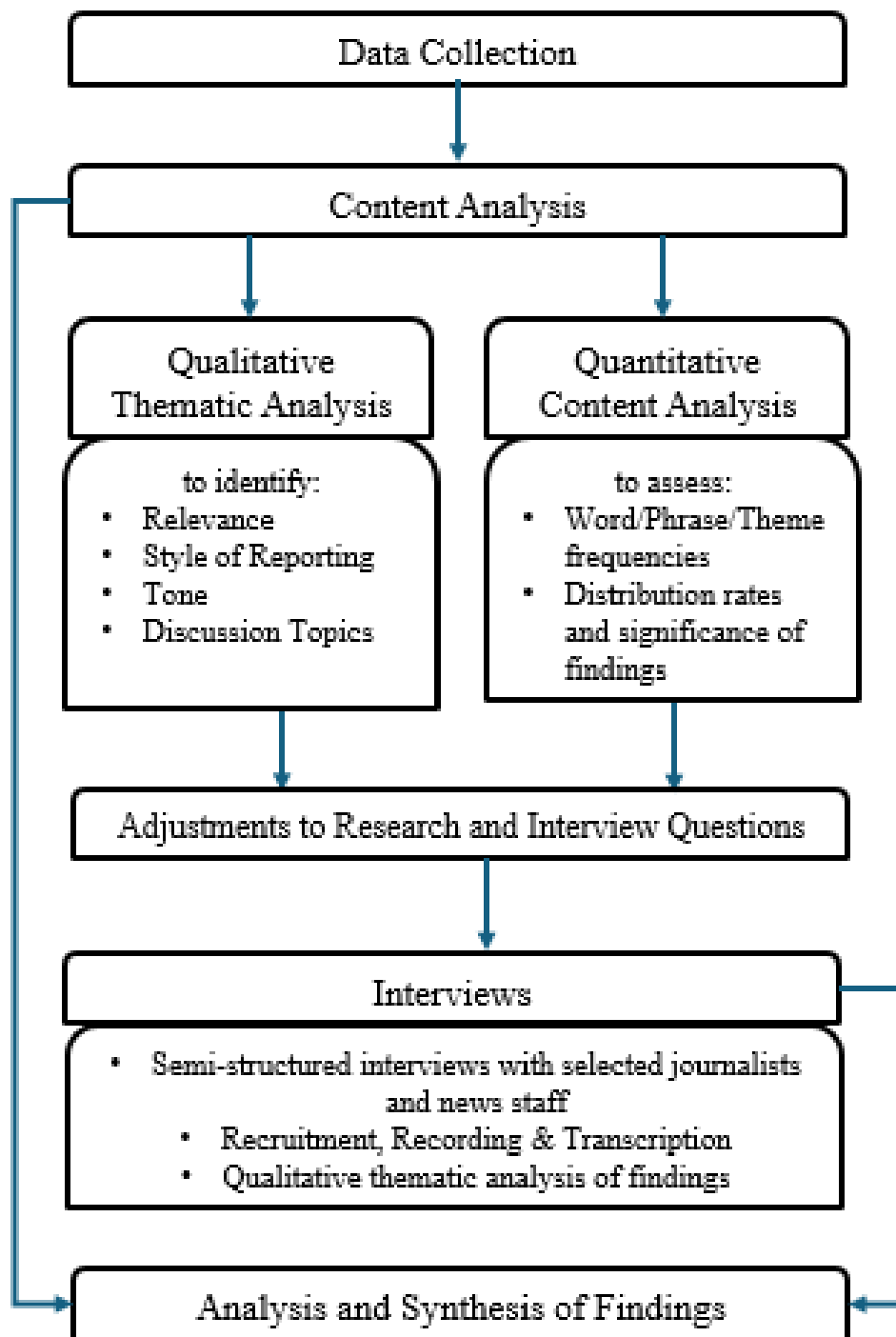


Figure 2. Overview of Research Design.

The names of the mainstream newspapers came from a list of highest circulated 30 media outlets in 2022 (MedyaRadar, 2023), with a target of including 10 most circulated news outlets. At the same time, I prioritized a maximum variation sampling approach (Suri, 2011), selecting outlets that reflected distinct political and social positions on RASIM. While *Birgün* and *Bianet* ranked between 20th and 25th, they were included as the highest-ranking dominantly online news outlets, representing alternative media and distinct audience groups compared to mainstream news consumers. Additionally, two news agencies Yeniasafak and Takvim with close ties to right-wing groups in the population, and one news agency, Posta were also included in the dataset to increase the diversity of views that are being studied. After excluding the outlets whose archives were inaccessible to the public, I was left with 10 news outlets.

Following the identification of target news outlets, I moved on to collecting the news stories from their websites using the AI-powered, visual web scraping tool, ScrapeStorm, Version 3.5.0¹⁹. The data was scraped between August 15-25 2023, collecting news articles from January 1, 2022, to August 1, 2023, a period rich in political and social developments as explained earlier in Chapter 1.

In the landscape of Turkish media, the selected news outlets represent a broad spectrum of target-audiences, operational modes, and historical backgrounds, each playing a role in shaping public discourse on migration on different groups from the general population. Table 1 provides an overview of political affiliations and target audiences for selected news outlets, as deduced from Media Ownership Monitor initiative's reports²⁰.

¹⁹ Available at www.scrapestorm.com

²⁰ <https://www.mom-gmr.org/>

Table 1: Overview of Selected News Outlets Ranked by Triage

| News Outlet | Political Affiliation | Operational Mode | Audience |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Hürriyet | Government-affiliated, Mainstream | Print & Digital | Conservative |
| Milliyet | Government-affiliated, Mainstream | Print & Digital | Conservative/Center-right |
| Cumhuriyet | Mainstream | Print & Digital | Secular/Center-left |
| Sözcü | Government-affiliated, Mainstream | Print & Digital | Secular/Left |
| Sabah | Government-affiliated, Mainstream | Print & Digital | Conservative |
| Yeni Şafak | Government-affiliated, Mainstream | Print & Digital | Conservative/Islamist |
| Takvim | Government-affiliated, Mainstream | Print & Digital | Conservative |
| Posta | Government-affiliated, Mainstream | Print & Digital | Center-right |
| Bianet | Alternative | Digital Only | Secular/Left |
| Birgün | Alternative | Print & Digital | Secular/Center-left |

This variation is particularly important to capture in Türkiye, in a media landscape where 8 out of 10 most read dailies belong to owners affiliated with the government (Media Ownership Monitor, n.d.; Karlıdağ & Bulut, 2021). Today, a unity of ownership is visible across major news outlets which belong to family-conglomerates such as Demirören, Albayrak and Doğu Holding/Şahenk families; with penalization or forced “buy-out” of oppositional voices ongoing.

Hürriyet, Milliyet, and Cumhuriyet are among the oldest and most influential newspapers in Türkiye, with their establishment dating back to the early and mid-20th century. These outlets have historically been seen as pillars of the secular, Kemalist ideology, although shifts in ownership and editorial policies of Hürriyet and Milliyet over

the years have radically changed their positions. In recent years, however, these historically secular, center-left or left leaning outlets have either been handed over to conservative media owners or hampered severely in their news production.

Cumhuriyet, known for its close ties to the opposition CHP, has spoken against the policies of the incumbent party and have faced such serious losses to its staff, after repeated penalties and intrusions to their work that could not be summarized here easily. Simultaneously, after changing ownership to actors close to the incumbent party, it was seen that Milliyet and Hürriyet started receiving commercial funds from the government (Sener, 2021) which were not given to opposition news outlets such as Cumhuriyet. Another change is visible with Sözcü, a newspaper that was founded in 2007 and remained among the top circulated ones to our day according to the report by Media Ownership Monitor(n.d.-b), yet could not afford to pay for the penalties the government imposed on them and thus was forced to sell one fourth of its shares to a media group led by a political figure who is known for his close ties to President Erdogan.

A Venn Diagram illustrating the political affiliation of the news outlets on a binary grouping from Conservative to Secular and their ownership on a binary from Mainstream to Alternative news media can be found on Figure 3, showing the dominance of conservative voices that align with Justice and Development Party (AKP), the incumbent party/government of the last two decades.

Reporting from this political background, Sözcü and Birgün stand out for their outspoken opposition to the current government, often reflecting a secular, leftist perspective in their reporting. However, as the media capture foreseen (Yeşil , 2018) Sözcü is currently under financial pressures and its oppositional position is under

scrutiny. While oppositional voices such as Cumhuriyet and Sözcü are at risk of suffering the effects of ongoing democratic backsliding, the news outlets that position themselves ‘independent’ or alternative, particularly at a self-proclaimed equal distance to both conservative and liberal sections in the population, seem to have it slightly less difficult than those that frequently and openly criticize the government.

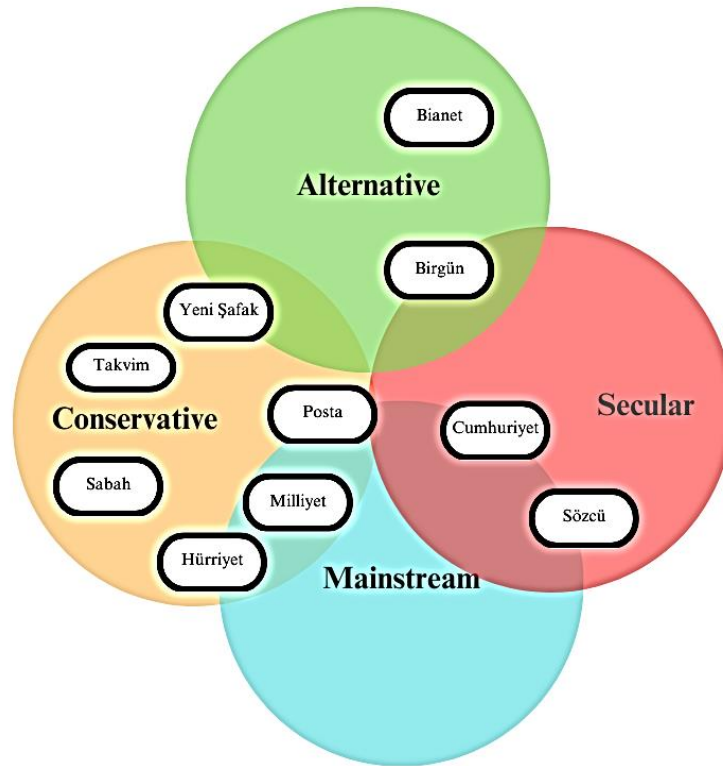


Figure 3. News Outlet Categorization.

Operating primarily online, Bianet and Birgün emerge as independent voices within the Turkish media landscape, emphasizing human rights, environmental concerns, and social justice, and striving to amplify the voices of marginalized communities. While their political content gets backlash from time to time, their reporting on migrants and

women seem to be well endorsed by their target audience and they do not receive as high levels of engagement from general populace as the mainstream news outlets receive.

On the other side of the political spectrum, Yeni Şafak and Sabah are known for their close ties to the ruling AKP party, offering a viewpoint that aligns with the government's stance on various issues, including migration. Takvim and Posta, in particular, were identified as outlets that resonate with conservative segments of the population, offering content that appeals to traditionalist views and sensibilities.

Collectively, the selected news outlets allow me to view how migration is reported by journalists who come from a variety of political backgrounds. This allows me to weigh the urgency of certain issues for different sections from the population, for example, knowing Takvim and Yeni Safak are more likely to refer to Islam or Islamic thought and solidarity, I expect their readers to align more closely with Islamic values, and thus seeing what Takvim or Yeni Şafak talks about when they talk about migration also allows me to make informed estimates on what their audience (this time the conservative Islamist groups) would like to hear on migration.

3.1.2 News Story Selection

The collection of news articles from designated news outlets was guided by specific keywords related to RASIM, as drawn from legal frameworks and ethnicity names. These keywords are namely “Mülteci”, Göçmen, Sığınmacı, Yabancı, Suriyeli, Afgan, Ukraynalı, Geçici Koruma (Refugee, Immigrant, Asylum-seeker, Foreigner, Syrian, Afghan, Ukrainian, Temporary Protection)”. Carefully selected based on the legal and societal distinctions elucidated in Chapter 1, as part of the justification of the RASIM framework, these terms are not only legally distinct but also resonate differently within

the public discourse. I used these keywords to conduct advanced searches on the website of each news outlet within the time frame of this study (January 2022- August 2023), paying particular attention to treating these words as lemmas (root words) and capturing their derivations.

Following the keyword search on archives, approximately 11,150 news stories were identified, compiled and transferred to a corpus spreadsheet with their author, title, news outlet and date noted in separate columns. Given the vast scale of the initial corpus, a strategic decision was made to distill this extensive collection into a more manageable subset. This larger corpus is subsequently used to create a random and smaller sample corpus of 1000 articles, to be studied in-depth for the content analysis.

3.2 News Content Analysis: A Mixed-Methods Approach

Upon completion of the corpus spreadsheet, I moved to the thematic content analysis of the news stories, searching for keywords and themes dominant in these news stories. The steps offered by Braun & Clarke (2006) guide the analysis of the collected news stories. I start by familiarizing myself with the data, reading and re-reading chunks of data and noting down comments which are later used to generate codes.

Codes identify a feature of the data (semantic content or latent) that appears interesting to the analyst, and refer to ‘the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Since this research builds up on questions regarding representation of RASIM, the code options, the features of the texts I pay attention to, were vast. Particularly, my aim was to understand major topics of discussion, and styles of reporting when it came to RASIM, meaning that I looked for not only repeating words and themes but also for

narrative structures, information sources, the framing of the event and the degree of investigative depth.

Many scholars conducted similar analyses of news stories on migration and came up with a coding set of their own. Notable among these were themes of humanitarianism, socio-economic implications such as devaluation of Turkish lira and border security, and the increased focus on the socio-economic well-being of citizens, leading to a more discriminatory language as the stay of refugees prolongs (; Doğanay & Kenes, 2016; Efe, 2015; Gölcü & Dağlı, 2017; Ramasubramanian & Miles, 2018; Sen, 2017).

In formulating the coding scheme for this study, meticulous consideration was given to be inclusive of subcodes utilized in prior research, while also maintaining a commitment to the discovery and integration of new codes as dictated by the data. For me, what mattered the most was to understand the content and style of news stories, reflecting personal and or institutional attitudes towards the RASIM. The established subcodes, such as border and war frames (Ramasubramanian & Miles, 2018), judgement (Gölcü & Dağlı, 2017), threat (Efe, 2015; Doğanay & Kenes, 2016), joy, praise, problematization, exaggeration, and dramatization (Göker & Kesin, 2015) provided a substantial toolkit for such an inquiry. At the same time, it was important to let the data “speak” for itself, thus I adopted a coding process that is inherently iterative, allowing for a dynamic engagement with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). It meant that I created new codes as they emerged in my reading of subsets of data and applied a refined set of codes to a larger dataset. This iterative approach ensures that while the analysis is grounded in established scholarly frameworks, it remains open and adaptive to the emergence of new

codes and themes, reflecting the evolving discourse surrounding RASIM in the Turkish media.

As part of this iterative reading process, a strategic approach was adopted where articles penned by specific authors were marked for further exploration. When a story shows a theme of interest linked to a specific journalist, I delved into the journalist's other works with a quick search online on their digital footprints and on migration, making notes on their related works. This selective marking and inquiry serves a dual purpose: first, it aids in the granular analysis of the media narratives, allowing for a deeper understanding of the individual and institutional tones reflected in the news stories; secondly, it acts as a critical jumping-off point for the subsequent phase of the research—the interviews with journalists. As such, the content analysis serves not as an end in itself but as a vital preparatory phase, laying the groundwork for a more informed, in-depth exploration of the issues for once I move onto discuss these issues with journalists.

A mixed-methods approach is adopted to capture both qualitative features of text, particularly their content and style of reporting (which cannot be perfectly quantified as units of analysis, particularly by a single-coder such as myself in this study, but can be assigned values) and quantity through which these pre-set codes (the frequency, distribution and relevant significance of the assigned values). The codebook for this study (Appendix 1) provides a detailed list, descriptions and examples of codes utilized in this mixed-method news content analysis. Once I had the larger (~11,000 words) corpus, I used a randomizer tool to shuffle the dates of the news stories on my original list while keeping the news outlet groups together, and compiled a list of random 1000 articles,

with 100 articles from each of the 10 news outlets. These news stories were read carefully searching for reoccurring patterns in the incident/subjects they cover, and styles of reporting and the dominant themes of discussion as seen in the news stories.

Once the list was compiled, I created a subcorpus on Sketchengine and used a multilayer coding structure, employing color-codes signifying the level of relevance of the news story and keywords that stand for categories of styles and content of the news story noted down in a separate column titled “Notes”.

3.2.1 Codes of Relevance

First, I embarked on selecting the news stories that were relevant to the study, using codes to sort the data into the following categories: “mostly irrelevant, completely irrelevant, other country, to be analyzed, political address on RASIM agenda”. These mutually exclusive pre-set codes helped me distinguish between news stories before engaging deeper with the content. The stories that had nothing to do with RASIM but got caught in our scraping process due to similar word selections (e.g. news updates about Syrian or Ukrainian war, or last name “Göçmen”) were placed under “completely irrelevant” category; whereas stories with one-to-two-word reference to RASIM without focusing on their cases were placed under “mostly irrelevant” category and were excluded from the analysis. Moving forward, news stories that talked about the conditions of RASIM in contexts other than Türkiye were placed under “other country” category, however, since some of them had references to repercussions for Türkiye, these news stories were included in the analysis on a case-by-case basis. Similarly, news stories on political speeches made by elite Turkish political representatives that were published

with no additional comments by the journalist were placed under “political address” category and were included in the analysis on a case-by-case basis.

Finally, the news stories that resonated completely with my research questions with their particular focus on RASIM-related incidents were marked with the code “to be analyzed”. 586 out of the 1000 articles were found to be relevant and selected for analysis to report preliminary findings in the following sections, excluding the mostly and completely irrelevant stories and the majority of stories on other countries. A breakdown of this smaller corpus by counts of articles per news outlet can be found in Table 2.

Table 2 Articles Analyzed Per News Outlet

| News Outlet | Total No. of Articles | No. of articles included in the analysis |
|--------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Bianet | 100 | 57 |
| Cumhuriyet | 100 | 63 |
| Hürriyet | 100 | 53 |
| Milliyet | 100 | 49 |
| Posta | 100 | 60 |
| Sabah | 100 | 66 |
| Sözcü | 100 | 69 |
| Takvim | 100 | 53 |
| Yeni Şafak | 100 | 54 |
| Birgün | 100 | 62 |
| Total | 1000 | 586 |

3.2.2 Format and Style of Reporting

In the next step, I was interested in observing styles of reporting when it came to migration. Gans (2011) had explained that journalists could not take on political roles speaking on behalf of the people they cover; however, they had the means to represent the news audience in their reporting as either in a general representation (as part of

diversifying news sources) or in a targeted representation (as part of efforts to inform a specific community). Moving from this capacity, Gans (ibid.) foregrounded multiperspectivism in the news – a term that stood for his proposal that journalists should strive to ‘look at’ society from other perspectives which would pave the way of producing alternative type of news such as ‘bottom-up’, ‘representative’, or ‘service’ news. Similarly, I was curious to see what styles of news journalists followed when they chose to represent RASIM. Specifically, I wanted to understand what the journalists were doing in the news story: what type of narrative they were creating (supportive, critical or neutral/informative); whether they were simply providing episodic coverage of the events or whether they were adding depth to the stories by incorporating research; and, whether they provide quotes from interviews with people affected or some form of analysis from experts. This line of inquiry, however, required a nuanced approach given the variety of content and styles of writing in my dataset.

My dataset included news stories characterized by brief, event-driven reports from larger news agencies and individual reporters, which I grouped under the category of "Episodic Coverage." Unlike a work of contextual journalism (Barnhurst & Mutz, 2006; Fink & Schudson, 2014) whose focus would be on the causes of the events beyond just reporting that the event happened, episodic news stories often lacked deeper analysis or context, focusing on the immediate events.

Opinion-editorial (op-ed) pieces differed from these as they were not event-driven and often conveyed the thoughts of public figures on selected topics. Since my interest was in understanding the work of journalists, I focused only on the op-ed pieces penned by journalists serving as columnists. The "Other" category encompassed all types of

writing that did not fall into episodic coverage or op-eds, such as investigative stories or more in-depth, thematic reporting. This category included thoroughly researched pieces, such as investigative reports on incidents of worker deaths over the last decade (Bianet, December 19, 2022), and special reports like "What is Xenophobia?" (Sabah, July 11, 2023), which sometimes resembled dictionary entries. Other examples include research-intensive articles, such as estimates on how many Afghan refugees other countries will receive (Sözcü, August 20, 2021), and special interviews with military personnel on potential civil conflict between Turks and Syrians (Sözcü, July 8, 2023). With this range of content in mind, I coded the style of my data into three mutually exclusive categories: "Episodic Coverage," "Opinion-Editorial," and "Other." A breakdown of the codes adopted in this part of analysis can be found in Table 3.

Table 3. Codes Regarding Style

| Code Name | Description | Examples |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Episodic Coverage | Brief, event-driven reports focused on immediate events, often lacking deeper analysis or context. | "70 migrants caught in Esenyurt truck raid." (Sabah, June 8, 2023) |
| Opinion-Editorial | Personal analysis or commentary, often reflecting the journalist's or public figure's viewpoint. | "What is Xenophobia?" (Sabah, July 11, 2023) |
| Other | In-depth, investigative, thematic, or special reports that provide deeper exploration of issues. | "A decade of worker deaths among refugees." (Bianet, Dec 19, 2022) |

3.2.3 Themes of Discussion

Finally, I was interested in exploring the dominant themes of discussion in migration reporting, what did journalists talk about when they talked about migration? To identify the dominant themes, I employed a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), beginning with an open coding process where I labeled recurring events, concepts and ideas that surfaced in the data with key phrases. These key phrases, i.e. codes, were initially broad, aiming to capture the subject and event of the news story. Then, I grouped similar codes into broader themes. For example, the texts where I labeled “rescue from boat”, “clash with Greek border security” or “rescue from sea” would later be aggregated under the same theme of rescue. These themes were refined through an iterative process of reviewing and comparing the coded data with previous examples to ensure consistency and relevance. These themes not only served as a foundation for understanding media framing but also informed the next phase of the research, where I aimed to dive deeper into the perspectives of the journalists who produce this content.

3.3 Semi-structured Interviews

Following the content analysis, the next step was to conduct interviews with journalists. My aim was to gather personal insights and experiences from professionals who have been actively reporting on migration and RASIM in Türkiye. The target group for these interviews included journalists, particularly reporters and editors, who could offer diverse perspectives on the subject.

A list of authors, was extracted from the news data set with the names of 93 individual authors, including the reporters and columnists as identified in the news story and excluding the names of larger news agency names such as Anadolu Agency, Ihlas

News Agency or Demirören News Agency. This meant that I had a substantial number of target participants to start the interview process, however there could be others who are prolific in the news coverage of RASIM yet not included in our target list due to (i) working for an outlet that do not identify their authors, (ii) working at one of the news outlets that are not included in our dataset, (iii) or whose reporting medium involves audio-visual or social media reporting and falls outside our scope.

Also on my radar were independent journalists such as the 27 people who covered migrant-related news from a lesser-known news outlet “Aykiri” and social media accounts “Karargâh” and “Mülteci Haberleri” and were subsequently taken into custody for spreading hate-speech on September 20, 2023. In order to be inclusive of potential participants, I employed a combination of convenience and snowballing sampling methodologies, moving from reaching out to all individuals on the list of authors and asking them and or their agency to refer to people who they think would be good candidates for this research. Thus, the selection of interview participants began with an initial list of 93 journalists from our database; however, this list was not a limitation. It acted as a foundational pool from which I could draw additional participants as needed.

I aimed at interviewing at least one reporter or news director, photojournalist, editor from each outlet and 5 independent journalists, totaling around 15 interviews. Journalists highlighted in the content analysis were given priority, and an initial round of introductions and invitations were extended to these individuals. Furthermore, each participant was encouraged to recommend colleagues who possess expertise in covering migration and displacement. This strategy ensured the expansion of our participant pool through a snowballing recruitment process.

Upon identification and recruitment of participants, the study advanced with conducting semi-structured interviews, expected to last around 1 hour. The interviews were designed to delve into various aspects of journalistic practices in the context of covering migration-related issues. The interview guide (Appendix I), comprising 10-15 main questions, balances open-ended inquiries for detailed, narrative responses with closed questions for specific, factual information. Specifically, these interviews explored:

- Journalists' personal and social perceptions of their roles.
- The typical workday and reporting process for migration-related stories.
- The challenges journalists encounter in covering migration related topics.
- How their perception of RASIM evolved over time, particularly whether they think RASIM are stigmatized in Türkiye
- Whether and how polarization influences their work and what it means to perform well in a polarized context.

Adaptability was a cornerstone of the interview process. The semi-structured format allowed for the integration of follow-up questions and the flexibility to pursue intriguing insights offered by the participant. Additionally, there are questions that are geared toward specific news outlet issues or journalists to discuss. News outlet specific questions were informed by my earlier content analysis, allowing me to ask, for example, what makes Bianet more likely to cover the failures or violence that occurs against RASIM in Greece and less likely to cover “popular” themes such as reporting on criminality or counting the numbers of RASIM. Similarly, journalist specific questions were derived from the content analysis of the journalists' earlier writing, asking, for example, how their perception of the refugee situation has evolved over time, with prompts from their news stories across time.

3.3.1 Interview Data Collection

Following a three-months long outreach period which involved contacting the journalists on my radar via (i) their publicly available information (e-mail addresses,

LinkedIn/Twitter/Instagram pages, personal blogs), (ii) their employers (on-site contact/off-site calls), or (iii) interpersonal communication with colleagues; I was able to conduct a total of 14 interviews, spanning across a total of 6 months from December 2023 to June 2024.. While this number was not near the goal I had in mind in earlier phases of the research, I was also satisfied with the distribution of variance among my participants almost each of whom came from different news outlets, and collectively contributed insights from 15 well-known “newsrooms”²¹ across Türkiye. Unfortunately, Yeni Şafak, Posta and Sözcü were not responsive to any of my outreach efforts and thus were not represented in the interview data²²; however, I was able to reach at least one journalist from 7 out of 10 originally intended news agencies: Sabah, Cumhuriyet, Milliyet, Hürriyet, Birgün, Bianet, Takvim.

As such, the sample presents a balanced selection of experts from mainstream and alternative media with majority of participants who have been in the field for more than 5 years, giving them time to specialize in their areas. Thus, while the number of participants in the interviews is admittedly and regrettably low, I feel confident in the generalizability of my findings to larger Turkish news media with the wide spectrum of political views and newsroom experiences they represent.

²¹ Newsroom here stands as an umbrella term to all the settings within which two and more journalists come together to operate a news outlet. It helps me talk about large conglomerates and for example twitter news sites with two-three writer/editors and still millions of following.

²² All agencies were contacted multiple times and through different channels. I learned that Posta works remotely and allows outside contact only via a third-party call center which directs you to an e-mail line that never responds. Sözcü was more corporate in this sense since journalists could be found working at their offices at its headquarters in Maslak which I visited, yet I was again directed to first secure appointments via e-mails which never responded. I do not think the absence of Posta in the interview data is a big loss since their original news story contribution was thin on the ground; however, the absence of Sözcü and Yeni Safak is unfortunate since their columnists have been the topic of controversy with their anti-RASIM and pro-RASIM writing respectively many times. This should be acknowledged as a limitation of this study and future research can look into ways of securing communication with these outlets.

In addition to gaining insights on my pre-selected news outlets, I came to learn that my participants -in the past and sometimes simultaneously- worked for other large and well-established news conglomerates such as Anadolu Agency (which provided a big portion of news to my target news outlets), Deutsche Welle, Reuters, Independent , CNN, and smaller yet famous (at least 1 million following) news platforms such as Ajans Muhbir, two local newspapers from Bursa and Ankara, GazeteDuvar, and Mezopotamya Ajansi. Their expertise has been crucial in putting my target news outlets to comparison and brainstorm different ways of approaching migration reporting.

3.3.2 Interview Design

Going into the interviews, I envisioned structuring the meetings into three main sections. First, we would get to know each other, digging deeper into the personal and professional background of the participant. We would discuss selected news stories they wrote, their writing processes and challenges in this step. Second, we would discuss the state of migration reporting in Türkiye, probing for the participant`s understanding of the good and bad in the coverage of RASIM on Turkish outlets. I also aimed at exploring their perception of polarization and how it affects their work in this section. Lastly, I would ask them to think more abstractly about coverage of migration and discuss the best practices they envision for reporters who cover RASIM in the future. Overall, we abided by this structure while making adjustments to the questions in line with the participant`s expertise.

Each interview lasted between one to two hours and took place over Zoom after receiving verbal approval of the participant to record. Once the interview was completed, I listened to the recordings and manually corrected the transcripts that were auto

generated by Zoom. This manual correction process was crucial to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data, as auto-generated transcripts can often contain errors or misinterpretations, especially with specialized terminology or nuances in speech. Listening and reviewing each interview enabled me to extract meaningful insights and patterns from our discussion as I moved to carry important quotes for analysis in the sections that follow. The corrected transcripts were systematically analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes, perspectives, and insights from the journalists regarding the content and format of RASIM coverage.

3.4 Interview Data Analysis

Upon completing interview data collection, I coded my data using NVivo 14 (Lumivero, 2023) and creating cases per interviewee. The initial codes I had on NVivo was a corresponding list of questions from the interview guide in order to make it easier to locate the exact dialogues pertaining questions. I also added sub-codes under these questions indicating common answers, for example interview question I-b asks “What type of stories do you enjoy investigating?”; and to this, umbrella answers “human rights violations”, “environmental concerns”, “women`s rights and well-being” emerge which I employ as codes for the analysis. At the same time, I coded for the demographics (age, gender, education, ethnicity, political identity) and professional background (current/former workplaces, the role as in reporter, editor, news director etc., and years on the job) of the participant.

Additionally, the findings from the content analysis were integrated as codes to connect the interview data with the previously identified seven themes of news stories (Irregular Migrant Hunt, Policy Domestic, Policy International, Rescue, Solidarity,

Criminality, and Fear/Threat). Themes that emerged within the interview such as “the dearth of training on attending post-traumatic populations” were added to codes to be analyzed to see their prevalence across the interviews. A full break-down of these codes and screenshots from my NVivo analysis page can be found on Figure 3.

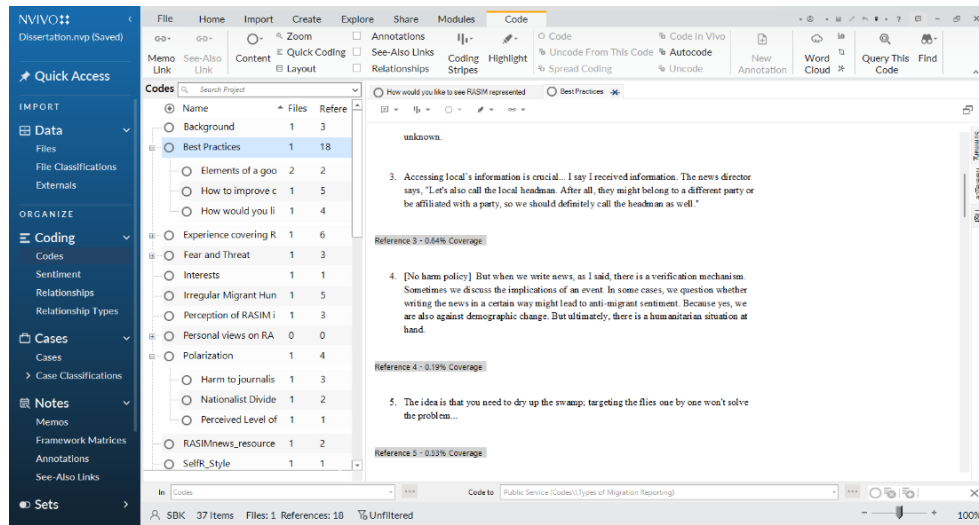


Figure 4. Overview of Nvivo Set-up

To sum up, this chapter presented an overview of methodologies adopted as part of this dissertation research. The following chapters report findings from analyses as framed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS FROM THE NEWS DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter presents findings from the analysis of migration reporting in Türkiye in years 2022 and 2023, addressing the question of: “What are overarching themes in the coverage of refugees, asylum-seekers and immigrants (RASIM)?”. The corpus consisted of 1,000 news articles - randomly selected from a pool of approximately eleven thousand articles- collected from a range of Turkish media outlets between January 1, 2022 and August 1, 2023. The analysis is organized into three sections, reporting on dominant format, style and the themes of discussion as seen in the news.

4.1 Format and Style of Reporting on Migration

In Chapter 3, as part of the data analysis methodology description, I explained that some news stories in my dataset appeared quite similar in their formats (i.e. the structure/length/depth of the news story), particularly those that were brief, spot-like stories that solely ‘carried’ information, providing snap-shots of events they narrated. Three codes, namely “episodic coverage”, “opinion-editorial”, and “other”, were used to distribute the stories to mutually exclusive categories. Table 4 shows a breakdown of news stories divided to these categories.

The analysis of the news articles reveals a significant dominance of episodic coverage in reporting subjects that relate to RASIM. Episodic coverage, characterized by brief, spot-like, event driven reports that often lack deeper analysis or context, constitutes 45% of news stories analyzed as part of this research (N=1000), and 75% of the articles that were found relevant to media representation of RASIM (N=586).

Episodic coverage outnumbers opinion-editorial pieces and other forms of coverage by a striking ratio of 9 to 1, meaning almost every other news story you will read in Turkish on the topic of RASIM will be a short description of how many RASIM and human smugglers were caught, along with where and when the operation took place. As such, the audience is compelled to rely on one-time news coverage of singular events (such as the operation that led to 70 RASIM being caught) without the added depth of research or commentary (such as what happens to these people pursuantly, the identities of the actors involved with trafficking, or how interviews with locals on the frequency and manner of these operations).

Table 4. Styles Per News Outlet

| News Outlet | Episodic | Op-Ed | Other |
|--------------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| Bianet | 28 | 8 | 16 |
| Cumhuriyet | 39 | 13 | 5 |
| Hürriyet | 39 | 5 | 1 |
| Milliyet | 43 | 2 | 0 |
| Posta | 56 | 0 | 1 |
| Sabah | 53 | 4 | 3 |
| Sözcü | 49 | 6 | 5 |
| Takvim | 49 | 0 | 2 |
| Yeni Şafak | 45 | 6 | 2 |
| Birgün | 44 | 9 | 5 |
| Total | 445 | 53 | 40 |

These episodic stories typically focus on immediate events such as the capture of irregular migrants or public speeches concerning, providing basic details like the location, the number of individuals involved, and the authorities responsible. When the subject is more politically charged, for example when a minister is making announcements on migration policy, the episodic coverage simply “forwards” their words in sections from their speeches. Mainstream outlets like *Posta* and *Sabah* lead in the

frequency of such reports, publishing 56 and 53 episodic stories respectively (out of 100 for each), doubling their rival Bianet (N=28), an online news platform known for its human-rights focused reporting.

The prevalence of episodic coverage is not just a random occurrence; to the opposite, I believe it reflects a broader trend across Turkish news media to prioritize quick, surface-level reporting over more investigative reporting. Put simply, I do not believe that existence of such episodic coverage is a problem, especially given Türkiye's geopolitical location that leaves it vulnerable for crimes such as human smuggling and making it a likely point-of-interest for news readers across the country. However, I believe they can be problematic for fortifying paranoia around security and paves the way for further stigmatization of RASIM for a number of reasons.

First is the host people's high exposure to similar news stories. This brings cultivation theory to mind which argues that exposure to media 'cultivates' perceptions of reality, amplifying certain views of it. Gerbner et al. (1980) proposed the concept "mean world syndrome" to explore the effects of long-term exposure to media violence. They argued that moderate to heavy exposure to violence in media can cause people to experience higher levels of anxiety and alertness to perceived (or, as some might dare to say, imagined) threats. Building up on mean world syndrome, Geurts et al. (2021) showed the effects of exposure to TV news in cultivating support for restrictive immigration policies. Similarly, episodic and crime-ridden character of the news stories might be contributing to a mean world syndrome, cultivating a perception of reality with heightened anxiety over ever-increasing numbers of border crossings.

Second reason why episodic coverage on RASIM might be detrimental to relationships with the locals is that such news stories tend to reduce RASIM to ethnicities and criminality statuses. For example, a common description of the events in these episodic news stories can be found in the following lines:

Çanakkale'nin Ayvacık ilçesi açıklarında hareket halindeki lastik bot içinde Afganistan uyruklu 20 kaçak göçmen, Sahil Güvenlik ekiplerince yakalandı. Kuşadası ilçesinde de 11 düzensiz göçmen yakalandı. *Off the coast of Ayvacık district in Çanakkale, 20 illegal immigrants of Afghan nationality moving in a rubber boat were caught by Coast Guard teams. In the Kuşadası district of Aydın, 11 irregular migrants were also caught.*' (Milliyet, August 4, 2023; My translation).

These lines are followed by brief information on which removal center they were taken next and what sorts of equipment was used during the operation. There is no mention on the motive of crossings, the ages, the gender or any other details on RASIM's end other than their ethnicities and numbers. This connects to the third and final reason why episodic coverage can be detrimental to equitable representation RASIM, with its limited amount or complete lack of information on the root causes of problem.

Overall, a consensus becomes noticeable across news outlets regardless of their political standing, a tendency to obsessively monitor the number of people who have been caught moving across borders or strolling the cities without proper documentation, one that surfaces in all news outlets except for Bianet and Birgün. This obsession with monitoring numbers means, mainstream news outlets that are known for their close ties to the incumbent party, such as Hürriyet and Sabah, (and thus "in theory" side with pro-RASIM views) do not in fact refrain from news that can potentially fuel the stigmatization of RASIM. The overwhelming focus on short, event-driven reports creates

a narrative that is both repetitive and shallow, contributing to a one-dimensional understanding of the complex and multifaceted issue of migration.

4.2 Themes of Discussion

In Chapter 3, I explained how the thematic codes were developed iteratively and in dialogue with the existing literature on migration and media. This iterative process yielded a set of codes that capture the dominant themes present in the news coverage of RASIM. The analysis returned the following themes of discussion with their sub-categories: Irregular Migrant Hunt (Capture/Deportation), Rescue, Criminality (Border/Urban), Policy (International/Domestic), Fear/Threat, Solidarity. These categories were not mutually exclusive but rather descriptive in helping me locate the subject of the news story. Table 5 presents an overview of these themes.

This breakdown showed that certain events dominated the news, particularly those that had to do with border management and securitization. The news media tended to emphasize political agendas rather than the human impact and lived experiences of migration. Most importantly, the analysis showed that Turkish news media on migration could be contributing to polarization on migration by not only denying their readers high-quality, in-depth reporting on facts regarding migration but also by enabling (proliferating/perpetuating) mental associations between the act of seeking refuge with criminality.

All the talk on the irregular and/or illegal migration (depending on where you stand on the spectrum of views on migration rights) overshadows human-interest stories or stories that interest actual human beings and, I believe, is a strategy of appeasing assumably resentful crowds of citizens. This is a point I will dig deeper with the

interviews in the following chapters, for the moment, let us take a step back and explain findings per theme of discussion.

Table 5. Themes of Discussion in Analyzed News Stories

| Theme | Description | Keywords | Translation | Frequency |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Irregular Migrant Hunt | Reports on efforts to detain or deport irregular migrants. | kaçak göçmen, düzensiz göçmen, yakalandı, geçişi engellendi, sınır dışı edildi, | Illegal migrant, irregular migrant, captured, stopped from crossing, deported | 143 |
| Policy Domestic | Domestic policy or party politics, political updates regarding RASIM in Türkiye. | Açıkladı, duyurdu, ifade etti, cevap | Explained, announced, expressed, responded | 67 |
| Policy International | Policies or discussions involving international agreements, political updates regarding RASIM in Türkiye. | Belirtti, açıkladı, duyurdu, Birleşmiş Milletler, Yunanistan | Stated, explained, announced, United Nations, Greece | 52 |
| Rescue | Instances of rescue particularly on when individuals are stranded on boats en route to Europe | Kurtarıldı, kurtardı | Saved, rescued | 43 |
| Solidarity | Articles highlighting solidarity with RASIM, protests, workshop or events organized in favor of RASIM. | Mülteci odaklı, mülteci işçi, kadın mücadelesi, Mülteci düşmanlığı | Refugee-oriented, refugee worker, women`s struggle/solidarity, enmity towards refugees | 43 |
| Criminality | Related to crimes by or against migrants or refugees. | gözüaltına alındı, şüpheli, tutuklandı, | Taken to custody, suspect, arrested | 37 |
| Fear/Threat | Articles discussing fears or threats related to migration. | sığınmacı sorunu, problem, tehdit, istila | Refugee-problem, problem, threat, invasion | 15 |

The most dominant theme, “Irregular Migrant Hunt” entailed a specific format of news that were designed to report incidents where security forces of the state (including police, gendarme and officers in Migration Centers) catch RASIM without proper documentation and the journalists move onto report either their moment of capture, describe how many have been deported or, provide information on the criminal network that helped RASIM. There are in fact two types of names attributed to RASIM in this category, “düzensiz göçmen”/irregular migrants and “kaçak göçmen”/ illegal migrants, whose usage has a symbolic meaning that needs to be explained slightly more in depth.

In Chapter 1, I discussed that my earlier experience with researching Turkish news media on RASIM had shown reactionary policy making practices, formulating new names and rights for different displaced as they come. For example, the word “mülteci”/refugee entered Turkish legal jargon with 1951 Geneva Convention which defined a refugee as a person who had to leave their country due to fear of prosecution, but with the geographical limitation that Türkiye would only recognize individuals from European origin as refugees. With the additional protocol to Geneva Convention (New York Protocol 1977), Türkiye announced a new legal term “sığınmacı”/”asylum-seeker” for Eastern populations who are displaced due to similar reasons to refugees. The news media did not seem to differentiate between asylum-seekers and refugees for a while, using the names refugees and immigrants for small groups of RASIM until Iraqi asylum-seekers started arriving in large numbers following the Gulf War. Several columnists at the time explained this naming was a political choice to remind Iraqi individuals they are not staying permanently²³.

²³ For a detailed review of these terms in early 1990s, see Doğan’s column titled “*Sığınmacı*” diye yeni bir tanım üretiliyor (Cumhuriyet, April 3, 1991).

In contrast, this time with the adaptation of “düzensiz göçmen”/irregular migrants and “kaçak göçmen”/ illegal migrants, I see a humanizing strategy pointing to a resistance by pro-RASIM politicians in Türkiye to push back on derogatory political naming of RASIM. “Düzensiz göçmen” if directly translated means “irregular migrant”, pointing a yet newer term and a concept. Presidency of Migration Management (n.d.) on their website defines this name as follows:

Irregular migration refers to illegally entering a country, staying in a country illegally, or entering legally but not leaving within the legal period. It is a subject that needs to be considered separately in terms of destination, transit, and source countries. For destination countries, irregular migration includes individuals who come to their country through illegal means or who enter legally but do not leave within the legal departure period; for source countries, it involves individuals who cross country borders without adhering to necessary procedures while leaving their country. For transit countries, it comprises individuals from source countries who enter the country through legal or illegal means to reach the destination country, using it as a transit country before leaving its border.

This term surfaces in 197 news stories in my corpus and it is seen that incumbent party representatives, governments officials and pro-government news outlets prefer this term over its more internationally acknowledged equivalent “kaçak göçmen”/illegal migrant. Since it also involves people who legally entered the country yet overstayed their visa, or people who cross country borders “without adhering to necessary procedures”, the term ‘irregular migrant’ brings technical difficulties and complications to light, painting RASIM in a more positive light, as if they just had one missing document. This, I believe is a highly political choice between the terms irregular and illegal; and, these are new additions to the expanding vocabulary of migration in Türkiye

Coming to the second major name given to RASIM under this category, “Kaçak göçmen” if directly translated means “unauthorized immigrant”, or with its more

internationally known usage “illegal immigrant”, referring to “a foreigner who enters or exists in a country through illegal means, resides in that country illegally or has entered a country legally but continues to stay in the country despite the expiration of their legal residency period” (The Gendarmerie General Command, n.d). This name appears in 64 news stories that report on capture, processing and/or deportation of illegal migrants and collocates with words insinuating criminality. The emergence of these two terms and dominance of “irregular” over “illegal”, I believe, is a meaningful finding for my study to acknowledge, and PMM’s role in pushing for this more positive naming should be acknowledged.

Moving on with the analysis, simple capture stories in “Irregular Migrant Hunt” category are two lines to a paragraph news stories, for example: “Çanakkale’de Afganistan uyruklu 57 kaçak göçmen yakalandı”, “57 irregular migrants of Afghan origin have been captured in Canakkale” (Posta, August 3 2023). Some of these stories are longer and provide in-depth information on the details of the operation through which RASIM were caught, and some run investigative stories on what happens to the criminal networks behind irregular migrant crossings. In majority of cases, there is no information or follow up on what happens to RASIM who get caught other than that they will be processed.

Closely linked to irregular migrant hunt news stories, the “Rescue” news stories talked about rescue operations for RASIM particularly along the border with Greece were second most observed news stories to in this dataset. These stories narrated the events in which RASIM were found stranded on the sea, either being reported by naval security forces or upon RASIM’s own call for rescue, and consecutively were “rescued” to be

handed to provincial migration bureaus. A good number of these news stories openly blamed Greece for “pushing the migrants back into the sea” (Milliyet, August 5, 2023) and some praised Türkiye on its ‘heroic’ actions in this matter. Unsurprisingly, the news outlets known for their closer ties to incumbent party, Sabah and Milliyet, took the lead in production of this line of news stories. What was surprising is that almost all these rescue news stories came to an end providing information on the rescue operation with no follow up on what expects the RASIM after that moment of rescue. This is where I believe rescue and hunt themes ironically come together, where two seemingly contradicting actions (capturing and rescuing), framed in completely different narratives, do in fact serve to the same end from the perspective of the RASIM, where the story ends with their detainment.

Thirdly, “Policy” was a code I used to bring together news stories that reported on or discussed migration policies pertinent to Türkiye. These articles differed from the others with their focus on international or domestic political updates such as the announcement of Germany’s offer to relocate some of its RASIM populations back to Türkiye (Sözcü, September 23 2022) or keeping an eye on Turkish political parties’ pre-election agendas and promises on migration regulation (Cumhuriyet, July 10, 2023). Additionally, the content was nuanced by the perspective from which policies were discussed, some news stories were addressed to citizens and others to RASIM. For the citizens, these policy related articles covered issues like EU visa rejections or foreign worker rights. In the news stories that addresses RASIM, the coverage focused on the personal impact of these policies, including adjustments to Turkish settlement laws and the implications of political rhetoric on migrants, thereby offering insights into how these

policies directly affect the lives and legal statuses of RASIM within Turkey.

Unfortunately, yet unsurprisingly, the number of policy coverage for the benefit of RASIM (i.e. circulation of information that would be useful for the RASIM) was thin on the ground (N= 12) and stories in this category was dominated by heated debates between political parties in Türkiye.

The domestic policy news stories (N=67) were mostly narratives of political party representatives explaining their political agendas on RASIM (Sabah, March 2 2022), or government officials making announcements on the numbers of RASIM (Yeni Şafak, June 5 2022), thus mostly involving public speeches by political elites that are delivered to inform Turkish citizens on the state of RASIM. The international policy news stories (N=52) included coverage of announcements from UN, other country representatives or international agreements on the future of RASIM (Birgün, January 10 2023). The review of both domestic and international policy news stories reveals a discernible preference for regulations aimed at managing and curbing RASIM intake. This trend underscores a policy orientation more towards containment than integration, and the priority given to elite voices.

Next, “Criminality” emerged as an important theme with recurring news stories depicting crimes committed by and/or against RASIM in either an urban setting or while crossing the borders. The stories that talk about criminality against RASIM vary from, for example, the mysterious death of a RASIM (Cumhuriyet, July 12 2023) with a plain description just like any other mysterious murder cases or covering the death of a refugee child after being punched by an officer in the removal center in detail and calling to stand in solidarity with RASIM (Bianet, February 17 2022).

There are also stories where a crime committed by a RASIM is followed by crimes committed against RASIM such as when numerous RASIM were attacked and left scared to leave their homes after a Turkish citizen claimed their dog was poisoned by a Syrian RASIM (Cumhuriyet, July 5 2023; Sözcü, July 3, 2023). This case where Syrian refugees were accused of poisoning a local's dog, leading to heightened tensions and instances of public outrage, encapsulates the precarious situation faced by RASIM, who find themselves the targets of communal ire based on allegations of criminal behavior. Another example is when a Pakistani RASIM secretly filmed women and posts their visuals on social media with sexualized and provocative captions about Turkish women (Sabah, April 20 2023) which led to the jailing of the perpetrator and public beating of multiple young male RASIM in different cities. Figure 4 shows the image of a public lynching incident following reporting on alleged crimes by RASIM as seen on television news.



Figure 5. Image Depicting Conflict between Locals and RASIM after Child-Abuse Allegations.

These examples not only highlight the vulnerabilities of RASIM but also the societal fissures that emerge in the wake of such accusations. Since the numbers of news stories that mentioned crimes (either by RASIM or local people) were low, I grouped these news stories together under the umbrella name ‘Criminality’. This grouping also allowed me to pay attention to changes in the content when the perpetrator was identified as either RASIM or citizen.

While not as densely clustered as the former categories, a set of news stories and opinion pieces emerged with a particular focus on evaluating fears and threats Turkish people and state will be facing due its role as a host country. Called the “Fear/Threat” category, the dominant themes of discussion in the news stories marked with this code comment on Turkish people’s alleged fears varying from personal and cultural sensibilities (e.g. loss of cultural identity, “Arabization”, to political (e.g. Hyperpolarization, Internal Conflict, Border Security, Terror) and financial ones (e.g. loss of jobs, economic deterioration, employee uprisings). Unsurprisingly, these stories mostly came from one news outlet: Sözcü, the one news outlet that stands out with clear ties to opposition parties in the country and amplifies liberal and nationalist voices who do not wish any RASIM presence in the country.

Finally, news stories that seemingly adopted a humanitarian or solution-oriented approach or openly expressed support for RASIM were grouped together under the “Solidarity” theme of discussion. These stories were distinguished from others by not only the offering steps to be taken to stand in solidarity with RASIM but also with the variety of actors involved in the story, including humanitarian organizations, gender equality and women's rights organizations among its informants. Sadly, these themes

only surfaced in two news outlets: Birgün and Bianet who were identified as online, independent news agencies, representing alternative media.

4.3 Discussion

In an increasingly digitalized media landscape, the decision to sacrifice depth for immediacy is one that journalists face every day, regardless of their subject or area of expertise. Yet, I argue that this trade-off needs to be critically examined when covering migration, resisting the availability of spot-like pieces of information or numbers made available by larger news agencies. Central to this discussion is a belief that news narratives can either bridge or deepen social divides, feeding into polarization. The findings presented in earlier sections such as the sheer volume of “Irregular Migrant Hunt” news stories, the overwhelming preference for episodic over thematic reporting or the strategic selection of reference terms like “illegal” versus “irregular” lend support to this belief.

To start with, it was striking to see the volume of news stories that fell under the “Irregular Migrant Hunt” category which easily exceeded the number of Fear/Threat news stories. This means, the bigger emphasis is on regulating numbers instead of further stigmatizing RASIM. Alongside this, the 'Rescue' operations theme presents a dichotomy, portraying efforts of salvation at the borders and overseas, a narrative that when juxtaposed against the hunt theme, reveals the multifaceted nature of state and societal responses to migration. These rescue stories, while showcasing acts of humanitarianism, often ended without further discussion on the future of those “rescued”, leaving a narrative gap that mirrors the broader uncertainty faced by RASIM in Türkiye.

Equally revealing was the observation of policy discussions—wherein the scarcity of coverage beneficial to RASIM contrasted sharply with the abundance of politically charged debates concerning Türkiye’s own international relations. The total number of articles under this theme was 119, making up 20% of the total. Majority of these news were simple reports from speeches of political figures, and on rare occasions, interviews with government personnel. Interestingly, the format of the news stories under “Policy” themes, their length and content were similar across news outlets. *Sözcü*, as an example to the far-left anti-migration news outlets (*Sözcü*, March 17, 2021) reports on the passing of a refugee agreement between Türkiye and EU in the same neutral tone, lengthy quotes with shallow descriptions and format of writing as its right-wing pro-refugee counterpart, *Posta*, when it reports on Minister Akar’s speech highlighting operations taking place to enable “voluntary” returns of RASIM of Syrian origin to Syria (*Posta*, April 26, 2024).

Stories focusing on crimes by or against RASIM (N=37), and narratives that amplify societal fears (N=15), surfaced at lower frequencies, amounting to 9 percent of the total 586 news articles selected for analysis. These were rarely on crimes committed by RASIM, only three articles in my sample dataset mentioned murders resulting from interpersonal conflicts, and petty crimes involving RASIM. This is surprising given the consolidated opposition to hosting migrants and the anti-immigrant debates that take place on Turkish social media (Babula et al., 2022; Cirakoglu, 2021; Aksak et al., 2021; Özdüzen et al., 2021), one could expect RASIM to be painted in a more hostile light.

While the absence of crime news affiliated with RASIM might seem like a good thing for harmonization efforts; it could also mean a neglect in reporting crimes *against* RASIM. Bianet (June 21, 2023) published a recent report prepared by Human Rights

Foundation of Turkey (TIHV) that states “at least 21 refugee have died in Türkiye between January 2020 and November 2022”, a timeframe that somewhat overlaps with our data analysis. After encountering this article in my dataset, I dived deeper into annual report prepared by TIHV and their efforts to monitor human rights violations (particularly the racially charged violent attacks on individuals) meticulously needs to be praised. However, when I turned to news media to double check these cases, I was able to see that less than half of the attacks mentioned on the annual reports would find their place on news media. For example, the case of Muhammed Savas, a Syrian national who got attacked by a mob of racist citizens as was noted on the 2020 report (THIV, 2020, p.41) was only picked up by Göçmeniz.org, a non-profit advocacy platform for migrants in Türkiye and was not mentioned by any of the major news outlets in our radar -with many other examples that can be found on TIHV’s list. This means that documented crimes against RASIM go unacknowledged, pointing towards a serious neglect by news media professionals. Of course, there is the possibility that this is an “intended” neglect, a question I will explore further with the interviews.

Last but not least, the 'Solidarity' theme (N=43, ~5% of the 1000 total) offered a glimpse into the potential for media to foster a more inclusive and supportive discourse around migration. Worker deaths is a major point of solidarity with RASIM, both mainstream (e.g. Hürriyet, May 7, 2022) and independent news outlets (e.g. Birgün, March 9, 2022) seemingly come together in their reports on the number of deaths among migrant workers and their calls for advocacy. While at lower frequencies, gender-based solidarity is visible LGBT+ support initiatives and NGOs organizing events to raise awareness on the cases of migrants (Bianet, June 29, 2023). The involvement of various

actors, from humanitarian organizations to gender equality and women's rights groups, in these stories, showcases the collaborative efforts being made towards the integration and support of RASIM. However, the limited presence of these narratives points to a need for greater media attention to solutions-oriented and supportive coverage of migration issues.

4.4 Modifications to Interviews with Journalists

As I move forward, these findings inform the direction of subsequent interviews and contribute to a broader understanding of the complex dynamics at play in migration reporting in Türkiye.

To start with, the analysis shows that new reference terms, i.e. “kaçak/düzensiz göçmen” ‘illegal/irregular migrant’ are being formulated despite their lack of legal recognition or basis in actual numbers. The findings indicate that the news outlets that are closest to the incumbent party such as Sabah and Milliyet are the major producers of this rhetoric; however, all mainstream news outlets join in on this act, proliferating the news stories that are usually from the same news agencies (Anadolu, İhlas or Demirören News Agency). This raises questions about the reasoning behind the decision to proliferate “Irregular Migrant Hunt” news stories. Is it simply convenient or purposeful to report on this topic? Is it the public’s heightening fear over border security that drives such stories? Or, is it the journalist’s predilection to keep accounts on the head counts? More importantly, could the proliferation of such news be a governmental strategy to appease the crowds’ hungers for mass deportation of RASIM?

One notable finding is the ironic contrast between how similar events are portrayed in "Rescue" and "Hunt" stories. In many cases, when Turkish security forces intercept RASIM (often at sea) and transfer them to migration offices, the same event is

framed in two opposing ways. Some stories present it as a "rescue" from danger, while others describe it as a "capture" leading to processing at a removal center. This raises questions about how journalists decide which perspective to adopt. Reporters choose to call these a moment of 'rescue' from a dreadful end over the sea or a moment of 'capture', both of which end in the same processing of the RASIM in a removal center. Do they notice the irony themselves? And where, from their perspective, does a "rescue" story begin and end?

Moreover, having conducted the content analysis and seeing the debates surrounding criminality, I realized that it would be useful to incorporate questions exploring participants' internal debates and ethical considerations when reporting on crimes committed by RASIM. Thus, I added the following questions to be asked to pertinent reporters and editors: "Considering the potential for your reporting to ignite public outrage, to incite further violence or fear, how do you assess the risk versus the necessity of bringing these stories to light? Are there preventive measures you take to mitigate negative outcomes?", "Can you recall a migration story that you decided not to run with, despite its potential interest? What made you hold back, and do you ever regret not publishing it?".

To conclude Chapter 4, the content analysis of 1,000 news stories from a larger dataset of 11,150 on refugees, asylum-seekers, and immigrants in Türkiye revealed a predominance of episodic coverage, especially in mainstream outlets, often focusing on the capture and deportation of migrants. The most common stories were "Irregular Migrant Hunts," followed by reports on policy and rescues at sea. Although thematic coverage offering deeper insights, such as the education of RASIM children, was less

frequent, these findings highlighted the patterns and preferences in migration reporting. Moving forward, the following chapters present insights attained from interviews with journalists from selected Turkish news outlets. The next chapter offers a look into journalistic practices, i.e. logics of practice, in migration reporting as described by my participants.

CHAPTER 5

PRACTICE OF MIGRATION REPORTING: INSIGHT FROM INTERVIEWS WITH JOURNALISTS

Previously, on Chapter 4, I presented findings from a content analysis of randomly selected (N=1,000) news stories from a larger collection (N= 11,150) of news related to refugees, asylum-seekers and immigrants in Türkiye. The major shortcomings identified through this analysis were:

- Predominance of episodic, event-driven reporting
- Dominance of ‘Irregular Migrant Hunt’ news stories
- Aggregation of news copied from larger news agencies

This analysis showed the dominance of episodic coverage, especially in mainstream outlets, which reduced migration issues to simplistic event-based reports, often highlighting the capture and deportation of migrants.

The most frequent type of news story in my dataset was an “Irregular Migrant Hunt” story. This meant that a reader who turns to Turkish news media for their morning news briefing, was most likely to read a spot-like news story that talked about the moment a number of irregular migrants who were caught (or sometimes “rescued”) by security forces and where they were taken followingly. These were followed by a mix of episodic, op-ed and other styles of reporting on domestic and international policy, and rescue of RASIM from capsizing boats over the Mediterranean. Although less prevalent, there were also incidents of thematic reporting providing deeper insights into the aftermath of migration, foregrounding solidarity with RASIM on topics such as the state of RASIM children’s education.

Overall, these findings showed that there was a strong interest in certain subjects over the others (e.g. articles on number of RASIM over their welfare), some were more

desirable, some were easier. Regardless, the origin of their interest in such subjects could not be identified by only conducting the content analysis. Thus, I decided to consult with journalists with expertise on covering migration on how to explain why certain content and style of reporting were favored over the others through our interviews.

Serving to this end, Chapter 5 builds on the findings from the content analysis in Chapter 4 and draws from interviews with journalists to explore the logics of practice—namely, the motivations, constraints, and interpretations that shape news coverage of RASIM in Türkiye. In this sense, Chapter 5 serves as an exploration into practice of migration reporting, asking why journalists believe they or their colleagues/competing news outlets choose to report migration in the way they do.

As Bourdieu (1990) explains, ‘practice’ operates according to its own logic, distinct from the theoretical models often used to study it. He notes,

Science has a time which is not that of practice...Practice has a logic which is not that of the logician...Probably the only way to give an account of the practical coherence of practices and works is to construct generative models which reproduce in their own terms the logic from which that coherence is generated... (Bourdieu, 1990)

This quote serve as a criticism of fallacies scientists might find themselves facing, such as believing that their proposal for ‘ideal practice’ can in fact match the reality synchronously. The time of ‘science’ exceeds the current day, whereas practice of journalism is embedded in the many layers forming our current reality. Moreover, Bourdieu undermines the belief that researchers who explore the practice from outside can grasp it (and all the decision-making processes involved) in its totality. I agree with this view that although shortcomings can be identified in migration reporting, it is also a Sisyphean wait to expect for a journalist to keep up with every recommendation that scholars produce for the ‘ideal’ practice of journalism, let alone migration reporting.

However, I also agree Bourdieu (1990) in that, as researchers, we can strive to identify practical coherence through constructing generative models, and are tasked to think about ‘ideals’ of practice in our ‘time’ of science.

5.1 Logics of Practice in Migration Reporting

Applying Bourdieu’s lens to the news production process, I set out to explore the ways in which journalists navigate and make sense of institutional, social, and personal factors to produce migration stories in Türkiye. For the first part of the interviews, I sought to uncover the decision-making processes behind story selection, writing, and editing among Turkish journalists. The content analysis in Chapter 4 pointed to shifts in formats and themes within migration reporting, notably a preference for brief, episodic news stories reporting on arrests of irregular migrants, which contrasted with the more varied coverage trends of the mid-2010s (Erdogan, 2015; Kavakli, 2020). However, the underlying motivations and external factors driving this shift were unclear from content analysis alone. To address this, I asked participants to describe the dominant formats they observe in migration reporting and their reasoning behind these choices.

As a brief reminder of the methodology, a total of 14 semi-structured interviews with journalists (reporters, editors, news owners, and a photo-editor) were held either in-person or via Zoom, spanning across a total of 6 months from December 2023 to June 2024.

Participants shared observations on dominant themes of discussions and reporting styles, reflecting various motivations, including public accountability, agency reliance, and ideological perspectives. Their responses highlighted structural and institutional pressures shaping how migration stories are produced. For instance, a majority of my

participants explained that the choice to produce quick, episodic stories was shaped by the financial and operational pressures to prioritize speed and volume, a rationale closely aligning with what Bourdieu (1990) describes as “practical coherence”—the alignment of actions with the underlying logic of the field, in this case, the news industry.

In the series of interviews I held for this research, different *logics of practice* emerged, each shedding light on the motivations and constraints guiding journalistic approaches to migration reporting in Türkiye. These logics are not rigid categories but rather interconnected responses to real-world pressures and norms. I see value in introducing them briefly before moving onto discuss what I learned when I asked my participants to reflect on major content findings from my own analysis of migration news.

5.1.1 Public Accountability Logic

The most frequent term my participants used to describe their logos of reporting, i.e. the way in which they construed the reasoning behind their migration reporting, was through the phrase “Kamu Hizmeti” in Turkish which translates to “Public Service” in English. The term ‘service’ could mean a voluntary act of service for some, yet on the majority there was a consensus on the perception of a journalist as someone who was obliged to monitor and report on the conditions that impact the well-being of citizens.

[Journalism] is a form of public service. I think the role of the Court of Accounts and Journalists is the same as a profession. It is to oversee those who use public power, uncover irregularities and correct wrongdoings. As the 4th estate, the role of the journalist is to protect individual rights and criticize harmful policies while advocating to replace them with better ones. (Participant 8)

Participant 8 here frames this responsibility in terms of accountability, akin to the role of the Court of Accounts, a means of ensuring that policies or practices harming society are

critiqued and corrected. This logic is very close to Harrison's (2019) conceptualization of Public Service Journalism, which proposes a mission-driven, watchdog journalism that treats its readers not as informed yet passive subjects but as active discerning citizens. Journalists that adopt this style usually produce investigative news stories on governmental policies and practices. They advocate for editorial independence from the government. Similarly, my participants who identified with this style had written extensively on insufficiency of education services provided for RASIM children, lack of women's shelters and similar other subjects concerning treatment of RASIM by the government.

One minor difference from Harrison's conceptualization was that my participants' reasoning for providing this "public service", i.e. providing information on RASIM, was not only for the hopes of attaining a "healthier political life" or a better functioning democracy, but started from one step earlier, stemming from a responsibility they personally felt to advocate for the struggles of underprivileged migrant communities.

For example, how many Syrian children are receiving education in Türkiye? The EU sends so much funding. How many of them [Syrian children] are going to school? Do we follow-up on their cases? These issues are left unchecked, and as a journalist I believe I must critique it as a service to the people. (Participant 10)

Journalists who adopted this logic aim to serve what they perceive as public interest, which influences their choice of stories, framing, and coverage depth. At the same time, while a shared commitment to public welfare emerged, the 'public' that journalists aimed to serve varied. For some, public accountability involved raising concerns about the cost and resource allocation for refugee welfare, focusing on the interests of Turkish citizens. For others, like Participant 10, it also encompassed representing the needs of marginalized groups within migration contexts. This divergence reflects how journalists

may prioritize different aspects of public service, depending on the populations they perceive as their primary audience.

For instance, the focus on monitoring state actions and scrutinizing policy effectiveness aligns with the prevalence of episodic, event-driven stories that spotlight incidents involving refugees and asylum-seekers, such as “Irregular Migrant Hunt” reports.

5.1.2 Profit/Agency-Driven Logic

While some journalists frame migration reporting as a public service, economic constraints often push media outlets toward a more commercially driven approach. Limited budgets and shrinking newsrooms mean that many organizations now rely heavily on agency-produced content, resulting in repetitive, formulaic stories. Participant 2 described this trend as a compromise in journalistic quality:

Journalism has now turned into agency journalism. Agencies do the production and employ the reporters, while newspapers are struggling to survive on small budgets. Online news outlets are also struggling to survive in the same way, relying on agency subscriptions to try to do journalism. This has, of course, significantly lowered the quality of journalism. (Participant 2)

This reliance on agency content allows newspapers and websites to publish quickly without additional reporting, but it also homogenizes migration coverage. Participant 8 observed that many outlets, including Cumhuriyet’s website, often post agency stories verbatim, with minimal edits to align with editorial policies:

Unfortunately, this is the case in many institutions. This also applies to the website of Cumhuriyet. When an agency like Anadolu Agency, İHA, or DHA releases a news piece, the newspaper, being a subscriber to these agencies, publishes the story exactly as it is on their website, stating 'Anadolu Agency' as the source. They do this to keep up with clicks or to avoid missing out on the news. The only modification they make is to change a word if it conflicts with their publishing policy. Otherwise, they

publish it exactly as it is. Therefore, especially on the internet or in most mainstream newspapers, the news is often served in this way. (Participant 8)

This approach to migration reporting often results in episodic, brief stories, such as the “Irregular Migrant Hunt” reports, which emphasize security and enforcement over context. The economic pressure to maximize content volume with minimal cost drives a reliance on simplified, decontextualized narratives. As a result, audiences encounter migration coverage that lacks depth and diversity. This approach, while financially pragmatic for struggling outlets, ultimately constrains public understanding by offering limited perspectives on complex migration issues.

5.1.3 Ideology-Driven Logic

While ideology is naturally a driver for journalists to produce news, it appears that the types of ideologies influencing migration reporting vary widely. For some, this influence leans toward ethical responsibility and human rights, while others focus on national unity or cultural preservation. These ideological stances shape journalists’ perspectives on RASIM and guide the tone and, imaginably but as also indicated through interviews, the framing of their stories. Table 6 presents an overview of terms that my participants used to define their political affiliations and ideologies.

This range of ideological motivations—from Kemalism and nationalism to feminism and human rights—demonstrates how journalists’ personal values and beliefs actively shape the narratives around RASIM, influencing not only what topics are covered but also how these stories are framed. Understanding these ideological drivers allows us to see how migration reporting in Türkiye is not just a reflection of events but a product of the values journalists bring to their work, which in turn shapes public perception and policy discussions around migration.

Table 6. Overview of Political Affiliations

| | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Kemalist/ Republican | [News Outlet] has had a fundamental mission since its establishment: to defend the values of the Republic. Therefore, the journalism we did at [News Outlet] was more about opinion journalism. Yes, politically, and by politically, I mean ideologically, it had a stance. So, the journalism we practiced was from a perspective aligned with Kemalism and Republicanism. Since I also hold these views, it was a point of alignment for me. (Participant 8) |
| Feminism/ Ethics of Care | <p>...because I'm very interested in news about women, I am very interested in the struggle for women's freedom in the Middle East. This naturally led me in that direction of reporting on migration (Participant 3)</p> <p>Of course, while preparing my news, within the framework of journalistic ethics, I approach it from a rights perspective rather than trying to pull it in a particular direction. There is something called Human Rights Journalism. For example, when I'm preparing news about a femicide, I don't include something that would justify the act, like asking the man his whole reasoning. I include the man's statement, but it depends on how you present it (Participant 10).</p> |
| Nationalist | I was very interested in ideologies and ideas around the world. This is actually what led me to journalism. Starting from my high school years and coming from a nationalist background, a nationalist family... I try to bring news to light from a segment of society that is not insignificant in number but lacks the power of propaganda to make their voices heard. And I try to do this from the place I belong, through a nationalist ideology, because in Turkey, the press has been predominantly controlled by the left for a long time. Later, it came into the hands of political Islam. And, due to a bit of incompetence and lack of capability on our part, nationalists have never been able to express themselves. (Participant 5) |

This section discussed that journalists’ motivations in migration reporting are shaped by diverse logics—public accountability, profit-driven agency reliance, and ideological commitments—each contributing to distinct perspectives on RASIM coverage. Rather than producing a single cohesive narrative, these logics coexist and occasionally diverge, driven by the unique professional, economic, and ideological conditions within the news media landscape. In the next section, I dive deeper into specific cases of migration

reporting, particularly the ones representing some characteristics found in the content analysis of news stories reported in earlier chapters.

5.2 Journalists' Views on Migration Reporting

Building up on the major findings from the content analysis as presented in Chapter 4, my interviews with journalists aimed at gaining insight into their perspectives on these trends in migration reporting. Specifically, I sought their views on the dominance of episodic, event-driven stories, the prevalence of “Irregular Migrant Hunt” narratives, and aggregation of news copied from larger news agencies.

5.2.1 Predominance of Episodic Reporting; Limited Solution Frames

When I highlighted the predominance of episodic, event-driven reporting in migration coverage, my participants expressed similar frustrations with this constrained approach regardless of their orientation toward RASIM. Many were acutely aware of the limitations it imposes on their ability to engage with the underlying complexities of migration. While journalists frequently aim to provide more layered, solutions-focused narratives, they encounter institutional pressures that prioritize quick, event-driven stories, often stripping migration reporting of its context and depth. This emphasis on brevity and immediacy, they argued, not only curtails their work but also shapes public understanding of migration in ways that tend to be fragmented and overly simplistic. Participant 1 reflected on the lack of editorial support for complex topics like migrant welfare, noting that editorial decisions often sideline stories that require dedicated time and resources:

For example, researching the right to education for Syrian children or their access to healthcare often meets resistance, as it requires dedicated time. Editors don't prioritize these topics, preferring instead to assign other tasks, like covering political meetings. Over my years as a reporter, I've

never had a suggestion from any director, editor, or colleague to investigate stories on refugee issues based on social media tips or community events. (Participant 1)

Participant 1's experience underscores an institutional tendency to favor episodic, incident-focused stories over the investigative work that might unpack migration's systemic dimensions. It also shows a critique of the tendency to focus on stories related to political elites, instead of further details on the problem or prospective solutions. This preference creates a news landscape saturated with reports on immediate events, rather than sustained narratives that consider causes, impacts, or potential solutions. This focus on episodic, reactive reporting is embedded even in journalism training, which, as Participant 11 explained, lacks specialized instruction in areas like solutions or peace journalism. Instead, journalists are taught "a more abstracted version of journalism," one that seldom equips them to explore the systemic roots of issues like migration.

Still, some journalists are perseverant in going beyond this episodic coverage that they link to a personal sense of accountability. One participant commented on a sense of personal responsibility he felt over the public opinion on RASIM, explaining how fragmented stories shape societal perceptions of migration:

It is impossible for a carpenter, a grocer or any citizen living in the Çankaya district to see or hear about these [tragedies RASIM face]. They form an opinion based on what they read and watch. Therefore, I feel responsible over what they read and watch. I think these news reports are very important if you look at it from this perspective. (Participant 9)

This sense of responsibility reveals a critical sense of awareness among journalists on how their reporting directly influences public attitudes. At least, they assume they can have some sort of influence in the betterment of discourses surrounding migration.

However, the structures and limitations they work within often prevent them from presenting migration as a nuanced, multifaceted issue.

While the editorial gatekeeping that prioritizes episodic stories certainly contributes to this narrowed view, it's also important to consider how public apathy toward migration may reinforce these editorial decisions. Editors may perceive low audience interest in migration's systemic dimensions, choosing episodic coverage as a way to meet limited engagement rather than challenge it. This creates a feedback loop, where audiences receive only fragmented snapshots of migration, which further solidifies public disregard for the subject. Consequently, the journalistic drive for immediacy and accessibility often overshadows the potential for comprehensive, solutions-oriented coverage that could reshape the public's understanding and interest in migration's broader implications.

Overall, the interviews show that while journalists are eager to provide more depth, editorial decisions and perceptions of public disinterest continue to drive an episodic approach to migration coverage. This tendency is particularly visible in the dominance of "Irregular Migrant Hunt" stories, which focus primarily on moments of capture or rescue.

5.2.2 Dominance of 'Irregular Migrant Hunt' News Stories

Another content analysis finding I brought to my participants' attention was the dominance of "Irregular Migrant Hunt" stories, which frame migration through a lens of capture and rescue. Participants noted that these stories, with their sharp focus on migrant apprehension or deportation, have become the primary way migration is portrayed to the public. This focus, they argued, reinforces a securitized perspective on migration, framing

migrants primarily as subjects of control or threat. One participant explained how political campaigns in Türkiye have increasingly adopted and amplified this “migrant hunt” framing to sway public opinion. These narratives are carefully crafted, blending elements of marketing with xenophobic undertones to resonate with audiences:

These ideas have been hammered into people's heads. The same thing is being done now, just like Ümit Özdağ. What did his party do? They shot election campaign videos. This man set up a stand that said “buy a ticket home for your refugee brother”. They made it look like a cute thing. They took ideas from young designers and internal advertisers on these matters, produced videos, and managed to keep up with modern times. Through the press, this is being widely disseminated. Eventually, it inevitably resonates with the public. (Participant 3)

This politically charged rhetoric reinforces a media environment where migration is framed almost exclusively through control and containment. Another explained that such coverage not only shapes public expectations but also reinforces a selective demand for stories that cast migrants as a societal issue requiring resolution through containment or deportation:

People became too involved with migrants, they started to think that migrants should leave, which created a different expectation for news. In Türkiye, there is a concern for ratings, and they know that news about migrants will be watched more and that positive news about them will draw criticism. The images of trucks filled with people at the border have caused everyone to be labeled as illegal migrants (Participant 11)

The emphasis on security and border control centered stories reflects a convergence of public interest, political influence, and editorial priorities, as described by my participants. According to the journalists I interviewed, “Irregular Migrant Hunt” stories—featuring scenes of migrant capture and deportation—are not only prevalent due to their ease of production but resonate strongly with audiences, who increasingly expect and respond to this type of content. Justifications for perceived apathy towards RASIM

(in subjects concerning RASIM's wellbeing) that drives journalists away from investigative reporting and towards episodic coverage on migration, leaves its spot to a rhetoric of perceived demand for sensational news when it comes to subject of monitoring 'illegality' of migration, making it viable to opt for the type of news characterized here as 'irregular migrant hunt' stories. This cycle of selective reporting results in a media landscape where the complexities of migration are often overshadowed by a narrower, securitized view.

5.2.3 Aggregation of News Copied from Larger News Agencies

The dominance of episodic news stories that usually spoke of security and border control was visible. Another theme highlighted by my participants was the widespread reliance on news stories sourced directly from major agencies such as Anadolu Agency, DHA, or IHA. Journalists noted that these agency-produced stories are often republished across multiple outlets with minimal to no modification, creating a highly uniform landscape of migration reporting. This practice, according to Participant 8, results in the same headlines and content appearing across various mainstream platforms, with little attempt to add unique angles or insights:

What happens is, and it is always like this: Anadolu Agency, DHA, or IHA, whichever of these three agencies serves a news story, all the press organizations, including mainstream media, take the news in this form. They do not change a single point. So if you see the same headline in many outlets, the source of the news is another agency. Most likely, they have taken the news from each other and published in the same way without citing sources. (Participant 8)

Here, the participant foregrounds the impacts of digitalization over journalism practices. This is a point I discussed earlier with agency/profit-driven logic, that participants reported publishing some episodic news -largely sensational- which were purely driven from an understanding that those stories helped them stay in competition

over ad revenues. While this could arguably be a problem that newsroom face regardless of whether they are producing migration reporting, what matters more to me is foregrounding the hazard of aggregation of one type of news, particularly news that depict RASIM as criminals in their moment of capture, pronouncing their ‘illegality’ without offering any follow-up or investigation on the subject.

During our interview, Participant 2 recommended that I make up a number – any number-, and use the phrase “illegal migrants were captured” or “rescued” along with this number. She told me to look up what headlines would surface. Taking her suggestion to heart, I did this practice at the time I met the participant and later in the time of writing for this chapter. Figure 5 presents screenshots with this practice to illustrate this exercise.

Looking at these search results, one might say, as participant 2 did, “pick a number, Turkish police have saved and arrested that many illegal migrants” which I hope suffices to illustrate the abundance of Agency Journalism available on the subjects regarding RASIM.

Looking at the same screenshots, another observation can be made on the variance I see on the news outlets that are re-using these headlines. Our target news outlets Habertürk and Sabah are there along with other mainstream news outlets such as TRT Haber and Ihlas News Agency itself. Additionally, I see pages titled Hamle Gazetesi or portals titled Dogruhaber which can be titled as alternative news media outlets with relatively lower following whose presence are rather sporadic but consistent with a plethora of portals that are started every day. This density and variance of competing news portals further complicates the race for mainstream news agencies, compelling journalists to get the story out as early as they could.

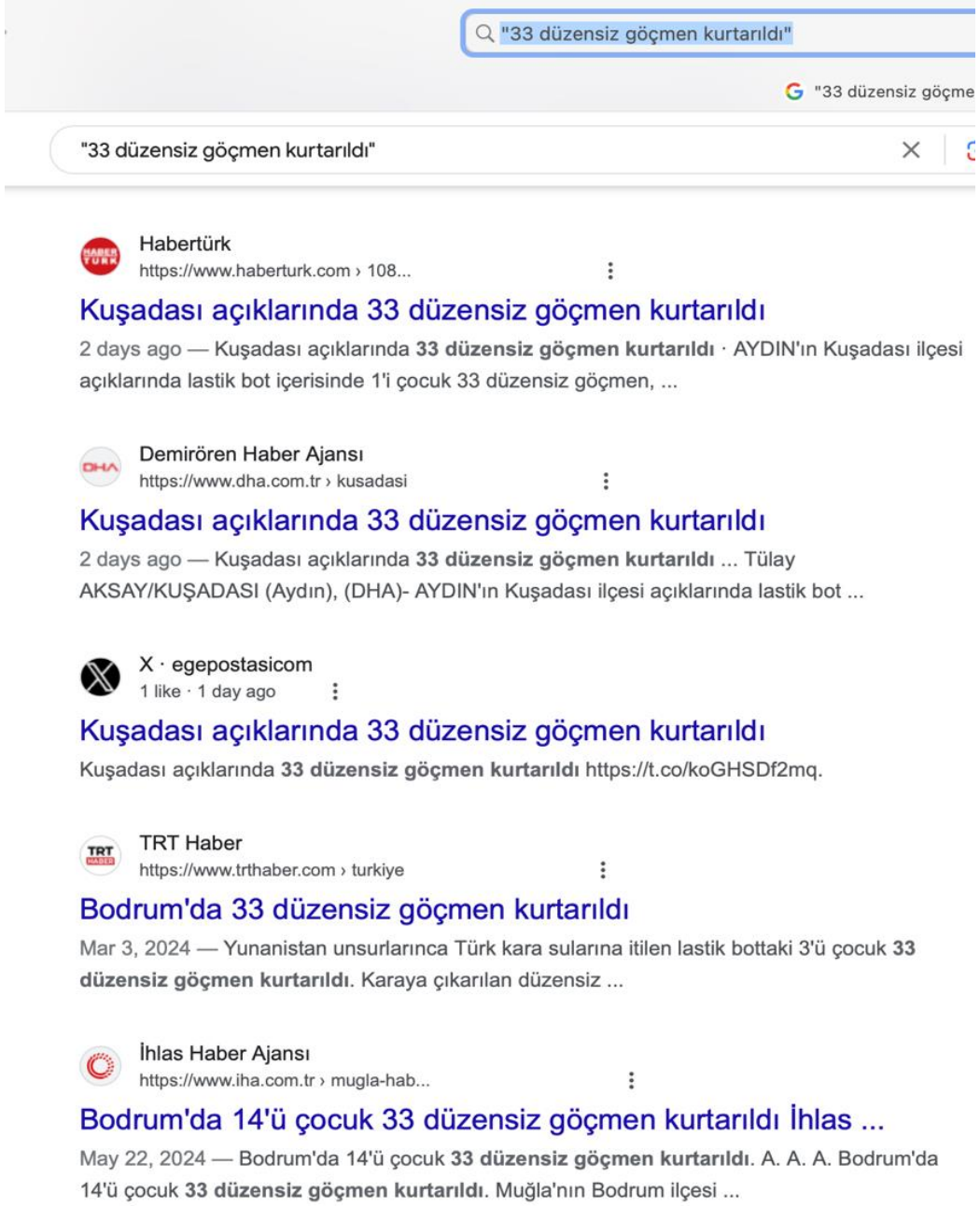


Figure 6. Screenhots Depicting Keyword Searches with Number 33

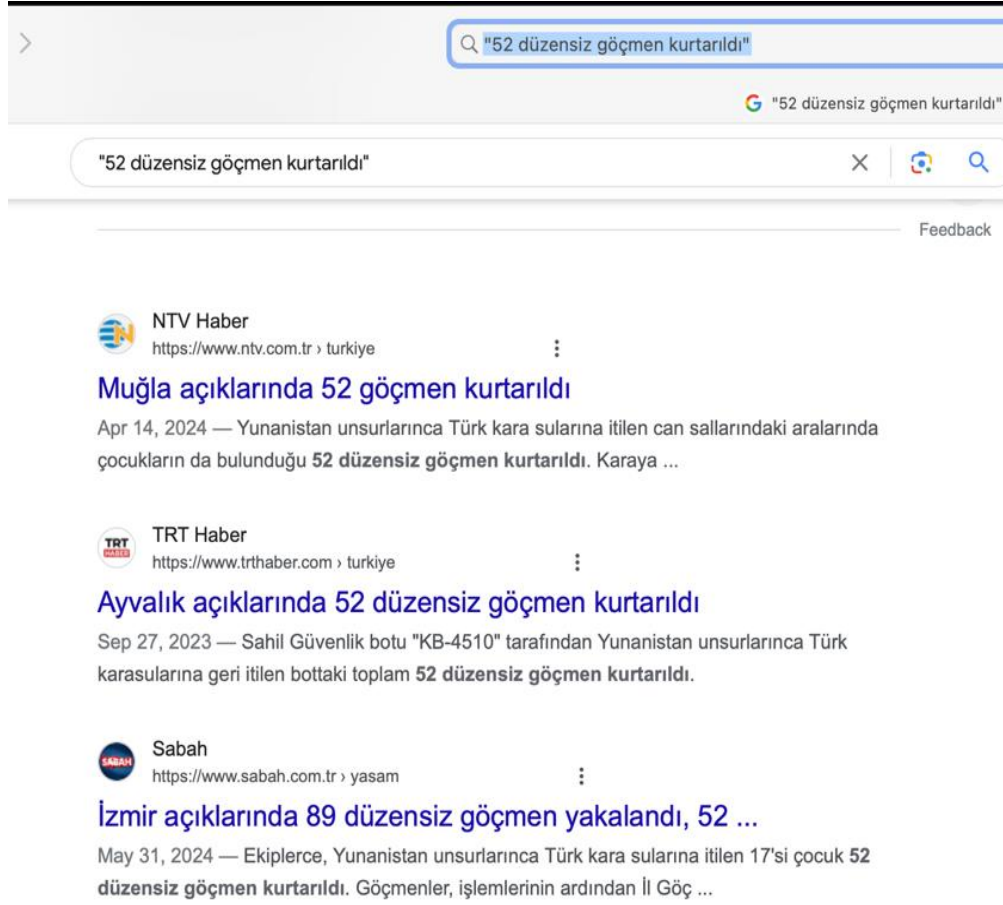


Figure 7. Screenshots Depicting Keyword Searches with Number 52

Through these discussions, it became clear that while journalists were aware of the limitations and potential harm of relying heavily on agency content, few seemed prepared to take meaningful measures to counter it. Many participants recognized the irony of “rescue” and “capture” narratives sitting side by side in these stories, yet most did not express significant discomfort or urgency in addressing this contrast. Even when I highlighted this irony directly, some participants generally acknowledged it without appearing particularly troubled, suggesting that the pressures of speed and uniformity in migration coverage may be too ingrained for individual journalists to counteract

effectively. This reliance on agency-driven content thus remains an accepted, if problematic, reality in migration reporting.

5.3 Discussion

Building on the content analysis of news stories and interviews with journalists, this chapter reported on how journalists navigate pressures related to institutional demands, financial limitations, and personal views in producing migration reporting.

One consistent theme was the tendency toward episodic, event-driven reporting, reflecting editorial preferences and broader industry trends favoring quick, consumable stories. Journalists noted that, while they aim to provide deeper context on migration issues; institutional priorities on brevity and speed often limit their ability to explore these topics more fully. This results in an emphasis on short, incident-focused stories, narrowing the scope of migration coverage by prioritizing immediacy over depth. The dominance of “Irregular Migrant Hunt” stories further illustrate these dynamics, as migration is often framed through narratives of control and containment. My participants explained that these stories resonate with audiences, aligning with public expectations and anxieties around migration. Although some recognized this framing as limited, they noted that audience interest and editorial priorities continue to reinforce their prevalence, creating a self-reinforcing cycle around simplified perspectives of migration.

It was also seen that financial pressures shape migration reporting, with many outlets relying on agency-produced content due to budget constraints and shrinking newsrooms. Journalists described how these constraints lead to a reliance on standardized agency reports, producing a uniformity in migration stories across outlets. This approach, while economically practical, limits diversity in coverage and contributes to a more

homogenized view of migration. Exercises with random searches and headlines illustrated this trend, showing how the same agency report can appear across numerous platforms with little modification.

Journalists' personal perspectives and values also influence how migration stories are framed, whether through a focus on social justice, nationalism, or human rights. These individual viewpoints add subjectivity to migration reporting, shaping not only the choice of topics but also the tone and framing of stories. In this way, migration reporting reflects both the events being covered and the personal orientations of the journalists covering them.

Overall, the interviews show that migration reporting in Türkiye reflects a combination of institutional, financial, and personal influences. While journalists are aware of the limitations of episodic, securitized, and agency-driven reporting, they generally feel constrained in altering these patterns. The result is a migration narrative shaped by multiple pressures, each contributing to a coverage approach that is practical but often narrow in scope. These insights provide a clearer understanding of how migration journalism in Türkiye balances public interest, editorial demands, and professional ideals. Moving forward, the next chapter sheds light on the multifaceted challenges journalists face in balancing the external demands and expectations while pursuing news stories related to migration.

CHAPTER 6

CHALLENGES OF COVERING MIGRATION

While reporting migration, journalists often find themselves at the intersection of complex, and sometimes harrowing, issues. This chapter explores these multifaceted challenges, which span personal, professional, social-familial, and violence-related realms. Insights shared by my participants reflect systemic issues and obstacles within the field of migration reporting that hinder the quality of their work and their overall well-being. These issues can be divided to four themes which are namely personal, professional, social-familial, and violence-related challenges of reporting migration.

Personal challenges span from mental health issues and former experiences of trauma to feelings of uselessness, and helplessness that is experienced by journalists working in the field of migration.

Professional challenges is a larger category that involves more common hardships inherent in journalism (such as limited access to the news sources or editorial dependence to the government, the risks of being prosecuted for your writing) alongside more particular ones to reporting migration such as unreliability of the data regarding the number of RASIM.

Socio-familial challenges are a smaller category yet presents surprising challenges such as how their coverage regarding migration impacted journalists' relationships with their friends and family.

Lastly, violence category brings together the sections journalists directly mention the physical and psychological violence they faced at their workplaces and online as an outcome of their migration coverage.

6.1 Predicting Audience Backlash When Reporting Migration

Covering migration is not only a difficult task but a dangerous one. Of course, this does not mean the level and impact of these challenges are distributed equally. In fact, let us start by getting one thing straight: that these challenges are experienced at differing levels depending on the gender of the journalist and their political background as perceived by the perpetrators of the backlash they receive.

A plethora of research (Gever et al., 2023; Fountaine & Strong, 2023; Lewis et al., 2020; Gardiner, 2018; Harris et al., 2016; Gardiner et al., 2016) documents the incidents where women and racially marginalized journalists face disproportionately more threats, online harassment and physical violence than their male, white counterparts.

These incidents occur globally, including in Latin America (Higgins Joyce, Chacon, Alves, 2022), Pakistan (Jamil, 2020), Phillipines (Gomez, 2023; Posetti, 2021); Nigeria (Gever, Talabi, Aiyesimoju, Bello, Zannu, Okunade, & Nwokolo, 2023), New Zealand (Fountaine & Strong, 2023; in the US (Nelson, 2023; Levi, 2021; Lewis et al., 2020; Carlson, 2020), South Africa, India and Finland (Posetti, 2021). From local reporters to elite ones covering international scandals (Konow-Lund & Høiby, 2021) to more established news agencies such as Guardian originating from the UK but spanning across countries (Gardiner, 2018), these threats are pervasive.

Of course, each scholar adds new depths to the research, extending the theoretical framework with their findings; and, there are differences in their research designs. For example, one study finds that while women receive more online threats, men receive offline threats more often (Gever et al. 2023). Another asks whether it is more difficult to be a woman reporting from conflict zones (Harris, Mosdell, & Griffiths, 2016). However,

this brief review of a rapidly growing literature can show us that more and more researchers have turned to ask how the intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), particularly of the states of being a woman and of an ethnic minority affects the lives of journalists.

Some level of misogyny that is inherent in the practice of journalism is also expected to surface when covering migration. However, it is still important to underline that women journalists, who often move from a point of care for RASIM, are subjected to psychological and sexual and gender based violence much more swiftly than their male peers. Four in five women I interviewed had experienced hate-speech containing sexual and physical threats online, two needing to call the police on the days these comments reached their peak to ensure their own well-being.

A common point for these four women was that they moved from a point of ethics of care (Gilligan, 1995) for RASIM, their reporting foregrounded the rights and needs of RASIM, and they received backlash for reporting things as harmless as covering a migrant woman who would be killed if returned to her country or reporting on something as dire as a 13 year-old RASIM child in Türkiye who was threatened to be killed by peers. I will dwell more on this finding and how women journalists are (not) coping with these challenges under the violence section. For now, I believe it is important to underline that findings reflect the patriarchal power relations embedded in Turkish society and culture of our day, that have been proliferated for generations by so-called right-wing “nationalists” and political Islamists.

Political affiliation also acts as a moderator in determining how much backlash one journalist is likely to receive when covering migration. Some, particularly male reporters from mainstream news agencies, do not meet severe challenges or clashes with their

audience or colleagues. One participant states, “I have not received backlash personally but we saw some under our news stories on social media” (Participant 8). Another one adds,

I have this disadvantage that is an advantage at the same time. I am an Ankara journalist. Ankara journalists do not like to be popular on social media. We like to behave properly. We don't tweet as much, outside our news stories. Thus, our social media following is not as large as hundred thousands. So we do not receive as personally charged attacks. But we sometimes see [hateful] comments under the agency's posts. (Participant 9)

Coming from two professional male journalists working for established news outlets with liberal-nationalist and liberal-socialist values, these two statements support the earlier claim, that journalists have a less turbulent time reporting migration in liberal news outlets. However, beyond gender and ethnicity, journalists can have a more difficult time depending on their level of conflict with ideological standing of their employers and colleagues.

As similar to how Participant 9 profiles Ankara journalists, another participant characterizes the varying levels of difficulty covering migration in news outlets with differing ideological agendas and gatekeeping practices:

Among such [leftist] journalists, editors, and news directors, I haven't had much trouble with migration news. However, with political affiliations like CHP or right-wing parties, it's different. Proposing news about migrants in these settings often leads to it being dismissed or looked down upon. For example, in morning meetings, when I suggest a story about migrants, it's often not taken seriously. In such places, you are generally looked down upon. "You are such a refugee lover." or, "You are an Islamist lover. (Participant 1)

Providing a glimpse into workplace backlashes, this is a crucial statement for our research. It supports the earlier observation on the tendency of left-wing journalists to cover the subject of migration more negatively, with the divided state of the left in itself

on the subject. It shows that while some leftist news outlets (the leftist socialist camp) offer harmonious work environments to write about migration, particularly from a positive approach, other leftist news outlets (center-left) do not allow pro-RASIM subjects or perspectives to be proliferated as easily. Input from other participants and observations from the interviews help me summarize the divide by saying both left and right are equally and doubly divided on the subject, with people having conflicting justifications as to why or why not support RASIM in Türkiye.

Overall, the experiences my participants shared indicate that journalists have a better chance getting their migration stories out in news outlets with leftist-socialists leaning; however, this does not predict the type of reactions they will get online. Instead, it is the political identity of the news outlets itself that predicts the type and level of backlash the journalist can receive upon reporting on RASIM.

All participants who reported having received public backlash on their migration reporting said they received hateful comments through primarily their personal Twitter (X) pages and, more rarely, on their news-site. Intuitively, I can expect journalists with larger followings on such social media platforms to be at a higher risk of exposure to hate-speech. Just as women were more likely to be subjects of interpersonal threats, leftist-socialists reporters working for mainstream news outlets were also likely to receive personal backlash for their coverage of RASIM. Both Participant 1 and 10 worked for a center-left mainstream news outlets before switching to more liberal news-outlets and report having horrible exchanges online before making the switch.

With this background, I can now delve into the specific types of challenges faced by journalists covering migration. These challenges can be broadly categorized into four main types: personal, professional, social-familial, and violence-related.

6.2 Personal Challenges of Covering Migration

Earlier, I mentioned that 10 out of 13 participants had some level of negative experiences covering migration, some of which were due to more personal reasons than the others. I asked my participants how their experience covering migration has been thus far, to explain some of the personal challenges they faced along the way. Their responses included mental health issues such as former experiences of trauma that are triggered by constant exposure to other people's traumatic experiences; feelings of depression and helplessness resulting from a perceived inability to help others; and feelings of alienation and exclusion from the society resulting from direct exposure to violence and hate speech.

As such, the interviews show that migration reporters are at risk of primary and secondary (sometimes vicarious) trauma, for which the defense mechanisms are - unfortunately- rare to come by. Frequently, migration reporters are the targets of violent threats and derogatory language. More frequently, they encounter people in dire humanitarian crises, seeking their assistance to escape from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan or Gaza devastated by Israeli attacks, reminding them the reality of how little a single individual can do by themselves in these instances.

To illustrate these personal challenges in this section, I wish to bring three women to your attention. These women altered others' lives deeply to the point of rescuing them from hanging-ropes, but they also found their lives to be changed in return, not with the

awards that they could have been awarded but by feeling forced to fall silent, to self-censor, to even migrate to a different country so that they can write freely again.

First is a woman in her mid-40s, a journalist by practice over 12 years who although is of Turkish descent, identifies with the Kurdish movement and has worked for dominantly Kurdish news agencies, except for her freelance work for international news outlets. Upon discovering a few of her news stories were referenced in my dataset, and connecting with her through a Facebook group for migration researchers in Türkiye, I invited her to take part in my research. She kindly accepted the offer, and we met in person for this interview.

She explained that her encounters with women journalists as an activist, participating in Gezi Protests encouraged her to take her first step into the profession. Being an English B.A. graduate herself, the transition was not so difficult, “we were activists with cameras”, she says. This sense of activism is seen in the reasoning that drives her to journalism, the following quote captures her aspirations and frustrations with her work simultaneously:

So, why does a journalist create news? To create social pressure, right? I can't create that social pressure anymore, and I've started to feel useless. I feel like I'm deceiving people because when these people talk to you, for example, those in the deportation center who are at risk of being sent back to Iran, they see you as a ray of hope. They believe this journalist will help them. They trust you, and you write the news... It is not only that my long hours at work or my efforts were in vain. None of these bar associations or NGOs actually work when you really need them. My time is not important at all. But the hope I created in these people's hearts and the fact that it reaches nowhere is important. (Participant 3)

These lines stress the importance she attributes to her sense of responsibility towards RASIM, reminding us of the public accountability logic discussed in Chapter 5.

Throughout our conversation, she insinuates at the mental difficulties she faced after

being exposed to some of her news sources' stories. She talks of the night when her news-source called her to say Taliban found them in their flat in Istanbul. The woman on the phone was asking for this journalist's help while some covered men wearing turbans were actively forcing her door.

Another example she gives is the dire calls she receives from deportation centers across Türkiye. She explains that she and her partner are both journalists, and that both receive countless calls every week from people who see them as their only hope in gaining visibility to their international protection appeals. The exposure to stories of maltreatment, and inability to secure answers on the well-being of their sources pushes this participant into the hands of secondary trauma. Later she also adds a point on the receptiveness of the traumatized individuals to communicate and helps characterize the difficulty of the task facing the journalists by stating,

Some of these people sleep less than 2 hours a day. Some are forced to work 18 hours a day, they do not get food if they do not work. I tried to get housing solutions for the women I interviewed but they already come to you at a highly traumatic and paranoid state. It is very difficult for you to help someone in that state. You need professional help. We would apply to ASAM²⁴ in these situations. (Participant 3)

This quote helps illustrate how journalists can find themselves underprepared to meet traumatized people, and the psychological effects of such encounters. She adds that neither she nor any of her colleagues have ever received training on how to work with people with PTSD or other mental health issues and underlines the urgency of trainings designed for these purposes. In fact, looking back at my sample, only two of the

²⁴ SGDD-ASAM is a non-governmental organization that specializes in advocacy for asylum-seeker and refugee rights. <https://sgdd.org.tr/en/our-values/>

participants received training (a workshop and a classroom discussion) on working with trauma.

Participant 3's experiences show that reporting on migration can be as harrowing as covering war or natural disasters, with the weight of these stories echoing deeply in the journalists' lives. As such the first personal challenge of covering migration becomes visible: the challenge of working with traumatized people without prior training or post-encounter support systems.

Returning to the three women of this section, the second one I would like to highlight is a woman in her late-30s, a journalist by training and practice with 16 years of experience working for several national and international news outlets. She has won several awards for her investigative reporting and has worked for large news outlets on both ends of the political spectrum. Responding to how her experience covering migration has been throughout her years of practice, Participant 10 says,

Terrible, terrible. I mean, throughout my career, I have never struggled with another topic as much as this one. I don't know- it made me feel detached from life, detached from work. I openly say this. I received death threats. I received rape threats. I was investigated, I gave statements, and it wore me out. One of the reasons I have reduced my social media usage is because I report on migration issues.

The earlier example in this section was a case within which the journalist was exposed to vicarious trauma, resulting from witnessing other people's suffering, and secondary trauma, resulting from feeling culpability. This time I am observing a case of primary (also called direct) trauma, the participant experiences social exclusion, hostility, and aggression firsthand. From her words, it is evident that she has experienced burnout, and she hints at depression and anxiety at times in her career. The rape and death threats alone have put her in a state of insecurity over her well-being for several periods of her life.

Responding to the question of how she handled incidents of public outrage, she responds: “I couldn't cope with these things. My psychology was severely affected. It wasn't just one or two instances. It happened a lot” (Participant 10).

Aside from aggression, discrediting one's work is a challenge this participant faces often in her reporting on migration. The following incident captures how difficult of a task it has become for her to convince her audience on the authenticity of stories from migrants.

I did a report from Bolu and interviewed an Afghan family. The child, who was attending elementary school, was told by classmates, "We will kill you and throw you in the trash." The child stopped going to school and fell ill because of this. I happened to have sources there, so I visited their home. I saw the child and the mother, and they were in a terrible state. I wrote about it, and after the news came out, about 1,000 people shared it. But half of those shares were quotes accusing me of lying and fabricating the story. This was very painful for me. I've never fabricated news in my life. I don't work for [A news outlet] or [A news outlet], and I have never made-up stories. I always try to do my job properly. The accusations really hurt me. I wrote that story thinking of the child. I was conveying what happened, and people said I made it up. How can something like that happen? They even called me a whore. It makes you question why you are doing this. It doesn't stop me from reporting, but I can't say I've been able to cope with it. (Participant 10)

The above account illustrates not only the professional hazards but also the profound personal trauma journalists endure. This trauma is exacerbated by public mistrust and the vitriol of online harassment. Following her story, an X user posted a horrible picture of women appearing to be stripped to be publicly ridiculed. The user noted that our participant is entitled to ‘a similar treatment’. While some users initially supported her and others attempted to troll, the post quickly incited public outrage. Unfortunately, it does not prevent the trauma my participant faces due to being targeted so violently and explicitly. This incident underscores the psychological and emotional toll on journalists

who must not only report on distressing events but also defend their integrity and safety against public backlash.

Lastly, I wish to bring a relatively young woman journalist to your attention. This participant is in her late twenties and comes from a rather religious/conservative Turkish family. She is a journalist by both training and practice, and she has worked for several alternative news outlets in Türkiye as a reporter and editor. Throughout her career, she has been the target of derogatory language on social media several times in various platforms; however, for her, one of the biggest personal challenge she has experienced when covering migration has been with her editors and colleagues. She is infuriated with the dismissive attitudes displayed in newsrooms when RASIM are mentioned, narrating several occasions where her co-workers were the first to attempt to kill the stories she proposes.

They have this mindset that all refugees are Islamists. Such condescension happens. They consider it a joke. When you ask, "Why do you say this?" they say it's a joke. But you understand that your perspective or wanting to make news about refugees is seen as if you are bringing up the victimhood of a very small social segment. You're dealing with worthless matters. It's considered worthless. Not worth recording, as if no one cares. These are the negative aspects, and generally, I have negative experiences.
(Participant 1)

This account highlights not only the professional challenges she faces but also the personal toll these attitudes take. Her suggestions and perspectives are often dismissed or ridiculed, which can be deeply demoralizing and isolating. Additionally, her conservative and religious background adds another layer of complexity to her professional life, as evidenced by further derogatory remarks from her colleagues. She shares another disheartening experience:

They say a lot of derogatory things. For example, they mentioned that my family is Islamist and more conservative. So, we are colleagues who spend time together and discuss everything. I know where they come from, and they know about my background. I have heard things like, "You still can't shake off your Islamist roots, that's why you do these things because of your Muslim Brotherhood fantasy." It's as if I need to completely reject where I come from. (Participant 1)

This quote foregrounds the additional burden she faces in having to defend her background and personal identity while striving to maintain professional objectivity and integrity.

In conclusion, the personal challenges faced by journalists covering migration can reach concerning levels. These challenges range from dealing with trauma—both secondary and primary—to navigating professional environments that may be dismissive or even hostile towards their work. The experiences of the three women highlighted in this section illustrate the emotional and psychological toll that comes with covering the complex and sensitive issues we often encounter in migration reporting. While we would not wish to see any journalist being targeted regardless of their gender, the gender-based discrimination and the ease with which women who work in this field are targeted should be emphasized once more.

These personal challenges are deeply intertwined with the professional obstacles that journalists encounter. The next section will explore these professional challenges in detail, shedding light on the broader structural and organizational issues that complicate migration reporting.

6.3 Professional Challenges of Covering Migration

Professional challenges encompass a broader range of difficulties inherent in journalism, particularly when reporting migration. These include common hardships such as limited access to news sources, editorial dependence and the risk of being prosecuted

for one's writing. Additionally, there are challenges unique to reporting on migration particularly that of the unreliability of data on subjects such as how many Syrian children are enrolled in schools around Türkiye, the total number of RASIM, wholistic numbers of irregular migrants along with inconsistencies in publicly available data.

A rather small but unexpected finding from the off set of interviews was the itinerancy observed within journalistic careers. I had not foreseen my participants to have experiences with so many different news outlets. Of course, some level of mobility is expected with internships and rotations in any ordinary journalist's career. However, in cases of my participants, some would change five newsrooms before completing their fifth year in the industry. This sometimes was their choice for reasons of finances and harmony at the workplace, but also due to political pressures, closure of workplace or news sites by the government or handover of their news outlet to newer media conglomerates.

For our research, the rotation born out of such difficulties presented ample opportunities to draw insights from varied newsrooms. However, such itinerant career paths meant added difficulty in conducting their profession, and truly every interview contains a statement in the lines of "You know you will make less than minimum wage becoming a journalist in Türkiye" (Participant 11), or "You have not done your job well if you have not been jailed least once" (Participant 5), indicating some professional difficulties to be already well-known. Below, I present a list of professional challenges identified by my participants.

6.3.1 Access and Recruiting News Sources

The questions regarding story selection and research such as “How did you decide who to interview for this story?” were an integral part of the interviews. The content analysis in Chapter 3 had shown a variety of themes of discussions in line with the political leaning of the news outlet, however, it was not certain whether the proliferation of some of these topics relied on the journalist’s or their employer’s will or both. My participants identified several strategies for recruiting news sources, and a consensus was noticeable in their perception of difficulty and cost of accessing RASIM.

Three participants emphasized the difficulty in accessing individuals who are currently held at removal centers. Participant 6 asks, “In the deportation centers, there are hunger strikes in Antalya. Nobody in Türkiye knows this. Why aren't these stories reported?”, a subject that faintly received attention on media (Duvar English, April 19 2024) and whose urgency has been underlined by one other participant. Yet, this story does not appear to be investigated further than the moment of its eruption. There are no news records of what came out of these hunger strikes beyond April, 2024. This is a point Participant 6 raises several times during the interview, underlining the difficulty of monitoring government’s actions and the state of RASIM at these centers beyond the government’s word.

These participants explain that RASIM in removal centers²⁵ are isolated from the outside world with their lawyers acting as their only channels to communicate with people they know. The centers are guarded by security officers and do not allow unauthorized entries or personal use of cellphones. Such isolation poses a significant

²⁵ Geri Gönderme Merkezi in Turkish, can also be translated as repatriation centers or deportation centers.

barrier for journalists attempting to report on the conditions within these centers. The difficulty in accessing reliable sources and the risk of professional repercussions contribute to a cycle where critical issues, such as the conditions in removal centers, remain underreported.

6.3.2 Unreliable Data on Migrants

Another difficulty journalists face in reporting migration is when they need to access accurate information on the demographics they cover, particularly refugees, immigrants and asylum-seekers. I see value in holding commentary back for a bit and list some of the answers my participants provided when asked about their level of trust towards official records on migration provided by the Turkish state. I believe the quotes speak for themselves in highlighting the mistrust and perceived lack of transparency when it comes to migration records.

Today, it is very difficult to find official data on this issue [number of RASIM]. There are only data from independent researchers. I mention Ümit Özdağ²⁶ as an example because he is a pioneer in this field. He always says there are 13 million illegal immigrants and asylum seekers in Turkey. When we include the illegal immigrants, the research shows that this number is indeed around that number. This includes those coming from Africa, Ukraine, and others in this number, which forms the 13 million figures. The fact that this is not recorded and controlled by the state is genuinely alarming. (Participant 5)

Neither the sources provided by the Turkish government nor those given by any civil society organization are reliable. These figures are in no way accurate. (Participant 6)

The ruling party avoids providing a clear number, trying to delay and suppress the issue as much as possible. However, unofficial figures range from 5 million to some exaggerating up to 10 million or even 13 million.

²⁶ A Turkish politician who has significantly increased his following with his anti-RASIM policy recommendations and discourses he proliferated on social media. He is also the author of the book 'Demographic Occupation' (2023) where he claimed the extant number of RASIM to be more than 13 million.

The lack of transparency also causes people to become significantly anti-migration and anti-immigrant. (Participant 7)

[Do you trust the official records] Personally, I don't trust it. But of course, because it is a public institution and it is considered official data, we use it. Yes, when data related to migrants is shared, we assume it is not accurate. (Participant 9)

These words are uttered by journalists who come from very different political backgrounds from one another, however they all report distrust towards the existing data on RASIM. Combined, these accounts point to the urgency in setting the records straight when it comes to migration, also explaining the dominance of one of the major themes – the monitoring of number of RASIM- in our data analysis.

During our interviews, the journalists call on the Presidency of Migration Management and other governmental branches to collaborate with the journalists in terms of allowing them ease in accessing the information they request. Some of their attitudes are conducive to believe they feel a deep-seated mistrust towards governmental records; however, some raise this call from a completely professional and ethical point regardless of the distrust they experience. For example, Participant 9 mentions *Piktes Teachers*²⁷ and that a random journalist might write negatively on the efforts of these teachers on the lack of certain things at their system that are outside their control. Participant 9 says, while covering the errors of this organization, he is at risk of unwillingly discouraging the teachers there where his intentions would be to help them improve their humanitarian efforts. He underlines that it would be to the government's profit to work together with the press in ensuring access to information and forming collegial relations.

²⁷ *Piktes Teachers* are a group of teachers that work exclusively with Syrian children as their primary teachers at border and city schools before transitioning to other local Turkish schools. They serve bravely and their efforts should be acknowledged for they sometimes serve in dire conditions providing assistance where it is most needed.

Along with their calls to government for transparency and collaboration in securing data, my participants also highlighted inconsistencies they observe in governmental narratives on the subject.

The remaining 300,000 are undocumented, so as far as I know, there is no official data on them. They are disregarded by saying they are not officially recorded. So they can't seem to label this correctly. They either give everyone refugee status or ignore the undocumented ones completely. They don't include the term "illegal" in their data. They refuse to acknowledge it and completely overlook it, leaving it out of the statistics. What's even funnier is that in 2022, the data provided by Defense Minister Hulusi Akar and Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu in the same week did not match. (Participant 5)

The participant is right in that there are cases where numbers fluctuate, particularly as deportation operations reportedly continue at full speed, it is expected to see some level of change in numbers. One participant jokes about this fluctuation by saying it has turned into a “pool problem” for their readers, solving the math equations of ‘if 1000 illegal migrant enters every six hours but 200 are deported every day’...(Participant 8). This self-reported perceived inconsistency points to an alarming risk of manipulation and ease for misinformation to spread.

More than the spread of false information, my participants are concerned about the filtered reporting of numbers, deriving from the many legal statuses and aliases Turkish government is capable of producing for RASIM. As Participant 5's earlier quote indicates, the labeling of the group whose numbers are reported matter and some participants appear to believe that these numbers are not communicated to the public in a healthy way. Journalists perceive the government sub-categorization of the forcibly displaced people as wordplays designed to deceive the larger crowds on the numbers of RASIM and ease their concerns over an influx of refugees.

6.3.3 Editorial Gatekeeping

A closely connected issue to access, editorial control appears to be a challenge, particularly for nationalist ideology driven news outlets. One part of the editorial gatekeeping occurs when pro-RASIM journalists meet anti-RASIM media owners. Journalists at leftist-socialist news outlets report no intrusion or disrespect toward their work by their employers and most peers at their workplace. Unfortunately, this is not the case for journalists who work at news outlets that identify with right-wing ideologies.

In the case of migration news, generally, the news editors and the site owners, and the chief editors, they are always hesitant, so I always have to struggle to get the story out. I mean, I need to fight for the content of the news (Participant 1)

As such, the participant argues that the peer-pressure on journalists to not pursue reporting on migration in news outlets that are known to be close to political parties CHP (placed in the political center-left) and IYI Party (center-right) is evident. Placed in the opposition role in Turkish politics, the voters for these parties are known to critique the government's refugee reception and migration policy. My participants explain that the journalists working for these news outlets pay particular attention to avoid enticing feelings of offense and grievance in Turkish citizens towards RASIM. "Your focus is on Syrians; Turks are in the same situation" is an objection Participant 9 sometimes meets and frequently hears from his circles. When the misfortune of one RASIM is mentioned, a similar misfortune of a Turkish citizen is immediately recalled by colleagues who would like to undermine the urgency of topics regarding RASIM, believing the worsening financial well-being of Turkish citizens and their conflicting interests with RASIM should be called out more often.

For example, when Participant 13 attempted to pitch a news story on the Afghan workers at a construction site not being able to receive their salaries, he was immediately shut down by co-workers who reminded him that there were “many other Turks facing financial difficulties” and asking what would be the element of news in this story if he was to follow up on this story. Two participants who self-identified as nationalists also brought up the same question on why Turkish citizens’ financial well-being should be prioritized in coverage, unfortunately not explaining why stories on both cannot co-exist. To be more accurate, Participant 5 takes a stab at explaining why they do not want to cover RASIM’s struggles, as he believes this would add to the legitimacy of their stay in Türkiye. However, Participant 13’s case is the less common experience of a journalist wishing to follow a human story on RASIM and being rejected. His experience helps illustrate the difficulty of getting a human-interest story out when interest in the human of that story, RASIM, has transformed into grievance and rivalry.

6.3.4 Legal Repercussions

Another point is the editorial control exerted onto journalists who identify with certain ideologies and the pursuant legal repercussions by the government itself. Pressure from the government is rare if news is written from a humanitarian approach, highlighting cases of solidarity with RASIM. However, for the anti-RASIM or anti-refugee-policy clique, reporting on this issue is not as easy. Some receive direct bans of their news portals and accounts, some serve time in jail for such reporting.

The bans of news portals are a rather peculiar phenomenon to Turkish context so I see value in describing these occurring in depths. Called ‘Erişim Engeli’ in Turkish,

access bans on websites are implemented under Turkish law, particularly Law No. 5651 (Dogan, n.a.²⁸). This law allows for the removal of content or blocking access to web pages due to violations of personal rights, privacy, or other legal concerns. Courts can order the blocking of specific URLs or entire websites if necessary, and Internet service providers must comply with these orders promptly to ensure the content becomes inaccessible. This legal framework is used to regulate online content, more dominantly to curb spread of certain information in order to protect individual rights. It requires a tight governmental hold over internet service providers as in many cases, these bans are acted upon immediately.

Access bans are issued by local courts upon receiving complaints, usually from lawyers or pertinent officers or personnel and can be issued as rapidly as under a few hours upon the briefing of the judge. Once issued, the executive forces will prevent users from visiting the website by either removing the link all together or having it direct the user to a generic message that says “404 Not Found” (Figure 8).

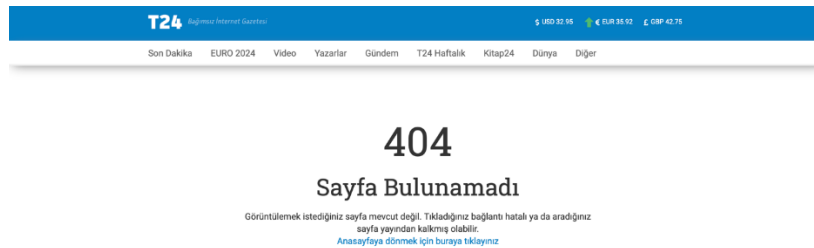


Figure 8. Screenshot Showing Error Message from T24`s Article

²⁸ For further information on this law, see <https://barandogan.av.tr/blog/ceza-hukuku/internetten-icerik-kaldirma-ve-erisimin-engellenmesi-haber-video-fotograf-silme.html>

One participant, an editor from a digital journalism and publishing portal, TamgaTurk, explains that they receive access bans so frequently that they now have a separate site on their portal listing these bans²⁹.

For example, our site constantly receives access bans. Some of these are related to migrants. We get a ban, and we write about the access ban. Then the access ban itself gets another access ban. We report on that as well. So far, it hasn't gone beyond three. We're a bit more stubborn. We have things like a chain of access bans. We even opened a category on TamgaTurk as part of a Shame Museum. We collect other access bans there. (Participant 8)

This experience of continual access bans underscores the systemic challenges and governmental control faced by certain groups of journalists. The creation of a "Shame Museum", or the section titled "Access Bans" on their portal, to document these bans highlights the resilience and persistence of these journalists, despite the oppressive measures aimed at silencing them. Some of the articles they include in this customized section on their portal gets very entertaining with titles such as the one that is titled "Access to the News About the Access Ban on TamgaTürk's News About the Access Ban Was Banned" (TamgaTurk, September 6, 2023³⁰), - also illustrated in Figure 7- a chain of events that is as equally (if not more) challenging to comprehend as it was to translate.

TamgaTurk's case is somewhat particular as they receive access bans for their coverage on many subjects such as tenders that result in favor of actors close to the incumbent party or alleged crimes by party representatives and alliance with criminals by the political elite. However, our participant underlined that their coverage on migration was not an exception, if not a more contested subject.

²⁹ <https://www.tamgaturk.com/erisim-engeli/>

³⁰ <https://www.tamgaturk.com/tamgaturk-un-erisim-engeli-haberine-erisim-engeli-getirildi-haberine-erisim-engeli-getirildi/65347/>



Figure 9. Screenshot Showing TamgaTurk's Article

One cannot help but compare the outlook of their page to a crime scene or a cemetery for news stories that offended political power holders or disturbed local authorities for various reasons. They write a news story that receives an access ban and then turn this into a news story that only uses the headlines of the previously banned news story. Each of the “Access Ban” news articles carry the same image with Tamga Turk's name crossed with what appears like a police investigation banner with the words “Access ban” appearing on a yellow background.

The ideological clashes Tamga Turk enters with the incumbent party and influential political figures exceeds this research's scope and needs to be studied more meticulously by future studies that examine press freedom in Türkiye. However, within the framework of our research, what needs to be paid attention with this chain of access bans is, in fact,

the attempts of the Turkish government to prevent speculations from spreading on subjects concerning RASIM. This is a rather interesting setting contrasting with the outlook of right-wing incumbent parties in Europe and elsewhere that are characterized by their own production of speculations on RASIM.

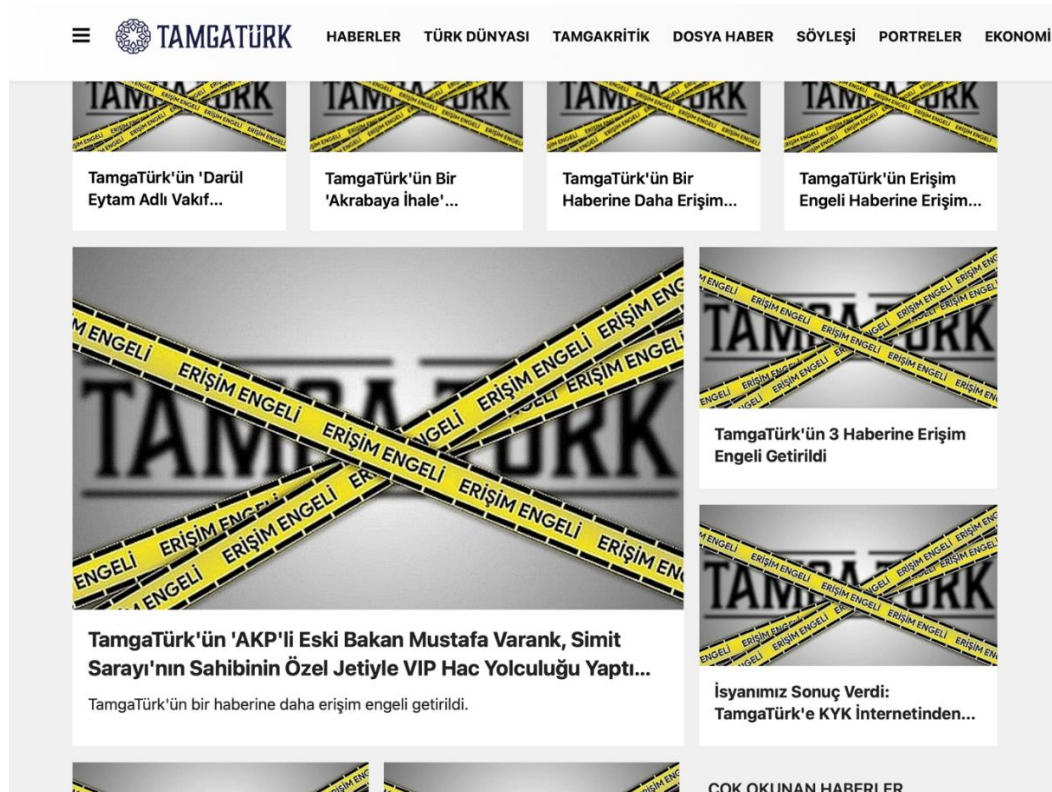


Figure 10. Screenshot Showing Tamgaturk` s Access Bans.

Another participant reported similar experiences with governmental bans and blockages from reporting on immigrants by imprisonment. Participant 5 was jailed for the posts that have been shared by an account he co-managed on Twitter (X) for a duration of 4 months and his case continues after his release from prison to this day.

Participant 5` s case is different since it shows that there is as much support as there is governmental pressure on the proliferation of anti-RASIM discourses. Referring to the public records of his court investigation, he says “in my file, there was a sentence

written during the police investigation. That was in fact what created the public outrage. It stated that ‘nationalist posts were detected’ on my account” (Participant 5). For him, being a nationalist made him a target for the incumbent party to silence. However, this does not appear to match the reaction by the public. In light of his rather friendly treatment by the police, his endorsement by several political representatives, columnists and his countless followers; it can be said that he becomes perceived as someone whose only crime was “to be a nationalist”, this public figure -or to some, hero- who was discriminated against unlawfully. Referring to his public address following his first court hearing,

I felt like saying, "Long live the homeland" at that moment. Because I believe that what we are doing is not just a journalistic activity, but also, as I said, a service to the ideology we believe in. And I always say this in Turkey: if you are a journalist and you get arrested, it means you have done your job well. I believe in this. (Participant 5)

This statement perfectly shows how tension with the state and the risk of imprisonment are normalized within the context of Türkiye. Beyond normalization, these risks are seen as tokens of success for a journalist. However, the actual cost of these tokens is not as pretty. After all, this participant missed out on his civil life, was forced to abide by prison routines and isolated from his loved ones for several months. He said several of his colleagues who were imprisoned or detained alongside him stopped their online activities and gave up on their migration reporting, thinking of the well-being of their loved ones. While our participant and some of his colleagues maintain their platforms, their earlier tone has certainly been mitigated by the arrests back in September 2023. Thus, the impact of this governmental intervention on the speculative coverage targeting RASIM is evident. However, this participant highlights this unlawful treatment

by pointing to the fact that none of the professional journalists involved in some of their news stories were there in front of a judge with them.

We faced imprisonment for 41 news reports. Of these, 40 were covered by national media, including videos and photos. Additionally, Anadolu Agency and TRT had produced one of the reports. During the last hearing, I asked the judge why there were no editors or reporters from Yeni Şafak or Euronews, as our news starts with the sentence, "According to a report by Yeni Şafak based on Euronews." I pointed out that they had reported the news before me and were the sources I had cited. (Participant 5)

This quote from Participant 5 illustrates a key distinction in the media landscape between professional journalists and citizens who are engaging with news content production and distribution online. Despite the significant overlap in the type of content produced, citizens who engage in news production outside of a recognized newsroom often face harsher legal repercussions compared to their professional counterparts. The fact that national media outlets, including Anadolu Agency and TRT, had produced similar reports highlights a double standard in the enforcement of legal actions.

Professional journalists are typically protected by their organizations and benefit from legal teams, professional networks, and institutional support that can mitigate the impact of governmental pressures. In contrast, citizen journalists (Rodríguez, 2001) – who are defined by lack of a preceding formal training in journalism practices yet takes up reporting for their community; or newsfluencers (Hurcombe, 2024)- who are skilled journalists who act independently on social media platforms- often operate independently or with minimal organizational backing, leaving them more vulnerable to legal repercussions. The lack of legal support and training exacerbates their precarious situation, making them easier targets for governmental crackdowns.

The narrative of occupational violence is further emphasized by Participant 8's personal ordeal: "I was taken into custody at the end of the next day's evening shift... I

was physically attacked in front of my house...". Participant 8 also has an ongoing case in court and reports to have suffered damages of physical violence for his media presence. This incident highlights the physical dangers journalists face, extending beyond professional risks to personal safety, underscoring the severe consequences of reporting under a nationalist lens in Türkiye.

This theme of systemic targeting is echoed in Participant 3's experiences, who said, "Getting arrested was a weekly thing back in [a news outlet], everyone was taken to detention at least once." This quote not only captures the routine nature of legal challenges faced by journalists in certain regions but also the pervasive atmosphere of intimidation and control. Nationalist journalists, like their Kurdish counterparts, now face significant legal repercussions, demonstrating the widening scope of state intervention and repression in Türkiye.

In summary, the landscape of journalistic practice within Türkiye is profoundly influenced by the interplay of editorial control and legal repercussions, particularly for those operating within the realm of nationalist ideology-driven news outlets. The experiences shared by participants in this discussion illuminate the multifaceted challenges these journalists face—from the editorial hesitations in publishing migration-related news to the more severe and direct confrontations with governmental power.

Participant 1's attempts to publish pro-RASIM news stories meets resistance from within the media organization underscores the internal conflicts that arise when editorial policies are influenced by political affiliations or societal sensitivities. Specifically, the hesitancy to address issues related to RASIM starkly contrasts with the more straightforward coverage of domestic issues. This editorial bias not only seeks to

minimize public discontent but also reflects a broader reluctance within nationalist circles to engage with or provide care for RASIM in meaningful ways, avoiding topics that might stir political controversy or challenge nationalist narratives.

Furthermore, the experiences of Participants 5 and 8, who have faced imprisonment and physical attacks, respectively, reveal the harsh realities of a profession under siege by state mechanisms. The stark contrast between their treatment and that of journalists in more mainstream or politically aligned media highlights a discriminatory landscape where legal repercussions are unevenly applied. This disparity not only threatens the principle of equal protection under the law but also underscores the vulnerability of citizens engaging in news production who lack the institutional support often available to their counterparts in larger organizations.

Overall, the professional challenges of covering migration in Türkiye encompass three critical areas that significantly impact journalistic integrity and effectiveness. First, access to reliable and timely news sources (in other words, people to interview) is a continual struggle. This limitation directly impacts the quality of their reporting and their ability to deliver a comprehensive view of migration issues, which in turn shapes public perception and informs policy discussions. Secondly, journalists face restrictive editorial policies in nationalist-driven outlets, where there is a pronounced pressure to conform stories to align with broader political agendas.

Simultaneously, the threat of legal action looms large, influencing journalistic approaches and often leading to self-censorship or the avoidance of sensitive topics altogether. Finally, the challenge of unreliable data on migration exacerbates these difficulties. The frequent discrepancies and the general absence of reliable data on

migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers make it challenging for journalists to report with precision and clarity. This not only undermines the effectiveness of their work but also contributes to the spread of misinformation and public mistrust.

6.4 Social-Familial Challenges

As we move from professional challenges of covering migration to once again a more personal one, one that examines the social and familial dynamics that further complicate the journalists' work, it becomes evident how these personal spheres are deeply intertwined with broader societal attitudes towards RASIM. This interplay in return significantly impacts the morale and well-being of the journalist. "My friends refer to refugees as "your people", they say "your people raped someone again" says Participant 4, highlighting the accusatory and alienating rhetoric that journalists often face from their own social circles. When Participant 12 sits with friends, they joke about his love for humanity that is commonly followed by sharing of a concern over RASIM's presence in Türkiye, subtly questioning his role in perpetuating the conditions that allow RASIM to remain in Türkiye. Ironically, this is a challenge I have also heard of from my contacts in Presidency of Migration Management³¹.

Of course, there are exceptions. Participants 3 and 6 are well-endorsed by their families and friends who encourage them to do such reports on solidarity with RASIM rather than political ones that could endanger them. However, my participants feel resentful towards their close circles, families and friends who hold onto entrenched discourses on migration. Participant 10 criticizes people who produce dehumanizing narratives of RASIM on social media, and adds;

³¹ See Chapter 2 for more information on PMM.

But it's not just that. I see it in my own family as well. I mean, when we're sitting at dinner, and suddenly, out of nowhere, someone says, "Oh, everywhere is full of Afghans." Where have you seen Afghans? You haven't even seen them. (Participant 10)

These words align well with Participant 9's earlier comments on how citizens who receive news of migrants from the comfort of their homes never in fact encounter the tragedies these people experience. Such instances underscore the pervasive nature of racist remarks and misinformation about RASIM, turning the simple act of reporting on migration into a daily struggle against deeply ingrained prejudices.

This discussion of the social and familial challenges faced by journalists not only underscores the personal toll of covering migration but also sets the stage for our final topic: the violence that intersects with these societal attitudes. As we transition into examining the violent repercussions faced by journalists, it's crucial to recognize how the personal biases and societal discourse around RASIM contribute to an environment that can escalate into physical and verbal aggression against those attempting to report the truth.

6.5 Violence

In the realm of journalism, particularly within the politically charged context of migration coverage in Türkiye, the profession's inherent risks manifest not only as personal, professional and social challenges but also escalate into threats of violence. This reality starkly affects all journalists, though female journalists often find themselves particularly vulnerable due to gendered threats and societal perceptions. Yet, the threat of violence remains a critical issue for the entire profession, underscoring the precarious nature of the media's role as the fourth estate—a cornerstone of democratic societies tasked with checking other powers. As we delve into this discussion, it becomes apparent

that these threats range from verbal assaults that seek to intimidate and silence, to egregious threats against personal safety. Such incidents not only jeopardize the physical security of journalists but also aim to undermine the journalistic integrity and the broader function of the media as a platform for truth and accountability.

Going in the order of level of threat experienced by the journalist, let us start with what might imaginably be the easiest to cope form of violence journalists reporting on migration face on a day-to-day basis: verbal abuse. These words come from a well-educated male journalist who has been reporting for one of the leftist-socialist news outlets, *Birgün*, for an extended time. He notes,

We receive comments like, "Your focus is on Syrians, Turks are in the same situation," or "Let them harass your wife and daughters, then we'll see," approaching the issue from a completely different and very ugly perspective. There is no physical threat in this regard, but I can easily say that there is verbal pressure. (Participant 9)

The participant later notes that over time he has learned to plug his ears against such comments and disregard instances of hate-speech and misinformation some social media users proliferate. While this itself is a problem that needs to be solved by the platforms in their efforts to fight discrimination, prejudice and spread of misinformation, our participant's remarks serve to remind us of the urgency of the matter. And, unfortunately, this level of verbal abuse is not even close to how ugly some of these comments can get.

The earlier sections on personal challenges experienced particularly by female journalists shed light on some of the psychological outcomes these journalists had to endure after their encounters with such backlash. When asked whether she encountered violence related to her coverage of RASIM, since this was a subject I knew she experienced from my earlier research on her profile, Participant 1 said;

Well, not really that [physical violence] kind. But threats do come sometimes, especially around the times when you make the news. Things like, "We will strip you of your Turkish citizenship" or "Send this one away [outside the country] too." Or heavy insults, like "We will f*ck you over the Turkish flag" and such. These kinds of things come. But nothing physical has happened. I don't really think it will either.

This was a participant who was repeatedly targeted on social media by numerous anonymous "troll" accounts as she calls them. While she has been endorsed by many for her strong observation skills, her attentiveness to her subjects and the depth of her investigative reporting; there has also been incidents involving hundreds of social media users attacking her with hurtful comments, threatening and accusing her for "pro-RASIM propaganda". For her, such threats were still unworthy of being fixated upon, she would in fact feel more empowered to write on these subjects seeing the cruelty her opponents reflect in their comments.

This point on sexual violence is an emphasis that I feel obliged to add, having talked about Participant 10. Her name was mentioned in a post by an X user who called for public shaming of certain female journalists alongside a call for sexual violence. "People threatened to kill me for sharing this visual online and reported me to police who came to collect my statement" says Participant 10. Combined, the accounts of these two participants serve to remind us of the sexual violence and intense personal threats that women journalists frequently face, especially when their work challenges entrenched societal narratives or exposes uncomfortable truths about migration. Rape threats do occur against women journalists who report on migration, and these should not easily be forgotten or overlooked. These threats are not only a direct attack on their personal safety but also an attempt to intimidate and silence their voices in the media.

As we conclude this section on the risks faced by journalists in Türkiye, particularly those covering migration, it is clear that the dangers extend far beyond the professional realm into deeply personal and, at times, physically threatening scenarios. The testimonies of participants, ranging from verbal abuses to direct threats on life, illustrate a stark reality where journalists are regularly targeted for their work. This harassment is especially pronounced among female journalists, who encounter not only the general threats of violence but also gender-specific threats, including rape threats. Such experiences highlight the dual burden faced by female journalists, who must navigate both the professional hazards of their reporting and the additional layer of gender-based violence.

Participant 9's ability to somewhat desensitize himself to verbal abuse underscores a coping mechanism that many journalists might develop over time. However, this does not diminish the severity or the unacceptable nature of the abuse itself, which ranges from undermining their professional credibility to threats against their personal safety and that of their families. The normalization of such threats, particularly those that are sexually explicit and violent, reveals a deeply ingrained societal issue that transcends the individual experiences of journalists.

Moreover, the experiences of Participant 1 and Participant 10 exemplify the heightened risks involved in reporting on contentious issues like migration. The threats they receive are not just attempts to silence their journalistic voice but are also aimed at delegitimizing their personal and professional integrity. Both participants' resilience in the face of such adversity and their determination to continue reporting in spite of these

challenges is commendable and reflects the critical role that journalists play in upholding democratic values and human rights.

6.6 Discussion

This chapter examined the challenges faced by journalists reporting on migration in Türkiye, a task complicated not only by the nature of the subject but significantly by the polarized media environment. Through detailed interviews with 14 journalists, this chapter illuminated how different journalistic styles and the broader socio-political context influence migration reporting.

Findings suggest that migration journalism in Türkiye is more than an occupational challenge—it is an exercise in resilience against political pressures, editorial gatekeeping, and societal biases. Beginning with an exploration of personal challenges, the chapter details the mental health impacts, trauma, and emotional strain that come with covering migration stories, often exacerbated by a lack of formal support and training. It is seen that there are profound personal and professional risks journalists endure in reporting migration including threats, verbal abuse, and especially the gender-specific violence faced by female journalists are disturbingly prevalent. The psychological aftermath of exposure to trauma alongside the need for training in coping mechanisms with such instances of violence have been repeatedly foregrounded. These findings not only highlight the hostile conditions under which journalists work but also the urgent need for better protection and support systems to safeguard their welfare and press freedom.

Moving into professional challenges, I discuss how limited access to sources, editorial gatekeeping, unreliable data, and governmental oversight hinder journalists'

ability to report comprehensively and accurately on migration. These limitations, as discussed in earlier sections, reflect a controlled media environment in which journalists frequently abstain the topic, and while more rarely, resort to self-censor or conform to ideological agendas, at the expense of journalistic independence.

The chapter also highlighted social-familial challenges, illustrating how journalists face isolation within their personal circles, where their professional choices invite skepticism or reproach from friends and family. This form of alienation underscores the broader societal biases against RASIM and exposes the ways in which journalism on sensitive subjects can strain personal relationships. Violence-related challenges, a dominant theme throughout, culminated in accounts of harassment and physical threats that journalists endure both online and offline. These narratives reflect a hostile public climate fueled by polarized media and societal attitudes, with female journalists facing disproportionate levels of risk.

As this chapter closes, it sets the stage for the forthcoming discussion exploring the impact of polarization on the practice of journalism. The next chapter aims to address critical questions regarding the nature of polarization in Türkiye—is it a dichotomous split, or are there nuanced layers within this polarization? How do these dynamics affect journalistic integrity and the overall media landscape? By continuing this exploration, the next chapter seeks to deepen our understanding of how polarization influences journalistic practices and the broader implications for media freedom and democracy in Türkiye.

CHAPTER 7

PRACTICE OF JOURNALISM IN POLARIZED CONTEXTS

In the earlier chapters, I discussed that polarization in Türkiye on the subject of migration, was easy to *observe* yet difficult to *frame*. A famous Turkish news anchor and journalist, Cüneyt Özdemir, on his daily news program said

You can't even speak up about immigration because you immediately get labeled as a racist. Of course, there are racists people, but if you ask why something isn't being regulated, you're branded as a racist or fascist. The reaction [against migration] is claimed by no one; there is hostility towards immigrants, but no one owns it. (Özdemir, Youtube, July 13 2024, My translation)

While I do not agree with Özdemir's rather limited tolerance for political correctness, his words bring a perceived censorship in practice of journalism to light. Ozdemir believes people are discouraged from asking questions on regulations pertaining to refugees, asylum-seekers and immigrants (RASIM). More importantly, he believes that there is an "unacknowledged" hostility towards RASIM. His example helps illustrate how a topic gets to be "the elephant in the room" in news production, something a journalist believes they observe but for some reason cannot frame in an acceptable narrative to the society. Journalism practitioners, researchers and scholars alike might be interested in asking at this point: Why is the secrecy, why can't journalists raise questions freely on a topic such as immigration? Does polarization play a role in this perceived censorship? If yes, how does perceived polarization change journalist's news-making practices and logics behind their practice? What are some professional and personal challenges posed by polarization, if any? These are the questions I set out to explore with this chapter.

Of course, raising questions on the relationship between polarization and practice of journalism comes with the challenge of exploring a new territory of terms. This is a

challenge that takes its roots not only from the geopolitical context of the research but also has to do with the difficulty in conceptualizing polarization in relation to media research.

In a systemic review of research, it is discussed that while there was an increase in research on polarization in the last 10 years, the definitions and measures of forms of polarization such as ideological or affective polarization have not been consistent throughout the literature; and, that there was a gap in the literature of research exploring media can “depolarize” (Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021). Inconsistencies in definitions and measures of polarization presented a challenge to systematically study this phenomenon and its relation to the field media and communication, let alone studying how news media can contribute to curbing polarization or ‘depolarize’.

At the same time, a consensus was visible in understanding polarization *vectorially*, treating it as the movement of masses in a spectrum of views, “moving apart to opposite extremes” and/or “moving together to a single extreme” (Wojcieszak et al., 2017). Preceding this vectorial consensus, there were also agreement on “fields” of research to study polarization, for example, two forms of polarization, i.e. “ideological” and “affective” polarization (Iyengar et al., 2012), have been commonly studied in relation to media, as researchers sought answers to what exacerbates animosity towards political opponents. For example, investigating how polarized contexts affects residents’ relationship with media, Wenzel (2020) observed that “circulation of polarized top-down national narratives frayed local storytelling networks”, weakening the link between actors in the community and shrinking the middle ground for discussion. Building upon a review of pertinent polarization literature in Chapter 1, I offered my understanding of the

term which I summarized by defining it as “the shrinking of middle ground” between opposing political parties. There, I also noted three distinct forms of polarization, namely elite, mass and affective polarization which have been repeatedly referred to in the literature, explaining how they shape my research questions.

Put briefly, elite polarization (Splendore & Piacentini, 2024; Suiter & Fletcher, 2020; Tucker et al., 2018; Wojcieszak et al., 2015; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Baldassari & Gelman, 2008; Fiorina et al., 2008) referred to increasing divergence in the attitudes and beliefs of political elites, mass polarization (Ludwig & Müller, 2022; Gidron et al., 2019; Lelkes, 2016; Leeper, 2014; Arceneaux & Johnson, 2010; Fiorina et al., 2008; Graber, 2008) was used in relation to general populace; and, affective polarization (Boxell et al., 2024; Wenzel, 2020; Iyengar, 2019; Lelkes et al., 2017) was on the realm of personal attitudes and emotions, relating to how people “feel toward other political parties”³².

While my initial goal was to understand how journalists perceived the polarization between the locals, i.e. citizens or host people, and RASIM, these theoretical constructs helped expand research and interview questions by encouraging me to explore how journalists also perceived the polarization between political elites, between different sects from the general population and in-between journalists and their close family and friends.

Each of these were important groundings of the term polarization; however, in order to respond to RQ 2: “How do journalists in Türkiye perceive their role within a

³² Since one of my goals with this research was to understand the role of journalists in mitigating polarization among general populace, mass-polarization was the more theoretically fit framework for this research particularly out of the three for drawing insights towards what needs to be done to improve coverage of RASIM. Still, the impacts of elite and affective polarization were not overlooked and instead were incorporated to the thematic analysis of interview data.

polarized media landscape?”, I also needed insights on how journalists identify and categorize polarization along with asking whether and how they adjust their reporting in line with their perception of polarization. For that purpose, a rather newly introduced term to the jargon of polarization studies, Media Polarization (Splendore & Piacentini, 2024) was found particularly useful for characterizing how journalists’ perception of polarization might impact their story writing processes.

7.1 Media Polarization

Examining the discursive construction of polarization, in relation to media-party parallelism in “polarized pluralist Mediterranean model” (Hallin & Mnacini, 2004) as exemplified by Italy, Splendore & Piacentini (2024) discussed that certain media systems, particularly those that are conducive to selective exposure disincentivize media owners and newsmakers from contradicting audience’s prior views, and thus reinforce polarization. This phenomenon could not be explained by elite or mass polarization as it yielded directly to how newsmakers were perceiving and navigating polarization, before potentially driving or mitigating it. Moving from this observation, they used the term ‘media polarization’ to account for editorial strategies of “imposing more extreme, hence polarized, positions according to what the competitors are doing/expected to do” (Splendore & Piacentini, 2024).

This research was eye opening for formulating questions on not only how journalists perceive polarization but also *why* they perceive it that way. It encouraged me to raise more targeted questions for understanding the political economy of migration reporting. Beyond ideological and political motivations, were there gains to be made through polarization for journalists? How did their behavior and attitudes while doing

their job change in relation to their perception of polarization? Did media owners expect their reporters and journalists to be cognizant of polarization and, if I may say, stay one step ahead of it? These seemed to be important sub-questions to consider for analysis alongside the larger research question “How do journalists perceive their role in a polarized media landscape?”. The larger question also involved personal, ideological and professional motives along with outcomes of these perceptions, aiming to explain how their narratives change in relation to these backgrounds in later phases.

With these questions in mind, I now turn to report my findings from interviews with Turkish journalists, reporters and editors on the subject of their relationship with polarization. The next section serves as an overview of responses participants provided when asked whether they believe polarization is a problem impacting their coverage on migration in Türkiye. Followingly, I move to drawing insights from my participants’ experiences on working from polarized contexts, namely I explore the impact of polarization over journalistic practices. A larger portion of this exploration is dedicated to explaining the harms of polarization to equitable practice of journalism; however, the findings show that polarization also creates new social media affordances for citizens to express themselves more formally against political elites creating a new avenue for polarization to become visible between the elite and general population. This visibility, I believe matters in shaping how the subsequent news may talk about RASIM.

7.2 Polarization over Migration

During the interviews, I asked my interview participants what comes to mind when I say the word polarization, probing for the journalist’s own accounts and definitions of the term before I presented my understanding of it. Some participants would not need to be probed to mention polarization and would start describing it as a big risk to communal

peace in Türkiye (Participants 5,6,8,11,14), in these cases they would be asked to elaborate on what they mean by the word. In the cases when they did not mention the word, and after asking for the participant's own wording, I provided a brief explanation of the term as the movement of people from differing political views in opposing directions, leading to a shrinking middle-ground for civil dialogue.

Following our exchange on the definitions, I asked them whether they think polarization exist in Türkiye over the subject of migration. Although it may seem like a question better suited for a larger quantitative survey, this question was an important question for me to gauge my participants' personal observation on such numbers. Afterall, there are numerous reports on insufficient coverage or anti-immigrant attitudes in print and social media (Avraamidou & Ioannou, 2023; Jauhiainen et al., 2022; Filibeli & Ertuna, 2021; Özdora et al, 2021; Özdüzen et al., 2021; Özerim & Tolay, 2021; Bozdağ & Smets, 2017), so I could assume there should be a sizeable anti-immigrant population; however, I did not know journalist's view of these attitudes and whether they thought polarization was noticeable. Whether and how journalists felt a societal pressure has been a mystery with the lack of research conducted with people working in the Turkish journalism industry. To be able to pursue these questions, I first need to clarify the presence and significance of polarization as perceived by journalists.

7.3 Polarization in the Presence of an Overwhelming Majority

A revered colleague reviewing this work in its earlier stages rightfully asked me³³, “In a country where 73% want to send refugees back, isn't it possible to talk about a near

³³ In her review, she also urged me to ask what type of role does news-media cut out for itself. Does it only cater to the wishes of the masses, providing information only on what the majority wants to hear? Or

consensus on this issue rather than polarization?”. This was an important question to ask as part of this research, could disliking toward any subject mean polarization? When does a majority overshadow a minority to the point that we cannot speak of polarization?

The responses when I asked my participants whether Turkish people are polarized in their views of migration, reflected the irony in the first sentences of this chapter where I mentioned it is easy to observe yet difficult to frame migration. Majority of participants disagreed with the statement that there is polarization on the subject of migration, “when everyone collectively not wanted RASIM presence” (Participant 1). They believed anti-immigrants sentiments, beliefs and discourses dominate the public scene, making it a crashing majority, or the winning faction, over a silent minority (Neumann, 1974; Glynn, 1995) who self-identifies as pro-RASIM. When asked whether they witness any polarization on the subject of migration, Participant 8 said,

So, polarization over migration is actually, in my opinion, low. The reason for this is that regardless of party affiliation, there is a predominantly conscious or unconscious opposition to migration among the vast majority of society. I think the proportion of people who accept or advocate for migration in Türkiye is very low, both on the right and the left. (Participant 8)

According to this view, a homogeneous disliking towards hosting RASIM can be seen and felt in daily talk of the “street”, a predominant conscious or unconscious opposition to migration. When I say I believe there is polarization between pro-immigrant AKP voters and the followers of opposition parties, one participant says,

I think you and I think differently on this. I think there is a big anti-immigrant group among AKP’s voters themselves. The number of those who are pro-migration across the board are very low. And those are the leftists in Türkiye, but extreme left. Not CHP left. (Participant 1)

does it still try to carve out a neutral approach to the subject, maybe a comparatively more constructive stance towards RASIM? This suggestion was noted for further thematic analysis.

Here, I have to admit there is no data to verify either of our claims on the subject, I do not know what people think about migrants based on their party-identities. Assumptions can be drawn from party agendas; however, this does not always mean that voters align with their party on the subject of migration. Some nationalists that are commonly represented by center-right political parties strongly oppose RASIM presence whereas those in further right who come together on religious grounds -and are usually allies with center-right- endorse RASIM presence. Also, the participant differentiates between center-left parties such as the Republican People's Party (CHP) and left-wing parties such as Turkish Workers Party (TIP) or Labor Party (EMEP). This is an important finding I highlighted in previous chapters briefly, that center-left and left-wing political parties make completely opposite statements when it comes to migration. This means that even a political-party-identity survey would have existed, this survey should be designed paying particular attention to these differentiations over views on migration across parties even from the same wing.

Another participant claimed that being anti-immigrant is a sentiment that exceeds political party-identity-borders, she notes,

AKP supporters don't want it [migration], CHP supporters don't want it, and HDP supporters don't want it either. I don't think there is a party distinction in this regard. This is something everyone in Türkiye agrees on.
(Participant 10)

Indeed, while party-level differentiations in approaches towards RASIM was visible, the justifications some participants for an anti-immigrant attitude were common beyond their political affiliations. For example, the belief that the prices of rents are climbing due to RASIM's presence was found to be a claim put forward by two participants, one aligning with a center-right party while the other was closely affiliated with a left wing

democrat party. Participant 10's words above on anti-immigrant attitudes not showing party-level distinctions are illuminating in the sense that she invites us to think about post-party alliances that are conjured over the identities of RASIM.

Alongside post-party alliances, representatives of political parties who act as the forerunners in expressing anti-immigrant attitudes such as Ümit Özdağ and Tanju Özcan, seem to have a growing following³⁴. However, not all seem to be at risk with the incumbent party's systemic efforts to curb public demonstrations of anti-immigrant sentiment, and towards harmonization.

Three participants believe the spectrum of attitudes are more diverse than simple anti and pro-immigrant attitudes; they do not believe in a 50/50 break and believe pro-immigrant citizens have a sizeable presence in the public debates. A good summary of the views expressed under this wing comes from Participant 9,

In Türkiye, as in almost every matter, there is a big divide on this issue as well. While there is a very intense anti-migrant sentiment; there are also many people who can look at the situation from a very humanitarian perspective, and their numbers are not small. I would say, it is almost half and half.

As Participant 9, later unpacks in his interviews, he believes there are many humanitarian efforts that tend to be overlooked, and these do not necessarily align with what people think of migration policy. He explains that some people identify with challenges RASIM are going through, do not oppose their presence in the country and in fact help them build homes but oppose the way within which this is managed in Türkiye, often leading to overpopulation of certain cities and scarcities on social services.

³⁴ Ümit Özdağ's party Zafer Partisi (Victory Party) was founded in 2021 and entered into elections for the first time after two years of preparation. It received less than 3% of votes in 2023 national elections, failing to pass the threshold. However, the alliances they established with other political parties in the process placed Ümit Özdağ and his party among important actor among political elite.

There are also people that identify with RASIM based on “relational” identities such as parental or religious identity (Zeng ,2021), whose examples could be found in our sample: “women who live under dire conditions reach out to me from Iran, Afghanistan...” says Participant 3, “I am a woman, I can` t tell them to stay where they are and endure those pains”.

Thus, some of my participants held the belief that pro-immigrant attitudes and solidarity with RASIM existed in the public in higher frequencies than what was reported in the media. This was a conclusion they had drawn from personal experiences of feeling empathy for the other, and not having found content to match the view of RASIM` s life they had in mind. In this sense, it was also important for analysis as it showed that they perceived other journalists to hold a tendency to overlook what might be less interesting to the reader (good deeds that are done by RASIM, their struggles and achievements, contributions to community etc.) and showed a willingness to challenge the perceived tendency to overlook these.

However, not everyone interacts with RASIM on the same level or shares empathetic views toward them. This uneven exposure may influence how journalists perceive the empathy gap within the public and, in turn, motivates them to amplify pro-migrant narratives—especially those that advocate for fair and humane treatment of RASIM. This can be seen in Participant 9` s reflection:

It is impossible for a carpenter, a grocer, or any citizen living in the Çankaya district to see or hear about this [the tragedies RASIM face]. They form an opinion based on what they read and watch. Therefore, I think these news reports are very important to form relations between communities. (Participant 9)

In saying that, Participant 9 helps respond to how journalists might be adjusting their reporting in line with the polarization they perceive, with the intention of curbing polarization. In this journalist's case, leading up to this quote, the participant described to me some of the anti-immigrant rhetoric he becomes exposed to on his way to work, on his digital encounters and elsewhere. He believes that journalists could help clear some of the disillusionments when it comes to migration by creating more shared experiences and middle-ground between citizens of anti and pro immigration views.

Overall, a consensus was seen in my participants' view on the presence of anti-immigrant attitudes among the general populace. The consolidation of anti-immigrant attitudes in Türkiye over the last decade are well documented (UNHCR, 2020). The racism and anti-immigrant attitudes performed on online spaces is also well documented in the literature (Avraamidou & Ioannou, 2023; Jauhiainen et al., 2022; Özdüzen et al., 2021; Özerim & Tolay, 2021; Bozdag & Smets, 2017). This much of evidence on anti-migration attitudes in the general populace made it seem redundant to talk about polarization when the other end of the spectrum, namely those with pro-migration attitudes, appeared to be weak. At the same time, these anti-migrant attitudes were in conflict with the incumbent party's political agenda on the subject which created barriers for the journalists who aligned with anti-immigrant attitudes. That other wing, in our case pro-migration voices, was not so weak after all. Thus, the reported perception on commonality of anti-immigrant attitudes across the board was an important finding. It meant that journalists who sided with anti-immigrant attitudes, while facing possible sanctions from the government, could rally people who came together around this view,

knowing there is demand. Similarly, it meant that journalists with pro-immigrant views could feel discouraged from making their works public.

Returning to the question I started this section with, on whether we can talk about polarization in the presence of an overwhelming majority; my answer is yes, I certainly think more attention needs to be paid to polarization, particularly in the settings where this polarization is in-between an overwhelming majority and a seemingly silent minority. I believe journalists are obliged to think of ways to expand the middle ground between citizens with polarized views of migration against the background of numerous challenges I identify in this study. The reason for this belief and answer is that, while polarization over the subject might be visible through the examples of conflicts and animosity between political parties, this might not be reflected in the interpersonal level. Citizens can be polarized in their views of policy regarding RASIM they can display pro-migrant attitudes, separating the RASIM from the work of policy makers. Thus, labels we give to sides with polarization do not work efficiently to reflect the interpersonal attitudes of citizens. The overwhelming majority of one view over the other can make studying impacts of polarization harder than it is in cases where the public is divided to equal portions; however, the loss of dialogue between these disproportional parties might exactly be the topic to explore, if we wish to look for ways of enhancing inclusivity of our public spheres or to seek ways in “improving” migration reporting in an equitable way.

Also, studying polarization in contexts where the divide between the groups is between an overwhelming majority and seemingly silent minority can be a good extension to Neumann’s Spiral of Silence (1974). Put briefly, the theory argues that

people are less likely to voice their opinion if they believe they are in a minority position due to fear of isolation, this leads to a ‘spiral’ as less people voice their opinion more visible the voice of the dominant view become. Neumann’s theory has been put to test and its core assumptions have been falsified by several studies which criticized the fitness of the theory to a post-broadcast, social and now online media environments(Weeks et al., 2023; Chaudhry & Gruzd, 2020; Duncan et al., 2020; Tsfati et al., 2014) while others tried to modify it (Cheong et al., 2022; Duncan et al., 2020; Dubois & Szwarc, 2018). Within the context of Türkiye, it appears that spiral of silence (Neumann, 1974) would tell us journalists would be more likely to voice anti-immigrant attitudes if they hold them since they believed majority of the population held similar views. However, the fact that the major actors among political elite were of the pro-immigrant wings, voicing the opinion that aligns with the majority can create challenges more dire than isolation. Some of these challenges I described earlier in Chapter 6 such as being detained or facing heavy censorship.

Just like Ozdemir’s comments on his YouTube news channel (2024), there existed a hostility towards RASIM but there was no one to own it. Naming this hostility racism would be wrong without contextualizing cases, and I do not personally think it connects to racism. Even in those cases, it was assumed that the general populace was watching for marks of racism ready to shame and cancel public figures who engage in racist remarks, and the incumbent party was overseeing removal of racist discourses from publicly available media. However, it was apparent to me that whatever I name it, this hostility could in fact translate to polarization with now the majority of general populace holding conflicting views to policy makers, the incumbent party representatives and the president

himself. Yes, polarization in general populace might not have been an important determinant on the news-making side while consolidated anti-immigrant attitudes were providing enough fuel for journalists to drive sensationalism (Arbaoui, De Swert, & van der Brug, 2020; Kleemans & Hendriks, 2009); however, losing common ground with the incumbent party could present serious barriers in the way journalists wish they could work.

7.4 The Impact of Polarization over Journalistic Practices

The personal, professional, and social challenges that comes with reporting on migration in Türkiye were discussed in-depth in the previous chapter. There, I discussed that journalists could face editorial gatekeeping and violence from the audience due to their reporting on topics relating to migration policy and RASIM in general. For this chapter, instead of focusing on the challenges journalists face in their day-to-day practices when covering migration, I wish to focus on how polarization exacerbates some of these challenges. Moving from an understanding of polarization as “the loss or shrinkage of common ground between opposing parties”, I argue that journalists who work within polarized contexts can find themselves rethinking their existing roles as “informants”, “watch-dogs” (Bennet & Serrin, 2005) or brokers of information (Gesualdo et al., 2019; Burt, 2004); and, if desired can extend this role to serve as mediators between RASIM and citizens. In the next section, I explore the impact of polarization over journalism practices, driving insights from my participants’ responses to question like “How does working in a polarized environment effect your work?” and “Are you familiar with any strategies, trainings or guidelines for reporting from polarized contexts?”. When thematically analyzed, it was seen that their responses could be broken

into two themes, namely polarization's outcome for journalists including possibilities of expansion in news literacy and polarization's harm to practice of journalism.

7.4.1 Harms to Journalism

The harms of polarization to journalist practices were found to be threefold. Namely these were: (i) the changing demands from journalists, i.e. the increased demand for fast and sensational news with decreased attention for thoroughness; (ii) self-censorship; and (iii) increased risks of harming civilians via false reporting.

7.4.1.1 Changing Demands from News in Polarized Contexts. Earlier in Chapter 5, I presented findings on the proliferation of a type of reporting, i.e. 'Agency Journalism', as a response to the fierce competition for clicks and financial constraints. Perceived to be a type of journalism that requires minimal effort, reporting in this line would occur by copying and pasting the headlines and content of news from large news agencies without adding commentary. This was more so a distribution method that was replacing the news-production on the subject. Summarizing this view, Participant 7 said, "We must admit the race to get the news out first has harmed journalists way too much." This was a sentiment shared across the board among journalists working in mainstream news outlets, as opposed to alternative ones that were funded by patronage or EU funds. The participants reported that increasing digitization, ease of setting up online news-portals and the fact that competitors were all doing it meant that their news outlet also had to speed-up its news production and delivery, almost being pushed to perform some level of agency journalism.

Also in Chapter 6, I discussed that "limited access to news-subjects" and "unreliability of data on migrants" were reported among challenges to equitable

representation of RASIM. With these systemic challenges at hand, journalists' chances of running research intensive news article on migration were already hampered and coupled with the push to get the news out faster, I believe more and more journalists could be drawn to agency journalism.

Polarization in Türkiye comes into play at this moment, against a background where fast, agency-made news are deemed advantageous. Reporters are well aware of the hostility towards migration (regardless of its reason), but more importantly they are aware that this hostility can drive competition for anti-immigrant news. The following lines serve as an example to this mechanism of reasoning:

People became too involved with migrants, they started to think that migrants should leave, which created a different expectation for news. In Türkiye, there is a concern for ratings, and they know that news about migrants will be watched more and that positive news about them will attract criticism. The images of trucks filled with people at the border have caused everyone to be labeled as illegal migrants. (Participant 4)

This statement on one hand lends support to Splendore & Piacentini's (2024) reasoning that journalists watch over their competitor's reporting and impose "more extreme, hence polarized, positions according to what the competitors are doing/expected to do". Indeed, all my participants made remarks on how their competitors reported on migration, highlighting how they differ from the others, which can be taken as a sign of them monitoring the news market regularly. However, in the specific case of Participant 4 above who is well aware of the citizens' hostility towards RASIM and risk of attracting criticism, does not seem to impose more extreme versions of his pro-immigrant views; nor does he report being affected by what he reads from competitors. When I look at his news reporting on migrants throughout his career, I see a steady human-rights based approach to topic selection, a steady neutral tone and elements of investigative reporting,

writing on issues such as the conditions of RASIM at removal centers, without necessarily imposing “more extreme” humanitarian coverage.

Contrasting with Participant 4’s steady stance, Participant 1 explained that her conflicts with anti-immigrant colleagues motivated her to write more on subjects regarding RASIM. Similarly, Participant 5 said she feels more willing to take over stories of RASIM when she witnesses the neglect in mainstream news coverage. Participant 2 and 7 complained about the sharp increase in the numbers of online “news portals” (i.e. online news sites) which added to the competition on the subject, compelling them to be more “aggressive in production”. These responses highlight the personal ways journalists choose to adapt or resist to perceived polarization and how shifting industry expectations are reshaping the speed and frequency of news production and circulation.

7.4.1.2 Demand for Sensational News. Another important theme that emerged in interview responses to questions regarding polarization’s impact on practice of journalism, was the increased demand for sensational news. Described as packaging information to make it more “interesting, extraordinary and relevant” (Molek-Kozakowska, 2013), sensationalism has been incorporated to news production processes in numberless cases and has long been a point of criticism targeting mainstream news producers (Singh, 2023; Lim & Bentley, 2022; Arbaoui et al., 2020).

In my content analysis, I described “Irregular Migrant Hunt” stories that at times presented police operations against human-traffickers with extreme details, or “Rescue” operations where Greece’s forces were presented in engaging in extraordinarily cruel acts of pushing people off the boats. These, while seem to be on a lesser frequency compared

to neutral tone of brief spot-like news stories on migration, hosted examples of some sensational news stories.

Some participants believed that the affective polarization between citizens and RASIM drove citizens to seek out sensational news, particularly news that painted RASIM in negative lights, so-called “exposing” the risks and threats they pose for citizens.

I can understand the fear in people from the story you described. A group of men -aged 18-30, biologically and physically strong- is coming, and these are people without legal status, with whom you cannot engage in a legal struggle, and who you cannot apprehend. This frightens people. This also affects the language of the news. As news increases, fear increases, and as fear increases, reactions and demand increase. As demand increases, it becomes a vicious cycle. (Participant 3)

In the lines above and later in the interview, Participant 3 explains that the demand for sensational news doesn't just stem from inherent journalistic practices but is heavily influenced by the way journalists perceive audience behavior and preferences, lending support to uses and gratifications theory (Ng & Zhao, 2020; Katz & Blumler, 1974). Some audiences will seek gratification through sensational news, and Participant 3 believes the type of gratification they seek will rely on their preconceptions of what a RASIM looks like (in this case a healthy male whose legal background cannot be identified as easily) These lines reflect a concern that is seemed to be shared across participants with self-reported pro-immigrant attitudes, a concern for the projected levels of sensationalism in news regarding RASIM.

Participant 3 believes “vicious cycle” of sensationalism in the news is to be avoided. Other participants -particularly those with strong nationalist tendencies- believed this was not a risk but a necessary step to keep the community engaged and cultivate a public response to problems with RASIM. Whichever route journalists decide

to take, to avoid or fuel polarization, it is evident that journalists regularly monitor the news-market, and responses to their news coverage. While the exact ways within which they do this monitoring may differ on an individual basis (indeed some might be reading other news sites` and following other journalists on a daily basis, some might be just lending an ear to a different channel`s TV news once in a blue moon), what matters is that majority of participants report a perceived demand for sensational news on the topic of migration. They are cognizant of the changing demands of their audiences and are in competition with other news outlets to respond to these changes.

7.4.1.3 Balancing attitudes. Beyond the demand for speed of production and sensational news, polarized contexts also push journalists to walk a thin line between offending one group in population while defending the other.

Yes, as anti-migrant sentiment rises, especially when it is openly voiced by politicians, the media is affected by this. Reporters working in the field of migration, especially those in the mainstream, find themselves holding back and applying self-censorship, even if they don't want to. Because when we report that Syrian children can't access education, some say that children in Türkiye can't access it either. (Participant 9)

In the earlier sections, I looked at the example of Ozdemir, a journalist who was stating that reporters are discouraged from raising questions on RASIM with the fear of being called racists or fascists. This time, I hear the same complaint from the opposite end, audience backlashing at the journalists for being pro-migrant this time, for not being `fascists` enough, so to speak. Participant 9 who works for an independent left-leaning news outlet rarely faces editorial gatekeeping or pressures; however, he mentions the hostile reactions he and his colleagues receive for simply covering a human-interest story on RASIM.

In an earlier quote Participant 9 (p.10) explained that people “form an opinion based on what they read and watch” and it was “impossible” for a citizen to perceive difficulties RASIM face on a daily basis; and that, his job also entailed enabling the formation of social relations between the two parties. Thus, he takes it upon himself to help expand the common ground between RASIM and citizens. It is important to highlight here that he is not moving from a compassionate or caring point when he presents an argument in favor of journalists serving as mediators between RASIM and citizens. On the contrary, the participant repeatedly brings up the necessity to standardize and normalize coverage of RASIM and their struggles so that journalism can be performed in an equitable way.

Similar to Participant 9, Participant 11 brought up how the citizens in Türkiye gradually became not only desensitized but also cantankerous on the subject of RASIM, and believed journalists were tasked with mitigating the polarization of attitudes towards RASIM by expanding the middle-ground between citizens and RASIM,. However, according to Participant 11, it was not only the citizens who went through this gradual change in attitudes, but also news-rooms as they developed a need to respond to observed hostility towards RASIM. Inviting us to pay attention to the priming processes (Iyengar & Kunder, 1982), i.e. the ways journalists pay attention to certain topics while avoiding others, Participant 11 stated,

Of course, media has some type of impact on polarization, but this could also be said about media on women murders, you know people can imitate what they read. But I don` t think we can quantify that very easily. I could give you this example instead. During our meetings at [a famous international news outlet], some reporters – and these are the type of reporters I do not get along very well- they would say “it is okey to adopt a human-rights perspective on an issue, but, if there is something that disturbs the peace and comfort of civilians, we have to mention that as

well” I mean you could mention these things but how will you frame them? That’s important. (Participant 10)

In this case, she was giving an example she witnessed where one reporter pitched the idea to report on the malpractices Mayor of Bolu, an industrial city in Türkiye, has conducted such as imposing 10 times more taxes on refugees (Stockholm Center for Freedom, July 26, 2021); and her team found themselves amidst a discussion on whether the alleged increases in rents (an important complaint the Mayor makes tying this condition to RASIM’s presence) should also be included within the news story. However, I could apply her reasoning to other potential cases where the reporters are pitching, such as a discussion on social security or health expenses Turkish state covers for RASIM. It is likely that the perceived polarization on migration, both mass and affective polarization between citizens and RASIM, will push the journalists to rethink the scope of their story and the subject they prime through these stories.

Other participants also mentioned frictions between their colleagues and themselves, particularly when their tasks involved delivering a news story without triggering extant grievances. This means that perceived polarization encourages journalists to reconsider their impact over opposing parties, in our case the relationship between citizens and RASIM. In reconsidering the scope of their news stories and their real-life impact, journalists either carve out new roles and responsibilities for themselves such as acting as mediators between the polarized groups/watchdogs for citizens’ grievances; or, avoid polarizing content all together. Either way, it is evident that they are in search of a balance between an influx of pro and anti-immigrant audience responses. This point also ties well to the next problem polarization poses for the equitable practice of journalism, namely the increased risk of harm to persons.

7.4.2 Increased Risk of Harm to Persons

Polarization's influence on journalism extends beyond shaping the content and style of reporting; it also raises significant ethical concerns about the potential consequences of journalistic choices, particularly in polarized contexts where public sentiments are heightened and easily agitated. All participants in this research were asked to identify the risks that came along with reporting from polarized contexts, and the majority responded by describing the challenge they face in navigating the fine line between reporting the truth and inadvertently inciting harmful actions against RASIM.

A critical example was the case of sexual offenses conducted by RASIM which quickly led to public lynching of the perpetrators -and those that were unfortunate to be near them at the time the news came out-, aggressive protests from the citizens of the region within which the crime was committed. One participant summarized this challenge with the following lines,

The difficulty of talking about migration is that you need to choose your words very carefully. For example, if you wrote an article and used a harsh language, and then someone went and killed a migrant, you could be considered the instigator of this event. (Participant 7)

This statement underscores the severity of priming processes and editorial decisions when covering sensitive topics in polarized societies. The choice of words, tone, and even the focus of a story can have real-world implications, sometimes extending beyond the realm of public opinion and into actions that can lead to harm to persons. In extreme cases, inflammatory or unbalanced reporting can be seen as a catalyst for hate crimes, placing a heavy burden on journalists to anticipate and mitigate the potential fallout of their reporting.

Participant 8 echoes this sentiment through their institution's commitment to a “no harm policy,” explaining, “In some cases, we question whether writing the news in a certain way might lead to anti-migrant sentiment. Because yes, we are against demographic change but ultimately, there is a humanitarian situation at hand.” This approach reflects a growing awareness among journalists and news organizations of their role in either fueling or tempering public sentiment. Even when personal or institutional biases exist, there is a recognition of a line that should separate practice of journalism from propaganda, to incorporate an element of humanitarianism. Both participants highlight a sense of responsibility to prevent harms being done to a person in relation to their news story. The responsibility extends beyond simply conveying facts; it involves actively engaging in harm reduction by being mindful of how narratives are constructed and the potential repercussions they might trigger.

7.4.3 Increased Civil Interest in News Production

Despite the challenges posed by polarization, one potential benefit is its role in fostering greater citizen involvement in news production. In polarized contexts such as Türkiye, where traditional media may be viewed with skepticism or as aligned with particular agendas, citizens can feel compelled to engage directly in the dissemination of news. This shift is particularly evident on social media which opens new doors of interaction-based-affordances for journalists, challenging institutional objectivity norms as journalists move to pass humor or personal branding along their news content using these platforms (Molyneux, 2015; Molyneux & Mourao, 2017). A striking example of this trend is the emergence social media-based news outlets led by non-professional citizens who leverage their platforms to express grievances against political elites, often

using humor and “meme-worthy” content to critique representatives from opposing parties.

In this sense, it can be said that elite polarization, i.e. the polarization between representatives from political parties, reflects onto citizens, encouraging those who feel marginalized by political elites. A participant who was among those citizens who operated news portals said,

I try to bring news to light from a segment of society that is not insignificant in number but lacks the power of propaganda to make their voices heard. And I try to do this from the place I belong, through a nationalist ideology, because in Türkiye, the press has been predominantly controlled by the left for a long time. Later, it came into the hands of political Islam. And, due to a bit of incompetence and lack of capability on our part, nationalists have never been able to express themselves.
(Participant 5)

By this statement, the participant illustrates how perceived elite polarization and exclusion from public debate can act as a catalyst for citizens to take up the tools of news production. Feeling underrepresented or misrepresented by mainstream media, these individuals turn to social media as a platform to share their perspectives and counterbalance the narratives controlled by political elites.

The decentralization of news making practices allows non-professional news writers to not only express their viewpoints but also to challenge the dominant discourse that often excludes them. In this context, while this digital journalism and publishing can be seen as both a response to and a consequence of polarization. It empowers individuals to take control of the narratives that affect their lives, making news production a more participatory and accessible process. However, this also presents challenges; as citizens often operate without the editorial oversight and ethical guidelines that traditional media adhere to, the risk of misinformation and bias is heightened.

7.5 Discussion

This chapter explored the various impacts of polarization on the practice of journalism in Türkiye, particularly in the context of migration. It started by explaining the struggle to define polarization accurately and assess its presence in Türkiye, where the consensus over anti-immigrant sentiment, complicates the traditional understanding of polarization as a balanced divide between opposing sides. Followingly, by reporting themes from interviews with journalists, editors, and media professionals, it discussed how perceived polarization influences the ways journalists frame their stories, interact with their audiences, and navigate ethical dilemmas.

A central finding was that polarization does not merely shape the content of news but also imposes significant pressures on journalists to balance their reporting between conflicting public sentiments. As one participant noted, the choice of words and tone could have real-world consequences, including the potential for inciting hate crimes against vulnerable groups.

Another critical issue identified was the impact of polarization on journalistic freedom and self-censorship. Participants reported feeling constrained by the polarized environment, where any coverage of migration risks backlash from various segments of the public. Participants reported that polarization increases the demand for sensational news, with audiences gravitating towards stories that confirm their biases and fears, particularly about RASIM. This demand created a vicious cycle where fear-driven reporting fuels public anxiety, which in turn escalates the need for even more sensational coverage.

Interestingly, while most participants viewed polarization as a detriment to journalistic integrity, they also acknowledged a potential benefit: the rise of citizen engagement in news production.

Overall, the analysis shows that journalists in polarized contexts such as Türkiye are acutely aware of these dynamics and the competition polarization creates. They believe the increase in competition with increasing numbers of news sites compels them to be more aggressive in production; meaning to opt for sensational news that boosts their website traffic over thoroughness and balanced reporting. The findings underscore the complex environment in which journalists operate, one that demands constant negotiation between professional standards, audience expectations, and the ethical implications of their work. As journalists navigate this polarized landscape, their ability to maintain integrity and foster a more inclusive dialogue becomes ever more critical, highlighting the need for strategies that support balanced reporting and mitigate the divisive effects of polarization.

CHAPTER 8

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR “BETTER” MIGRATION REPORTING

One major goal of this dissertation, if not the main one, was to ask the question of what ‘better’ migration reporting would look like from a teleological perspective. What was the function of migration reporting, and when would a journalist be considered to be doing it “well” as others see. In this chapter, I respond to this question by synthesizing recommendations offered by my participants with earlier scholarly research, existing journalism resources for migration and my content analysis as shown in Figure X.

My interviews with 14 Turkish journalists and editors show that while there are many circumstantial difficulties that keep journalists from adhering to existing journalistic guidelines, there are also principles upon which they agree when it comes to ‘improving’ their practices when writing migration news stories. Before moving to these principles, and recommendations that were drawn from the interviews, I see value in explaining my interview process with slightly more detail.

Each interview would begin with a brief description of the interview structure, explaining that the interview will start with discussions on media representation of migration in Türkiye, move on to some factors that might be impacting journalistic trends on this subject; and, lastly, we would discuss whether we could improve this media representation. When we moved to the third and last section, I would invite my participants to brainstorm ways we could equip future generations of journalists with tools to report on migration. At this step, I would ask my participants to imagine if they held the chair position in a board or a committee that oversees the curriculum of all journalism schools, thus having utmost power in deciding what future generations of

journalists will study. Next, I asked them to come up with recommendations for future journalists covering migration in Türkiye or elsewhere that would help improve some of the shortcomings we identified in the existing media representations of refugees, asylum-seekers and immigrants (RASIM).

In what follows, I present insights gained from this practice and a qualitative thematic analysis of the recommendations my participants raised during our interviews. This analysis helps understand what “better” coverage would look like for a journalist working on similar subjects in polarized contexts.

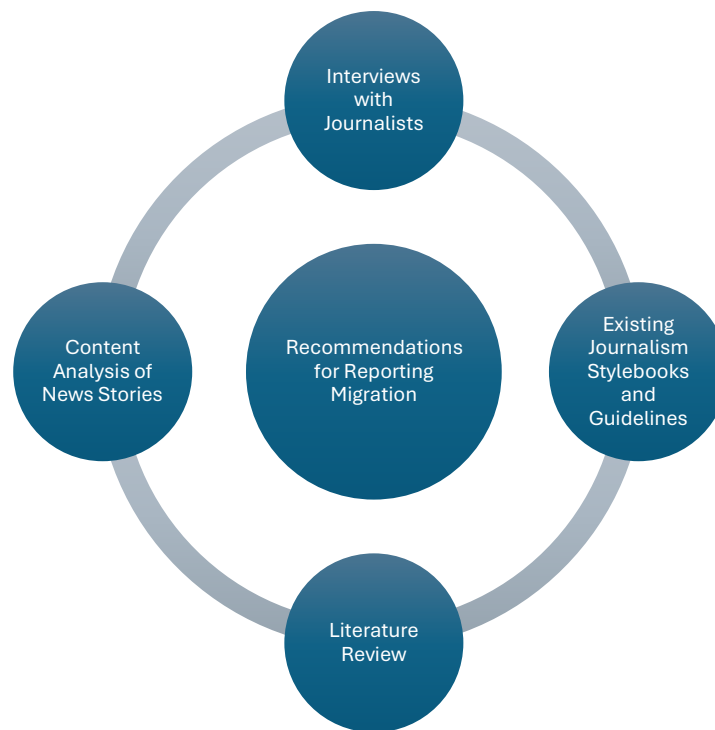


Figure 11. Synthesis of Findings

8.1 A Teleological Approach to Migration Reporting

The review of literature in Chapter 1 had shown that the resources journalists can draw for forming their style when covering migration such as stylebooks and handbooks were plenty, and strong repetitions in emphasis for a humanitarian approach could be

observed across scholarly and professional guidelines. For my research, these guidelines offered an important framework for understanding how media coverage of migration can be improved. Their authors encouraged creating more responsive and investigative news stories in urgent areas such as the education of unaccompanied RASIM children, or freedom and protection of women from oppressors like Taliban. They argued that better migration news is not merely a matter of avoiding harmful language but involves a deeper commitment to fact-based, legally sound, and context-rich journalism.

The need for standardized guidelines across media outlets was evident. At the same time, not all of these guidelines were applicable – and even desired- in practice of day-to-day life.

The interviews with Turkish journalists who had experience covering migration revealed a myriad of challenges journalists needed to navigate to produce news in relation to refugees, asylum-seekers and immigrants. Some were disheartened by hate-speech and backlash they received, some felt distrust towards transparency of the available data regarding RASIM. Each identified shortcomings of narrative regarding refugees and asylum-seekers, giving a false picture of the migrants regardless of the narrative being pro or anti-migration. Those who opposed the government`s migration policy and RASIM presence in Türkiye were not happy with how news talked about RASIM due to a perceived insufficiency in profiling and keeping RASIM liable in legal terms, among other reasons. Those who held more welcoming views of RASIM were equally dissatisfied with the profiling of RASIM due to lack of depth in investigation and absence of a human-rights approach in the news that would hold governments accountable for equitable migration policies.

However, my participants' views on the future of practice of journalism were not as bleak. The problems we identified and discussed in our interviews helped me produce four tips for future journalists working or planning to work on media representations of migration. These four recommendations or tips are namely "aiming for greater diversity in sources and framing", "fact-checking and keeping terminology up-to-date", "satisfactory and systemic profiling of migration trends", "adopting a human-rights based approach". These recommendations are drawn from a list of corresponding themes after immersing myself in the transcripts and identifying overlapping patterns of discussions across interviews.

8.2 Diversity in Sourcing and Framing of News

When I step back from news coverage of migration to the general practice of journalism, long-standing discussions on changing dynamics between journalists and their news sources become visible. Fisher (2018) argues that the shift towards digital platforms as the preferred methods of accessing news complicated the relationship between reporters and news-sources. She discusses that the affordances of social media, has allowed "sources" to go public, leading to weakening of journalists "stranglehold over the means of production". This is a significant change from reports as near as 2013 where a consensus that "journalists are in control over news discourse" was visible (Broserma et al., 2013). It means that sources are now able to "opt-out" of a traditional "source to reporter, reporter to public" relationship (Fisher, 2018) more easily, and can instead choose to share their information and insights on their individual or selected platforms.

The liberating influence of digitalization on the relationship between news sources and access to public is highly visible in our day-to-day news consumption practices with, for example, random individuals on site of a fire starting to live-stream the event using platforms such as Instagram or YouTube and newsrooms connecting to these live streams. Insights gained from the content analysis of news from our dataset; however, do not show a visible and direct connection between RASIM and the public. Put more clearly, there are almost no events where a RASIM takes to social media making their story visible and later captures the attention of news reporters. There are some RASIM who give interviews to journalists - even when they voice their fear of going public for fear of being targeted- (Milliyet, June 16, 2023; Birgün, March 01, 2022) however, there is a dearth of RASIM-led news coverage as also observed in the news data analysis as part of this research.

There are examples of RASIM reaching out to journalists to make their voices heard, a common practice confirmed by my participants' experience; however, at least in our news dataset, a RASIM-led narrative in news media is lacking. After a decade from first large groups of Syrian RASIMs' move to Türkiye, there are admirable journalists such as Halid Abdo³⁵ who use their platforms to raise awareness on issues concerning RASIM. Unfortunately, the pieces of news stories they pen – to my knowledge and as far as my dataset expands- are not acknowledged by mainstream news outlets. This lack of RASIM voices in news making practices can presumably be explained by systemic challenges

³⁵ A Syrian journalism student completing his studies in Türkiye. His example stands out for the large following he gathered by covering news that corrected false allegations about Syrians.
https://x.com/HalidAbdo?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor

such as the fear of exposing themselves; yet still needs to be studied further in depth if we wish to learn how to mitigate the polarization and fear around topics of migration.

Beyond incorporating RASIM voices, reporting on migration requires journalists to develop outreach strategies that aim for higher diversity of sources. Much like Education or Environment, Migration with a capital M usually involves discussions on subjects ranging from national security, demographics to economy and culture; involving actors such as various governmental offices, non-governmental organizations, and civilians simultaneously. For example, even when reporting a rather simple series of events involving illegal crossings to Greece, journalists are expected to speak to government officers (state and local), response personnel from both countries, UNHCR or other NGO personnel on ground, RASIM who were involved in the event (in transition and afterwards) and civilians who might be eye-witnesses or enablers in these series of events, each requiring tweaks in journalist's method of communicating with their interviewees³⁶. Even in this hypothetical news story example that has been reproduced thousands of times, it would entail the journalist to know how to access elites and experts who are directly related but also keeping in touch with alternative sources such as local party head men who could enrich these accounts. The time a journalist has to outreach to possible interview subjects for their news story is surely a limited resource, and migration reporting is one time-consuming subject of writing. Of course, there are factors that limit the amount of time and resources a journalist can allocate for recruiting resources for a given news story. However, I also believe it is a matter of choice, a teleological principle

³⁶ See Chapter 6 for particular sets of challenges journalists face when interviewing participants with history of trauma and distress.

by which my participants -and journalists in general- decide on what to discuss and who to interview for their news story.

Many possibilities exist for a reporter after these considerations in deciding who will make it to the sources of the news story. However, in the field of migration, a meta-analysis of research showed the inclination to represent only elite voices as news sources (Seo & Kavakli, 2022), particularly excluding doubly marginalized communities such as displaced women. In a systemic review of news stories on immigration, O'Hagan and Rani (2018) found the striking absence of women's voices as sources. This absence is illustrated by the dominant preference towards male experts or male government officials being three times more likely to be quoted than female ones. O'Hagan and Rani (2018) explain this absence to be concerning given the interest of female populations among migrants; however, the bigger worry is on the proliferation of news stories around a central theme of national security.

Similarly, the content analysis conducted for this dissertation helped show that Turkish migration reporting in our day is at large marked by national security discourses involving debates of criminality and illegality which creates an inflammatory environment for news to become events, particularly events of "conflict" between some citizens and RASIM. This inflammatory media landscape is divided further by amplification of voices from one anti-immigration side and growing grievances on the other side. Thus, from a teleological perspective, I believe too much is at risk if I continue to leave out a large group of people's (this time RASIM's) inputs as news resources.

In covering migration, journalists who participated in this research stress the importance of creating a full picture of the events by talking to as many people involved

as possible, a step that gains extra significance in addressing the potential harm caused by one-sided narratives like those found in "Irregular Migrant Hunt" stories. These types of news, as described in Chapter 4, often focus narrowly on the moments when refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants without documentation are apprehended by security forces, leaving out crucial details about what happens to these individuals afterward. To combat these and similar incomplete narratives, journalists advise a comprehensive approach that includes diverse voices and perspectives.

If I was able to talk to everyone involved, I feel confident about the report. Like my Ankara story, if I got an official statement from the deportation center, the lawyer, if I spoke with the patients and their relatives, the Presidency of Migration Management, the Ministry of Interior... Even if they were reluctant to make a statement, once I have all this, I can say it is a confirmed news report because I got at least one sentence from all people, offices and organizations related to the story. (Participant 1)

This approach of reporting thoroughly sourced stories is one that can be considered a standard "good" practice for all journalists regardless of their subject, but in the topic of migration also ensures that the complexities of migration stories are fully represented.

An endorsement of such a recommendation can be found in respected journalism sources. For example, EJN's e-Media Toolkit (2017) exhibits a training titled the "Impact of News Stories"³⁷ narrating and having the participant practice writing a news story. In this case, the news story is on Afghan entrepreneur Samira Kitman who claimed asylum in the UK and was rejected even when there was reasonable doubt to her life's safety. We learn that the Guardian covers Samira's story and pressures the British Government to stop her forced return to Afghanistan.

³⁷ <https://e-learning.fra.europa.eu/course/view.php?id=4#section-0>

The discussion on two possible outcomes of the news story is particularly useful and illuminating for nudging journalists to be more resilient in incorporating RASIM voices in their news stories, particularly when RASIM may appear to be difficult to access at locations such as deportation centers.

Similarly, the example Participant 1 refers to as “the Ankara story” is a story where she was covering the capture of a particular undocumented immigrant; however, with the intention to unearth malpractices this individual faced in deportation centers. She explains that this practice of acquiring statements from all relevant parties does not only help her fact check the accounts she is given by the migrants (in whose favor she sets up to write her news story) but also brings transparency to the work these parties conduct, keeping migration regulation offices under watch and alert towards the needs of RASIM.

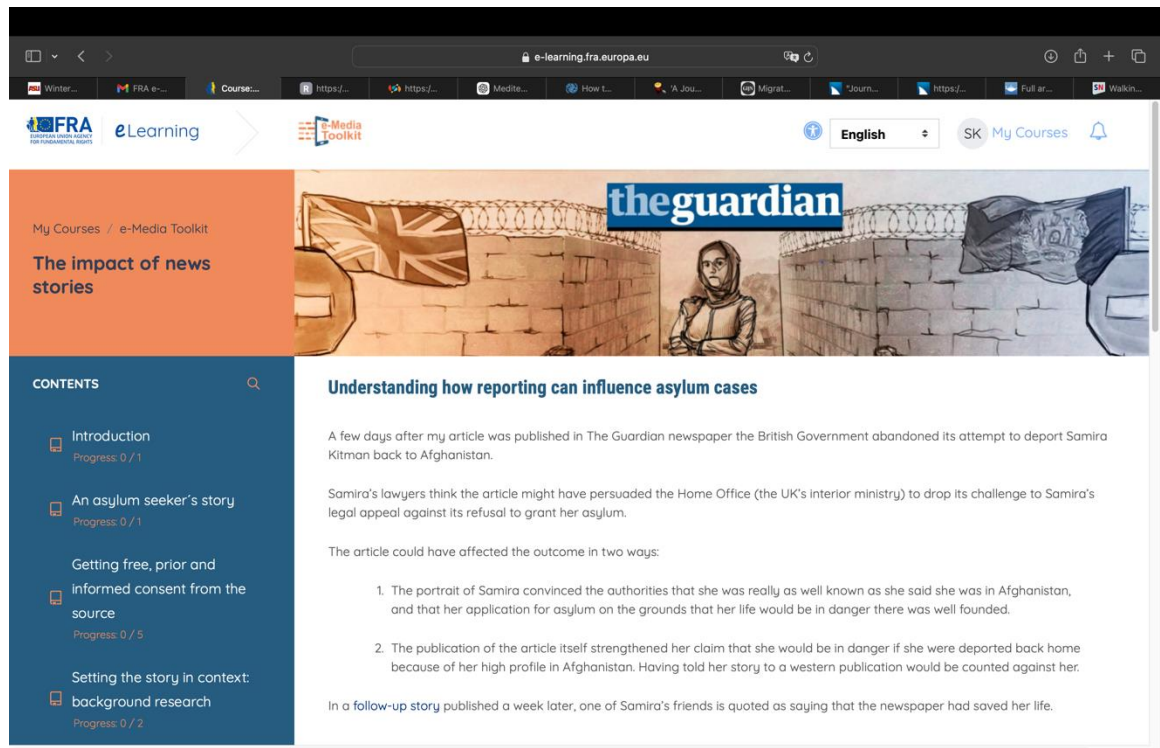


Figure 12. Screenshot Showing FRA's E-Learning Resources.

Increasing variety in news sources is also emphasized with the purpose of reminding future journalists of the necessity to not only trust elite information sources such as high-ranking government institutions but also to acquire information from local sources and those at official roles for civil organizations as frequently as possible.

Accessing local's information is crucial... I say I received information. The news director says, "Let's also call the local headman. After all, they might belong to a different party or be affiliated with a party, so we should definitely call the headman as well"... We reach out to higher institutions, such as the Presidency of Migration Management or the Ministry of Interior for information. Locally, we try to get contact numbers of the families involved or their lawyers from sources like the headman or district officials. This is generally how we gather our sources. We may also contact higher-level figures like provincial party leaders, as they often have information they receive and relay to their superiors when an incident is significant. (Participant 8)

With these lines, Participant 8 highlights the variety of sources they consult prior to production of a new news story. Later in the interview he explains that local sources (such as people, neighbors, citizens in that area without official titles) can have more context informed and in-depth knowledge on the state of the RASIM when it comes to stories less generic than oversea rescue operations. Similar to his account, Participant 4 gives a similar example of forming relations with local *kahvehane*³⁸-goers, as his "eyes on the street". Participant 1 explains she is in a WhatsApp group with reporters and migration experts who themselves are affiliated with at least one city-level solidarity group with RASIM who all join in keeping their community and information resources

³⁸ A traditional Turkish coffee shop whose customers are characterized to be middle to old age groups of men who spend long hours playing cards, drinking Turkish tea and coffee, and discussing politics in and around these cafes.

vibrant. Together, these participants invite future journalists to cast wide communication networks when it comes to searching for sources at the local level.

Some participants believed personal accounts at the local level may not always be as trustworthy or easily verifiable as the accounts attained from officials at local levels. In fact, one participant cautions us against local narratives. She urges us to consider the possibility that local shop-owners or people on the street might hold hostility and false assumptions for an imagined overcrowding of the RASIM in their neighborhood.

So, for example, when I went to Bolu, of course, I also spoke with the local people. It's clear because, for instance, Tanju constantly fuels [anti-refugee sentiment]. I walked into a shop, and even before I brought up the topic, the shopkeeper said, "There are a lot of Syrians here." I told him, "I was just at the governor's office; I came straight from there, and they said there are only 100 Syrians living in Bolu." And it really was true. But he said, "How can that be?", adamant the number should be much higher. As a journalist, I can't just take what he says and put it in the news without questioning it. (Participant 10)

Participant 10 and I share a very similar experience from the times I conducted a fieldwork exploring how local shop-owners in Ankara perceived Syrians and came upon a few urban myths like “donations truck pouring-in when seemingly rich Syrians don't need it”, and one involving secret meetings at a mosque.

It is reasonable to approach any news sources and information with some amount of doubt and fact-checking, especially with so many anti-RASIM attitudes on display in public life. The literature cautions us that sources may have an agenda of their own and that journalists are fully aware of this when they go through “a mesh of intersecting information-seeking processes” (Hertzum, 2022; Bertz) looking for information relevant to the story they are investigating. This is more the reason why future generations of journalists should follow standardized ‘best practices’ of journalism, such as keeping an

eye on increasing the variety of sources, so they can use these different sources to cross-check the information before creating their narratives of news events.

Overall, the participants recommend future journalists covering migration to pay attention to reflect diversity in their recruitment of news sources. One offered a particularly long list of sources that he considered to be a must to include, drawing from basic verification practices that can be common to other areas of journalism while adapting them to migration:

Public institutions, especially the Ministry of Interior and many other ministries that work in this area, from the Ministry of Health to the Ministry of National Education, which directly interact with people, in other words, all the executive ministries, are our sources. When it comes to migrant news the Ministry of Family and Social Services is a very important source... Or we can call places like the Provincial or District Presidencies of [a political party] and ask them to explain the situation there. Headmen are very important in this regard. Additionally, local sources such as teachers, headmen, and from doctors to all healthcare professionals. These are some of our news sources. (Participant 9)

Here, I see that Participant 9 foregrounds political party headmen who are representatives elected at local level organizations of political parties as important sources to consider for migration reporting. These organizations also include local level youth-branches such as AKP or CHP Youth and student-wings, inviting young people to join in on the political debates and allowing them to create networks that hold the potential to prepare them for a career within the party; and in lesser numbers, women`s wings where political problems relating to women rights are discussed. Members of local organizations and youth-branches are usually civilians from differing backgrounds (in terms of age, gender, race, income) but all come together on a shared geographical location and political party identity.

The input from the participants indicate that local-level engagement is of utmost importance for journalists seeking to report on migration. They champion the idea that these local spaces (youth and women wings, provincial and district offices of political parties) are important spaces to look for news sources on politically charged subjects, on the grounds of three types of communication that occur in these spaces: First, civilians come to these offices to voice their political needs and concerns. Second, party officers take note of their experiences to submit to the higher-level party representatives in an hierarchical order of informing. Third, civilians enter a horizontal communication network with like-minded individuals in these locations, exchanging important life-experiences and perspectives. All three of these communicative exchanges are important in the production of political discourse surrounding RASIM and my participants identify local-level political party offices to be important locations for engagement.

Earlier in this section, I argued that migration is a subject that is infamous for driving polarization, and that perceived polarization can drive journalists away from pursuing a subject further in depth, prioritizing speed over depth of the story. Having received the input of my participants, I do not believe journalists are purposefully shortcutting informational routes, but I believe they find it more difficult to access their sources in the first place. Participant 1's opening remarks illustrate the challenge of receiving "one sentence" on the subject at times, other examples in the section help show the variety of possible sources and importance of fact-checking while increasing this variety. Lastly, journalists are aware that not every source comes to them, and they are the ones who need to reach out to their sources or meet them in spaces such as local-level party organizations in order to recruit. With these in mind, I now move on to another

recommendation that surfaced during the interviews, one that pertains to use of correct terminology.

8.3 Fact-Checking and Keeping Terminology Up-To-Date

Another recommendation for future journalists covering migration that was endorsed across the board by my participants was on keeping the terminology of migration incorporated into the news story as accurate (in line with national legal frameworks) and up to date as possible. Journalists by norm are expected to make sure they get their legal terms right regardless of the subject they are covering, but the outcomes of an ‘accidental’ misnaming such as calling a group “illegal migrant” when they hold a protection status can be catastrophic, for example, releasing authorities from their responsibility to deliver services that group is entitled to under normal circumstances.

... The Ministry of National Education is obliged to provide education to people with migrant status. This is a responsibility for the Ministry. But when it comes to asylum seekers, they provide education to children who want to receive it within the framework of integration policies. This is not an obligation. It is something that the Ministry of National Education can shape according to the government's policy. Therefore, the Ministry of National Education preferred to say "asylum seeker." At that time, we took it from that report and used "asylum seeker." Because if we said "migrant," it could have become a legal matter. It would imply that the Ministry of National Education is not actually fulfilling its duty.
(Participant 9)

The incident Participant 9 illustrates with his example is only one out of many particularities presented by national and international law that journalists need to navigate on a daily basis when covering news related to RASIM. As such, correct naming of the RASIM, in other words choosing the right terminology that matches proper legal statuses

bear grave importance in keeping authorities accountable without holding them liable to conditions they have not agreed upon in their internal legal frameworks³⁹.

Regardless of their political backgrounds, every one of the participants demand further clarity on statuses attributed to RASIM and would like the publicly available official datasets to match this terminology. There are two sides to this demand. On one face of the medallion are journalists who believe misnaming of RASIM by news media can be harmful for RASIM, referring to -consciously or unconsciously- delegitimizing RASIM's presence and rights in Türkiye. On the other side, there are journalists who believe misnaming of RASIM can be harmful for the Turkish citizens if used as a strategy to cover up the "excessive volume" of RASIM or a public concern. Regardless of the motivation, the journalists I interviewed were aware of different problems false naming of RASIM could cause, the most important one being the capacity of these false names to build up to frames, i.e. schemata for different aspects of reality (Scheufele, B. 2006; Scheufele, 2006). Participant 9's example served to show how false naming of RASIM in the news could undermine legal accountability, yet there are many other arenas of social and political life that can be affected by news media discourse on migration.

Framing has been a central concept for media and communication research, helping researchers make sense of social construction of reality and processes that help with this construction (Wicks, 1992; Entman, 1993; Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Scheufele, 2006; Cacciatore et al., 2016). Frames "package" information "for efficient relay" to the audience (Gitlin, 1980); and depending on their efficiency and accessibility, these packages of information can influence how the audience will construe the event. The

³⁹ See Chapter 6 for a quote from same participant explaining the necessity of exchanging information with governmental offices transparently for the benefit of governmental offices as well.

terminological choices journalists make in defining marginalized groups such as RASIM are important determinants in shaping these frames.

To illustrate, one participant gives the example of recent political debates surrounding the policy proposal that involved mass-murder of stray dogs in Türkiye (The Guardian, July 30, 2024; Reuters, August 15, 2024) and adaptation of terms such as “putting to sleep” or “culling” and says,

What they will do is not to put the animals to sleep, it is to kill them. By calling it “putting to sleep”, they are trying to paint the massacre in a lighter color. This is also present in migration news. When you say "illegal migrant," you fuel anti-migrant sentiment. It's not "illegal migrant." Migrants have a status recognized by the state. Legal terms cannot easily accommodate conditions of migrants, there is no legality illegality in migration. That's why I think the terminology is sometimes intentionally chosen in the media. (Participant 4)

This allegory between a bill that proposes to kill stray animals and perception of migration policy may not be at all relevant in terms of their content, but it is a timely one and surprisingly one that was picked up by two other participants. It mentions the proposal of a bill that will oversee the selective killing of stray animals, which was met with significant backlash from civilians (Daily Sabah, July 24, 2024; Euronews, July 28, 2024; New York Post, September 1, 2024). I met this participant and conducted the interview about a week after the bill was brought to parliament. Another participant brought up the same bill as an example to newsroom conflicts, she explained that in one morning briefing meeting she and her colleagues held long debates on how they should cover the bill and were shocked to hear another colleague insisting on including images of dogs attacking humans in the news story.

...In the end, that colleague won, and we inserted 1-2 lines on fear over animal attacks on people. But we did not let it take over the title or take up important portions of the story, we reflected some concerns that were shared with us by that colleague after careful consideration. This is not about including a piece of information or not, but it is about how you include and present it. Regardless of the subject being an animal, human, LGBTQ+ or migrant, how you present the information should not conflict with your morals. (Participant 10)

Although the proposal of this bill on animals is very recent, both participants refer to it as a subject that drives high level of polarization and some signs of it are already visible in the titles of the exemplary news stories. I believe it is interesting that three participants organically bring up this bill but what is more interesting is to observe how newsroom think about another highly polarizing subject.

Infamous for being a mouthpiece for the incumbent party (Committee to Protect Journalists, October 24, 2022) which originally proposed the policy that is projected to allow for the killing, Daily Sabah chooses to call the bill an attempt in “tackling stray animal issue” (Aslan, July 18, 2024; Daily Sabah, July 24, 2024) while Euronews calls it the “massacre law” (Wilks & Fraser, July 30, 2024). As another example of divergent media frame building practices (Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Scheufele, 2006; Cacciatore et al., 2016), this allegory helps to remind us that much like news sources who may have their own agendas news outlets have their own agendas in endorsing or defying political proposals. These agendas require adopting or avoiding certain frames, for example, Daily Sabah (Aslan, 2024) replaces the verb “to kill” with “euthanize”, paints the bill in a positive starting off with an “acknowledgement” that stray animals constitute a problem, and finishes with a eulogy/appraisal to AKP’s “step in the right direction”, that direction being the road to massacre. This bill example helps my participants illustrate how different names and wording make up the frames that drive polarization.

Journalists contribute to frame building practices (Scheufele, 2006) over RASIM when they adopt terms with strong political collocates aligned with one ideology or the other. One example of this, and maybe the most dire one, is the vast adoption of the term ‘kaçak göçmen’ in Turkish which translates to “illegal migrant”. Differing from ‘düzensiz göçmen’ or “irregular migrant” in English; a ‘kaçak göçmen/ illegal migrant’ has no coherent meaning in practice and has no equivalent in the legislation. I do not know what makes one an illegal migrant as it could be their method of entry, time of entry, intent of entry, choice of documentation or all above. Likewise, I do not – and cannot possibly- know how many ‘illegal migrants’ exists as definitions for this term always assume people who enter without being recorded, allowing for endless speculation.

Indeed, the news stories I analyzed do not explain what qualifies these individuals to be called “illegal” in the news story, none of the news stories I analyzed had a descriptive line such as “X person lacked their passport or Y person’s visa was out of date”, instead there is the declaration of illegality, the naming of the group as “illegal migrants” without the reasoning behind that naming. There are many NGOs for “refugees” but none for “illegal migrants”. There are numberless government policies in design for those with a “temporary protection status”, but none for illegal migrants since this term does not exist in legal terminology. This is what Participant 9 means when he says “there is no legality or illegality in migration”.

A similar warning comes from Participant 8 who believes "Future journalists should be clear on the reason behind the migration, motivation, and Türkiye’s current responsiveness”, and the importance of selecting the correct terminology comes into play in this moment to construct the reasons behind migration clearly, something the adoption

of the term “illegal migrant” erases at once. ‘Düzensiz göçmen/irregular migrant’ is recognized by the Presidency of Migration Management and a clear definition for this status is provided on their website⁴⁰. However, the content analysis of a collection of randomly selected 1,000 news stories on migration show that the phrase “kaçak Göçmen/illegal migrant” was used 603 times in 247 different news stories and was mentioned in 96 titles to the news stories. As opposed to “illegal”, the phrase “irregular migrant” appears in 103 times in 64 texts, majority quoting government officials. This means that, when referring to a group of displaced people in Türkiye who do not hold the necessary paperwork, journalists show a sizeable preference over the pejorative alternative “illegal migrant” over the legal one “irregular migrant”.

This takes us to the other face of the medallion, to the specific cases of journalists who believed misnaming RASIM was a harmful practice for Turkish citizens. Participants on this group believed that there was a large number of people who entered to Türkiye without official records may they be named illegal or irregular migrants, and that these people were excluded from official records and terminology with the purpose of covering up excessive volumes of border violations.

There are illegal immigrants, people that did not come to Türkiye through official channels and have no official status. They are neither refugees nor asylum seekers. The state even has serious confusions about their presence. While the official records share figures about refugees and asylum seekers, it never mentions them. They say, "We have this many refugees and this many asylum seekers in our country." However, due to the gaps and concessions at the borders, hundreds of people enter Turkey every day either through human traffickers or by themselves, carrying a backpack and paying \$100 at the border. The number of illegal immigrants in Turkey has now surpassed the official numbers of asylum seekers and refugees. For example, in 2022, İsmail Çataklı, who was then the head of the Migration Administration and previously an assistant to Süleyman Soyulu, said in a live broadcast, "We don't know where 122,000 Syrians

⁴⁰ See Chapter 4 for a detailed description.

are. We went to their addresses, and they were not there." This is coming from the person who is responsible with overseeing migration management. (Participant 5)

This is not a view I highlight to give credibility, since as the participant also states there are no records to support any number that can be proposed with this justification, but mere hearsays. Still, the participant draws our attention to a practice which, in theirs and their followers' cases, mitigate their trust for the official records.

A common misnaming of RASIM occurs with the false attribution of a legal status to a larger group who may not belong to this status anymore. For example, many Syrians who migrated to Türkiye following 2011 have either attained a "temporary protection status" or moved to Turkish citizenship status or adopted another legal settlement and work status in a different country. At the same time, news reports regarding these individuals still use a mix of the words refugees and asylum-seekers in reference to these people and talk about intervention policies to plan their "return", feeding into an urban myth of that "refugees are exhausting social security money and resources" while these individuals have already integrated into social and monetary systems of the country, working for legit jobs and paying taxes for more than a decade for some. These false names, as one participant cautions us can easily make for urban myths:

I think fact-checking and being mindful of urban myths is crucial for any coverage on migration. I once went to Bolu for a news story and was talking to a random shop owner, before I said anything he started making up things about Syrians like "They are getting free such and such from the municipality", and I know this is a lie, I just asked the municipality about it, I checked it with my own eyes. I as a journalist saw it with my eyes that there were not more than 100 Syrians in the city as opposed to Tanju Özcan's [mayor]statements. (Participant 10)

For this example and many others, journalists interviewed in this research highlight the value of fact-checking the statuses they attribute to RASIM represented in their news stories. They believe journalists should frequently revisit legal sources for changes in the scope of terms and legal statuses attributed to RASIM. Some believe the government is obliged with easing this process and being more transparent with its legal terminology. This takes us to another highly connected point to correct terminology, the recommendation on satisfactory and systematic profiling of migration trends.

8.4 Satisfactory And Systematic Profiling Of Migration Trends

As part of the interviews, I asked my participants what the shortcomings in migration reporting were and what sorts of improvements they think could help mitigate these shortcomings. At this point, all participants identified issues with circulation of factual information regarding migration, the distrust they observed on the matter, and brought up their recommendations for satisfactory and systematic profiling of migration trends.

The term profiling here is used to refer to a particular package of information that contains demographics (education, ethnicity, age, gender...) along with cultural and political background regarding RASIM. Majority of my participant state that it is important to profile migration trends, to monitor the numbers and demographics of RASIM. The reasons why they would like to see such numbers and information differed from one another.

Some believed that equitable profiling of RASIM as part of migration trends would help debunk anti-RASIM claims and urban myths.

One thing they always say is that Germany took the elite portion of refugees, and we were left with the least educated groups. No this is a lie, there are many Syrian doctors, architects highly qualified migrants... This disturbs me a lot. Once [a Turkish newspaper] published a news story on a

Syrian astronaut coming to Türkiye -and even that was not good- if people are not astronauts but are workers, should this mean they are not allowed to seek refuge? (Participant 10)

With these words, Participant 10 highlighted the lack of layers of information regarding RASIM beyond just naming their ethnicity and identifying numbers, a flatness in representation of RASIM that I also identified and explained as part of the content analysis of news stories. She believed the variety of skill sets, the rich backgrounds, and prospects RASIM can offer to communal life are understated and she believes news media should make an effort towards debunking the pejorative profiles attributed to RASIM. Of course, this does not mean the participant would like to see appraisals of an elite group within RASIM with rich educational and career backgrounds; to the opposite she believes journalists should insist on an equitable representation of people regardless of these skillsets. As such, she argues that journalists could help fight the information pollution on who RASIM are and what type of prospects they hold for the larger community.

Some believed equitable and satisfactory profiling of RASIM was necessary to mitigate the fear local people may hold over perceived perils of demographic change that follows incidents of mass migration.

How many people? Which people? What do they believe in? We don't know any of this. I'm not sure if the government knows either. Many people think like this, as far as I have observed. Therefore, some people naturally have a fear of demographic change, especially in the secular segment. But, as always, our people are experiencing anger for a chaotic situation – one that should have been managed by the government- and they are taking it out on the refugees. (Participant 3)

This participant, by advocating for RASIM welfare in Türkiye while actively pushing forth the idea that Türkiye is over its capacity for hosting any more of RASIM, holds an

interesting spot on the spectrums of views on migration where she can be located as pro-RASIM, yet anti-RASIM policy. Her words reflect her observations regarding a general populace's fear; however, she also notes in the interview that she experiences the fear towards RASIM presence, stating her city Ankara has started to become more dangerous for women with the increase of young male RASIM populations. In her case, satisfactory profiling of RASIM would reveal the real size of the threat of which she was unsure. For others, this profiling would reveal a level of threat or danger that they already believed to be high.

Some asked the same exact questions of “how many people”, and “who are they?”, but this time to highlight the dangers posed by hosting what are assumed to be “unrecorded”, “lost”, “unknown” groups in the population.

...There's a group of people, a crowd that we don't know who they are or what they're doing, coming to us without any records, just grabbing their bags and entering through our borders. We don't know what they are, we still don't know. We don't know what they're doing there, whether they're terrorists or not. Do you understand what I mean? This topic is actually a very dangerous one (Participant 2)

Exemplified by Participant 2's words, the participants in this group were more concerned about keeping government accountable of the perils that may come from not efficiently monitoring and controlling RASIM.

Combined, the interviews indicate that there is a perceived demand for profiling migration trends and further clarity in demographics of RASIM. Just like Participant 10 who asked if someone can only become a refugee if they held niche careers or big successes, I believe there are risks to this demand. For example, this demand can come forth from an understanding that only those who are skilled in top-level jobs or “model

refugees” should be considered as “worthy RASIM” excluding those who might need protection regardless. If done in a way that does not uphold privacy standards, I believe profiling RASIM can go beyond excluding and delegitimizing some RASIM towards posing real-life threats to their security. However, I also would like to highlight the extension by Participant 3 in cautioning us against the existing hearsays that are already profiling RASIM in one way, particularly profiling them as young, uneducated, male, and presumably dangerous populations; rarely doing any justice to the diversity in their backgrounds and experiences.

Overall, these recommendations point to a call for addressing the need for information and clarity that journalists perceive to exist among their audiences, information on who RASIM’s demographics, backgrounds and prospects for co-living. While profiling may not be the best solution, it is one that comes up most frequently and consistently throughout my interviews. Given the severity of disbelief in RASIM’s legitimacy in Türkiye, there may be value in clarifying some demographics, and providing the “5 WHs” (what, who, where, when, how and why) of migration trends.

8.5 A Human-Rights Based Approach

The recommendations I listed until this point were recommendations where some level of consensus across participants was visible. This last recommendation on the necessity of a human rights-based approach; however, was put forward by five out of the 14 participants I had in my sample. What was surprising; however, was that two out of five of these participants identified with anti-migration views, believing the volume of RASIM were a burden or a problem for Türkiye. They emphasized distinguishing between being critical of policy and being critical of the people that are involuntarily

affected by politics, underlining that humanitarian crises hit people, not policies. Thus, the critique of the crises should also start from the policy, not the people. A clear and straightforward proposal of this recommendation can be found in the following lines;

For covering migration, a fundamental human rights-based approach is needed, one that does not alienate, target, or harm any individual. Events should not be overly personalized or dramatized, such as the stories we see in [a right-wing mainstream news outlet] or [a left-wing mainstream news outlet] about a person who died in an earthquake. Instead, journalism should focus on fundamental policies that protect citizens' rights, criticize fundamental policies, or advocate for other policies. Additionally, the use of correct terminology and a highly functional verification mechanism is necessary because this is a sensitive issue. (Participant 8)

I shared another quote by Participant 8 on the previous chapter where he noted his and his outlet's anti-migration stance by saying "we are also against demographic change. But ultimately, there is a humanitarian situation at hand". This and the lines above indicate that the participant considers the moment of humanitarian crises as distinct moments that require modifications to traditional forms of news making; since moments of humanitarian crises (for example, Netanyahu's recent attacks on refugee camps in Palestine, as an epitome of brutality and state-led-terror) are separate than day-to-day reporting. This recommendation makes sense coming from a journalist who have observed various waves of migration with varying degrees of urgency to them; and his suggestions to avoid alienating, targeting or harming individuals are the one he underlines the most for the general practice of covering migration.

There are a number of scholars and journalists championing a similar idea that traditional journalistic approaches do not suffice to encourage empathy and dialogue in intergroup communication dynamics between the host nations and RASIM in moments of humanitarian crises. Solutions journalism which aims at equipping the audience with

knowledge on how to address problems, (Bornstein, 2011; Dyer, 2015; Wenzel, 2016; Brenner, 2017; Aitamurto & Varma, 2018) presenting examples of solutions rather than dramatizing the problems, is one that is frequently proposed in response to such shortcomings of traditional methods.

Another one is human-rights journalism (Shaw, 2012; Plaut, 2014; Varju & Plaut, 2017; Shaw & Selvarajah, 2019) or humanitarian journalism (Bunce et al., 2019; Scott et al., 2023) both of which seek to report under-reported crises and amplifying marginalized voices to challenge and expand the scope of traditional coverage of these humanitarian crises. In this sense, a human-rights approach does not mean amplifying suffering and making a spectacle out of humanitarian crises which could potentially yield to even larger empathy gaps and ethical problems arising from claiming or labeling RASIM with a “potent” ever-present victim identity (Chouliaraki, 2006, 2010, 2024). Nor does it mean reporting simply on the acts of humanitarian organizations (Powers, 2012; Cottle and Cooper, 2015). The definition I adopt for a human right approach builds upon Shaw’s (2012) reconceptualization of the term humanitarian journalism, with an emphasis on not only highlighting under-reported crises, and covering the work of humanitarian institutions but also contextualizing the crisis within the socio-political environment of the events that lead up to the crises. I believe this definition is the most fitting in literature to correspond to what my participants refer to when they say a “human-rights-based-approach”.

When I ask the participant to clarify the reasoning behind the need for a human-rights-approach and how this approach operates in their newsroom, he says,

In Türkiye, the media sphere we inhabit is one that provokes outrage. You can see these in the social media posts by political parties or those so-

called news-sites you see on Twitter, they try to provoke outrage to increase traffic on their sites and engagement with their news stories. ...This is not how we approached our stories and why we have a process of fact-checking. We asked each other whether writing the story as we did, we could be fueling anti-migrant attitudes. We are against the continuum of such a migratory flow to Türkiye, but there is a humanitarian crisis in action and a journalist should be very careful not to single out individuals, to avoid targeting a civilian or reducing the problem to their personal experience. Instead, a journalist should critique the insufficient or harmful policies that led to this crisis, to shed light on the imperial state agendas over Afghanistan or Syria that disrupted the peace in these regions in the first place. So, you need to dry the swamp, not try to target and catch mosquitos one by one... (Participant 8)

It is apparent that the participant and the newsroom he represents emphasizes a clear break between the policy leading to migration and the migrants who are affected by that policy. Although it is not clearly stated, there is also a call to seek out solutions, and a desire to equip their readers with knowledge to critique the policy can be seen. While this call does not get to a solutions journalism framework (Bornstein, 2011; Wenzel, 2016; Wenzel, 2018); it signals towards possibilities of solutions journalism training for the future.

As such, it could be said that Turkish journalists in our sample are closer to the human rights paradigm than solutions paradigm which is visible in the way they attempt to highlight injustices and moments of crises as they apply to everyone regardless of their gender, age, or ethnicity. However, it is also seen that in order to frame a crisis as one that applies to ‘everyone’, journalists might need to negotiate their distance from the subject. Here, “a human rights perspective” allows them to circumvent theoretical discussions on neutrality (i.e. not taking sides) while holding onto their claims to objectivity (i.e.

reflecting reality as is), thus mitigating the pitfalls of positivist objectivity paradigm (Charlotte, 2005; Knapp, 2022).

Of course, while preparing my news, within the framework of journalistic ethics, I approach it from a rights perspective rather than trying to pull it in a particular direction. There is something called Human Rights Journalism. For example, when I'm preparing news about a femicide, I don't include something that would justify the act, like asking the man why he killed her. I include the man's statement, but it depends on how you present it... (Participant 10)

Participant 10 is confident in that a journalist does not have to bring in statements from all views. For example, when she went to a city on reports of increasing violence towards RASIM, she did not include the lines from locals who were justifying their personal level hatred to RASIM. This, as she sees it, does not take away from the integrity of the piece she wrote since the demands of this anti-RASIM group is not the subject of the story in the first place. She excludes these side narratives since they do not add any value to the target of the story which at the time was to understand how RASIM were coping with the violence. To the opposite, she believes such statements would hamper the objectivity of the issue by muddying the information that needed to be passed on.

Another participant holds very similar views on the subject, with less confidence in defining a humanitarian approach as equally neutral to other traditional modes of journalism. However, he also appears to be very strict in not contacting those who might have entrenched views of migration. He argues,

Migration doesn't differentiate between Turks, Kurds, or Syrians. We are all human. There is a tragedy there, and their tragedy is twice as much as ours, because they had to come to a society whose language and customs they do not know. So, we must defend their rights, just as we do for all

disadvantaged groups. From a journalistic technique perspective, it might be wrong, but sometimes when we do everything by the book, nothing good comes out. Therefore, in a news report about migrants, we take opinions from people who look at the issue the way we do, so to speak. We definitely do not engage with those on the other side who derogatorily label migrants. (Participant 9)

Building upon existing human rights journalism frameworks (Shaw, 2012; Bunce et al., 2019; Shaw & Selvarajah, 2019), it is evident that my participants do not construe work of human rights journalism to be simply covering the efforts of humanitarian organizations. Instead, it serves as a framework for themselves, one that guides their source selection.

A selection bias also is also visible in sourcing of their news on the side of participants who held strong anti-immigration attitudes and would not support the adoption of a human rights perspective. Reflecting on how future journalists should cover migration, Participant 5 says,

I don't think that Turks, as a minority, will be able to make their voices heard much in this country, to be honest. But let's assume that happens. Much harsher measures will need to be taken, and journalists will need to toughen their language significantly.

While this participant does not specify what these “harsher measures” look like, the desire to “toughen” their language signals towards a desire to drop humanizing coverage of RASIM altogether. Similarly, a participant who identifies as being anti mass-migration, says “You need to separate those who fake it from those who need protection authentically” (Participant 7) adding that he and his outlet would resist presenting the cases pertaining to “illegal” (or this time “fake”) migrants as humanitarian cases. Displaying a much harsher stance than these two participants, when asked how future journalists should cover migration, one participant said “Başakçım *laughs* I'm not on

the side of them being represented at all in our country” (Participant 2). Her words indicate that the absence of a human rights-based approach does not equate to neutrality.

Overall, this section revealed that there exists an emphasis on adopting a human rights-based approach by certain participants, particularly those who work at well-known news outlets. This approach was not systematically defined across the board as participants showed varying levels of rigidity in acting on this approach, however, a shared desire to highlight under-reported humanitarian crises was seen in the statements by five participants as presented above.

8.6 Bridging Guidelines and Interview Insights

The findings from interviews with Turkish journalists offer a ground-level view of the challenges involved in covering migration and insights into how to work against the backdrop of these challenges. The scholarly research and professional guidelines for migration offers a foundation for fostering a human-rights approach, emphasizing the importance of avoiding harmful language, prioritizing fact-based reporting, and being sensitive to the complexities of migration. While these resources present roadmaps for responsible reporting, the insights gathered from my interviews reveal that their application is not always straightforward in the field, particularly in politically polarized contexts like Türkiye.

The Turkish journalists I interviewed – while generally and reportedly unaware of the presence of these guidelines- identified challenges in the way of adopting them once I introduced some of these resources in the interviews. For instance, while guidelines universally advocate for accurate terminology and the avoidance of pejorative labels like "illegal migrant," several participants highlighted the pervasive use of such terms in

Turkish media, making it obsolete to distinguish between other terms. Moreover, journalists noted challenges in accessing transparent data regarding RASIM which is crucial for adhering to fact-based reporting principles. The presumed lack of reliable data, coupled with public distrust, limits the ability of journalists to fully align with the scholarly and professional guidelines that advocate for legally informed, data-driven narratives.

While three participants in total said they were aware of local guidelines prepared by Bianet (2019), none of my participants referred to the guidelines referenced in this chapter's review of literature pointing to significant problems with circulation of these resources to journalists working in this field.

Despite these challenges, there are areas where the guidelines resonate strongly with the experiences of Turkish journalists. For example, the need to include diverse voices in sourcing was a recurrent theme in both the guidelines and the interviews. Additionally, the guidelines' focus on framing migration as a complex, multifaceted issue rather than a simplistic dichotomy of "good" vs. "bad" migrants is echoed in the Turkish journalists' desire to move away from sensationalist narratives. Majority of my participants called for a more nuanced approach that contextualizes migration within broader socio-political dynamics, a perspective championed by human-rights-based journalism.

One key area of divergence lies in the approach to human rights in migration coverage. While international guidelines strongly advocate for a human-rights-based approach, not all journalists in my sample saw this as a priority or even a necessity. Several participants with anti-migration views felt that current migration policies were too lenient, and as such, they resisted framing migration stories within a humanitarian

framework. This divergence raises important questions about how journalists can reconcile ethical reporting guidelines with personal or political views and public pressures.

In conclusion, the insights from Turkish journalists, when combined with the international guidelines, point to a more complex picture of migration coverage than the frameworks alone can offer. While the guidelines promote ethically sound, inclusive, and legally informed journalism, their application in the field requires adaptation and negotiation, particularly in politically polarized settings.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

This dissertation started with a fixation to understand the conditions that needed to be met for “better” migration reporting and address this need in highly polarized media landscapes such as the 21st century Turkish news media. Migration reporting was defined as reporting on topics that concern the lives of and events surrounding people who due to the state of being displaced (forcibly or voluntarily) hold a legal status other than a citizen; including statuses such as refugees, asylum-seekers, “illegal” aliens, irregular migrants, temporary protection status, just to name a few. While a desire to come up with practical solutions to some of the shortcomings I identified in news reporting on these marginalized individuals led me to this study, the study was equal parts driven by a philosophical inquiry that sought to understand the principles of morality by which migration reporting ought to operate.

In the beginning, I admittedly was slanted towards making these principles work *for* refugees, asylum-seekers, and all forms of immigrants who find themselves in a foreign country due to being forcibly displaced, whom I addressed with the acronym RASIM⁴¹. However, my journey has taught me that a balanced approach between anti- and pro-migration voices could in fact be more equitable for all parties involved in migration reporting.

Continuing the line of studies that followed Kant’s work on cosmopolitan human rights (1795), the theoretical framework adopted in this study assumed that, since humans inherit a limited globe and thus being “territorially-bounded”, encounters between groups

⁴¹ See Chapter 1 for Baker et al. (2008)’s and others adoption of this acronym.

of people are inevitable, especially when one flees *to or through* another's land. To ensure these encounters occur peacefully, Kant argued that a right to "present one's self to society" (to introduce yourself, to state your intentions or needs...) -guided by a "universal principle of hospitality"- was needed. I adopted this framework as opposed to an approach that would recognize the full autonomy of persons and states in deciding on migration policy and strived towards basing my analysis on this cosmopolitan approach.

I also inherited the idea that the loss of one's political context (the right to have rights) meant significant losses to one's prospective civil rights (Arendt, 1966), and that a contract -or a series of contracts- needed be drawn between 'hosts' and 'displaced' people in a migration scenario to prevent such losses (Benhabib, 2004). Yet such localized contracts could only be possible after complex processes that are called "democratic iterations" (Benhabib, 2004, 2007; 2008), where "universalist rights claims are contested and contextualized, invoked and revoked..." (Benhabib, 2007) against a certain sociopolitical background.

According to existing international laws and regulations on migration, an individual (formerly a citizen, now a RASIM) who fled one government that failed to secure safety and wellbeing of its citizens, could not simply seek refuge anywhere else. To the opposite, they were obliged to enter into a legal contract with a new government or nation. Challenging the status quo, political philosophers such as Kant, Arendt and Benhabib suggested this contract (or series of contracts) to be porous and be revised in line with the changing needs of the time.

I construed Benhabib's formulation of democratic iterations to be public attempts at rethinking the way political membership is regulated in our modern-day world order,

and wondered how these democratic iterations could be played out within the realm of news media on migration. I wondered if news media played a role in the way this political membership was decided and what sorts of information regarding RASIM were accessible to civilians of the host country on the news. To what degree were RASIM allowed to ‘present themselves to society’ when they are represented through these news stories?

When I turned to pertinent media and communication literature with these questions in mind, I came across a satisfactory number of studies documenting the influence of media on fueling negative perceptions of RASIM⁴², pointing towards a “growing consensus that the mass media portrayal of migrants disseminates and reinforces prejudices and negative attitudes towards this group” (Scherman et al., 2022). Some of these studies built upon the agenda-setting theory (McCombc & Shaw, 1972; Scherman e al, 2022), often confirming its assumption that news media is instrumental in helping the public “learn” about RASIM and decide on its salience for the public, particularly the citizens of the host country. Some offered a grounded theory approach to study ‘framing’ of news stories (Marinescu & Balica, 2021; Tuomola, 2021; Beckers & Van Aelst, 2019; Burroughs, 2015; Goffman, 2008; Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Entman, 1993) involving measurements of public attitude towards migration (Bonjour & Schrover, 2015; Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014); while others offered autonomous theoretical conceptualizations for assessing public opinion on migration (Lakoff & Ferguson, 2006; Brader et al., 2008).

⁴² For example, see: Scherman et al, 2022; Marinescu & Balica, 2021; Cooper et al., 2021; Hosokawa, 2021; Tuomola, 2021; Beckers & Van Aelst, 2019; Lirola & Zammit, 2017; Berry et al., 2015; Burroughs, 2015; Cisneros, 2008; Jackson & Esses, 2000.

Reviews of communication and media literature on migration reporting showed that we know a good amount about what the news content is and we know that most of this content is negative, misleading or limiting public opinion in one shape or form-, at least in certain countries in the Global North (Scherman et al., 2022; Seo & Kavakli, 2022), but we do not know as much about how the news on the subject of migration gets made. This was a major reason why I choose to study knowledge production processes of migration reporting as part of this dissertation.

Borrowing from ‘the hierarchy of influence’ model that explains how media content could be studied at different levels of analysis (Shomaker & Reese, 2014; Reese & Shoemaker, 2019), I moved from the assumption that personal backgrounds of journalists, along with the network of constraints surrounding them, would have an effect in the work they do. Similarly, I aimed at exploring these effects through individual and social institutions levels of analysis, in consideration of how personal backgrounds/traits of newswriters and the political background and power relations impact the news reporting when it came to migrants and migration. I have found that ideological affiliations play a critical role in shaping the content the journalist and agency will pursue; and that as different actors ‘jockeyed for power’, the content of the migration reporting became shaped by institutional biases. Some hoped to see the dominance of discussions that concerned them (e.g. Irregular Migrant Hunt for anti-RASIM camp), some hoped to censor such productions. Rarely were the RASIM involved or taken into consideration in crafting these news stories.

Returning to my earlier question on the degree to which RASIM were allowed to ‘present themselves to society’, and in critical engagement with pertinent media and

communication literature, I discussed that news media can serve as a battleground for affect with its agenda-setting affordances; and, that the repeated exploitations of certain frames (such as the salience attributed to border insecurities over safety and respectful processing of RASIM) have led to entrenched negative perceptions of migration and RASIM, particularly in Türkiye.

There were commendable efforts towards curating style-guides, handbooks, dictionaries and various types of educational content on subjects pertaining to migration reporting, and these could be used accessed online and freely by anyone interested in migration reporting, particularly journalists⁴³. Admittedly, majority of these sources are in English, and there is much work to be done by scholars across to globe to come up with localized solutions. Still, while these resources existed, the content of migration reporting, -i.e. the news regarding refugees, asylum-seekers, and immigrants, for some reason, has continued to suck. The images of RASIM in the news was commonly coupled with images of border policing and the news rarely presented solutions to problems that surfaced with mass-migration.

Recent research (Splendora & Piacentini, 2024) had discussed that certain media systems, particularly those that encourage selective exposure, discourage media owners and journalists from challenging the pre-existing views of their audiences, thereby reinforcing polarization. At times, journalists were acutely aware of the “heat” of the subject, and political implications of producing such news, leading to self-censorships (Genç, 2016). Research with journalists in Istanbul, Türkiye had shown that when

⁴³ Chapter 1 presented an overview of these resources which are not only useful to see all in one place (for all who may be taking their first steps into migration reporting) but also for synthesis of the definitions and practical tips they offered with the interview findings from this dissertation.

experiencing or observing political distress, some journalists adopt ‘embodied detachment’ strategies from their jobs “in the hope of mitigating any culpability they might have in polarizing or isolating people through their reporting” (Miles, 2019). Building on such exemplary works, I wondered whether all journalists wished for mitigating culpability? Would journalists drive this polarization consciously and/or voluntarily? In other words, how did perception of working at a polarized media landscape affected the way journalism was performed?

Previous research found that Türkiye was a country with high levels of polarization (Bozdog & Kocer, 2022; Yanatma, 2018) on many subjects that are essential to everyday politics, particularly between the conservative Muslim and secular opposition sections of the population (Somer, 2019). For the theoretical framework endorsed in this dissertation, polarization could mean mass polarization referring to an ideological drift among the general populace (McCarty & Poole, 2006), elite polarization referring to an ideological chasm in- between the elite or opinion leaders within a political context (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Baldassari & Gelman, 2008) or affective polarization concerning emotional divides, empathy gaps and outgroup hostility (Boxel et al., 2022; Iyengar, 2018; Tajfel & Turner, 2004) between individuals and groups of people.

For RASIM, polarization meant a contested imagery in the way they are “greeted” in public and are represented or allowed to represent themselves in the news media (whichever may come before). On one side, there were news that signal solidarity with RASIM, highlighting their moments of need, the systematic injustices they face, and helping them get their “voices” heard. On the other side, there were news fueling hostility towards RASIM, visible in not only “exceptional”/sporadic moments of hate-speech but

also in the day-to-day instances of what I call “muffled nationalisms” where the value RASIM holds for the host community is undermined and the imagined costs of hosting RASIM are inflated, usually displaying securitization and illegality frames⁴⁴.

With this dissertation, I sought to explore the factors that shape migration reporting and to do so within the context of Türkiye, one of the largest host-countries around the world. My aim was to critically examine the media discourses surrounding migration in Türkiye, exploring how journalistic practices intersect with societal polarization and influence public representation of RASIM. For that purpose, I asked three main research questions. The summary of my responses to these questions can be found in the following section.

9.1 What Are the Overarching Themes of Discussion in Migration Reporting?

Chapter 4 was a critical chapter in responding to my first research question on the content of migration reporting in Türkiye. It presented findings from a qualitative thematic analysis of 1,000 news articles - randomly selected from a pool of approximately eleven thousand articles- collected from a range of Turkish media outlets between January 1, 2022 and August 1, 2023.

One of the key takeaways from this analysis was the sheer density of episodic news coverage, characterized by brief, spot-like, event driven reports that often lack deeper analysis or context particularly on the events where RASIM are captured along the borders, near boats or strolling through streets. The prevalence of episodic reporting (45%) meant that majority of the available information regarding RASIM had in fact nothing to do with RASIM’s political rights or well-being, and instead served to monitor

⁴⁴ See Chapter 5 for a detailed description of what is meant by these frames. Also, Lakoff (2006)’s analysis of the framing in such news stories is a great description to consider

a group's actions (most frequently called 'kaçak göçmenler' 'illegal/irregular migrants'), pursuing their capture and arrest. With the abundance of episodic news stories, the neglect of thematic coverage becomes apparent. Stories that need follow-up such as reports on futures of 'rescued' or 'captured' RASIM in deportation centers or stories that need revisiting such as those addressing RASIM children's education are unfortunately rare.

While episodic and flat narratives of illegal border crossings made up the largest portion of news stories on migration and RASIM, the crimes committed against RASIM were overlooked. Documented crimes against RASIM such as the case of Muhammed Savas -a Syrian national who got attacked by a mob of racist citizens as was noted on the 2020 report (THIV, 2020, p.41) were only picked up by migrant-solidarity platforms such as Göçmeniz.org; otherwise completely disregarded in mainstream news media.

When I turned to main themes of discussions within these news stories, I identified six themes which are listed followingly in a descending order of frequency: Irregular Migrant Hunt, Policy Discussions, Rescue Operations, Solidarity, Criminality, Fear/Threat.

Put differently, when it came to migration, the news stories in my corpus dominantly spoke about how many RASIM were captured or rescued (corresponding to themes Irregular Migrant Hunt and Rescue). When they were not reporting on these numbers, as the second most common discussion in my dataset, the news stories were reporting on updates in domestic and international migration policies (Policy). Articles highlighting solidarity with RASIM, protests, workshop or events organized in favor of RASIM were noticeably lower than these former two subjects; however, they were more

easy to come by than stories that spoke of civilians' fears or perception of being threatened by RASIM.

The choice towards a style or type of reporting did not necessarily align with the political views of the journalists as individuals, and a journalist could be producing in several types simultaneously. For example, a journalist working for a well-known mainstream news outlet could be asked by their editors to take up episodic news stories from larger agencies; to be able to keep up with the competition over click counts, while they would go after ideologically-driven topic selections in other stories.

Overall, the presence of these themes, alongside the absence of much more dire ones (on RASIM children's education, health, women's rights and protection, just to name a few) showed a preoccupation with securitization that frames migration as a challenge to be controlled rather than a phenomenon requiring structural solutions. In light of this analysis, I discussed that the media's focus on superficial, security-oriented narratives, rather than the human impact of migration, could be playing a role in perpetuating polarized views of migration in Turkey.

9.2 How Do Turkish Journalists Interpret and Utilize These Themes?

When I informed my participants of my findings from the content analysis and asked them to interpret the salience of certain subjects such as irregular migrant capture stories, they acknowledged the dominance of episodic stories, explaining it as a response to demands for 'faster' news. Some discussed that financial constraints and shrinking newsrooms led to proliferation of brief, event-driven coverage rather than in-depth thematic reporting. Journalists had to be strategic with the time and resources they allocated for a story and it appears that thematic reporting was deemed more costly than

episodic ones. In many instances episodic stories came from major news agencies such as Anadolu Agency, and they were shared by other news outlets with almost no change to their content. These stories required minimal effort from the journalist and/or the newsroom that subscribed to that agency; and while they were not considered to be necessary or good examples of reporting, the newsrooms' interest in this type of reporting was evident by the abundance of such news articles. My participants did not appear to endorse these almost-automated capture news stories fully; instead producing such news stories was a financial choice targeting for clicks and engagement.

At the same time, the majority of my participants stated that they provided some form of 'public service' with their reporting, ensuring people in positions of power are held accountable for their actions or inactions. Others moved from a profit-driven or ideology-driven logic when they decided to report on migration. Participants with a focus on human rights or solidarity often sought to provide alternative narratives, emphasizing the struggles and heroic moments of RASIM. Others, influenced by nationalist or cultural preservation ideologies, framed their stories to align with concerns about social cohesion, demographic change and resource distribution. Similarly, while some journalists saw their role as amplifying the voices of marginalized groups and advocating for systemic change, others prioritized addressing the concerns of the broader public, often reflecting dominant societal anxieties.

9.3 What Are the Challenges of Reporting on Migration, If Any?

The historical overview of migration policies as of the renouncement of modern-day Republic of Türkiye on October 29, 1923, showed that the country's migration policies evolved through various phases, moving away from an antiquated race-based

classification (Settlement Law No 2510 in 1934, Turkish ‘descent’ demanded) towards a security-approach (Limitations to Geneva Convention 1951, 1994 Regulation on Asylum-Seekers) to be recently replaced -or at least diluted- by an increasingly humanitarian and professional approach (Law on Foreigners and International Protection No 6458 in 2013 and pursuant Presidency of Migration Management legislation and enterprises).

Considering Türkiye’s geopolitical position at the cross-roads of the Balkans, Caucasus, Middle East, and eastern Mediterranean, and its strategic role in the broader European migration context; it is only natural to expect frequent updates and reformulations to law and codes of conduct in the way migration is governed. This overview, however, showed that Türkiye did not make any drastic changes to its migration law between 1934 to 1994 and then in 2013 -following the arrival of large groups of displaced people from Syria- after which a boost to regulation and standardization can be seen. This meant that migration policies have been somewhat proactive but certainly reactive to their context, with newer waves of migration giving birth to newer needs⁴⁵ and trends in regulation. Contrasting with this movement in migration policy, the literature zooming on media representation of RASIM in Türkiye in the last decade identified a shift from a humanitarian emphasis for the sake of RASIM to concerns regarding well-being of Turkish citizens, in often discriminatory practices towards RASIM (Cambay; 2019; Erol & Yaylaci, 2022; Goker & Keskin, 2015; Golcu & Dagli, 2017). The review of scholarly literature in this line showed that the tone of news stories became more hostile in this context and pointed out the biased treatment of

⁴⁵ For example, it is a new trend and a recent stubbornness to name and see someone as a refugee or a ‘temporary protection status’ for indefinitely while Bulgarian Turks or Iraqi Turkmens are able to blend into citizenry shortly after their arrival.

different groups in media such as hyper-sexualization of Afghan men as ‘predators’ and Syrian women as ‘brides’. I was familiar with this background information on the policy and media going into my interviews, and I asked my participants to unpack what sort of reporting they thought was expected of them, and what challenges they identified in delivering migration news.

Chapter 6 presented findings on the subject of personal and professional challenges of migration reporting as identified by my participants during our interviews. The personal challenges as identified by the interviewees of this study involved difficulty of working on emotionally taxing issues and the inherent gender-bias that exists in the public reactions to journalists moving from a point of an ethics of care. As part of the earlier point, I discussed that migration reporters are at risk of primary and secondary (sometimes vicarious) trauma, for which defense mechanisms are -unfortunately- rare to come by. The first point on the emotional toll of working with traumatized populations, were illustrated through the examples of three women from my sample – who while producing lifesaving and in my opinion award-deserving journalistic work - were subjected to severe levels of psychological violence

Access to reliable sources, particularly in restricted settings like deportation centers, was a recurring problem. Participants described how the isolation of RASIM in these settings made it difficult to obtain accurate information or verify claims. Similarly, the widespread mistrust of official data on migration emerged as a significant barrier, with journalists criticizing the lack of transparency and consistency in governmental records. The example of the inconsistency of number of RASIM as shared by two politicians in the same week help illustrate these interviewees’ perspective where a

mistrust towards the incumbent party agenda and motivations in hosting RASIM yields a mistrust of the critical information to be shared by solely migration governing offices such as PMM. These participants would like to put an end to misinformation caused by anti-RASIM politicians and public figures. Unfortunately, however, what they will accept as “clear” information from the government varies, with some the nationalist newsfluencers demanding unreasonable and attainable numbers as in they want to know the number of ‘unrecorded’ people giving birth to a predicament.

Editorial gatekeeping also played a role in shaping the challenges of migration reporting. Journalists working in nationalist-leaning newsrooms reported significant resistance to stories that humanized RASIM or highlighted their struggles. Proposals for such stories were often dismissed or met with ridicule, reflecting entrenched ideological biases within media organizations. Conversely, journalists in leftist-socialist outlets found more support for covering migration but still faced public backlash when their stories clashed with nationalist or anti-immigrant sentiments. However, it was also seen that journalists eventually chose to work for news outlets with which they share ideological values, thus even if editor-journalist tensions existed, they were not long-lived since the journalists would change newsrooms once they become aware of this tension.

A mildly important finding was on the societal and familial challenges journalists faced in covering migration. Those who identified with pro-RASIM attitudes among my participants recounted how their professional choices often invited skepticism or hostility from friends and family, who frequently echoed public biases against RASIM. Degrading terms such as ‘refugee-lover’ were used to “joke” about their passion for their profession

by their friends and families, however, this type of language was not enough to deter a pro-RASIM journalist from pursuing their news stories.

The most alarming finding, however, related to the violence and harassment faced by migration reporters. Female participants reported disproportionately high levels of gender-based threats, including rape and death threats, primarily on social media. “We will f*ck you over the Turkish flag” was one of the threats raised by a Turkish male citizen against a Turkish female journalist who simply tweeted about the RASIM children waiting for the election results in fear. These threats not only jeopardized their personal safety but also aimed to silence their voices and delegitimize their work. Male participants, while less likely to face direct threats, also encountered physical violence and legal repercussions, highlighting the precarious nature of reporting on such a contentious topic in Türkiye’s polarized media environment.

In conclusion, the challenges of reporting on migration in Türkiye reflected a convergence of personal, professional, societal, and systemic obstacles. From the emotional toll of working with traumatized populations to the structural barriers of access, unreliable data, and editorial control, journalists face a hostile and often unsupportive environment. These challenges, I believe, are exacerbated by the polarized nature of Turkish media and society.

9.4 What Are the Challenges Posed by Polarization, If Any?

I believe it was important to look at challenges posed by the subject (i.e. migration reporting) and the circumstances (high polarization) separately. While the challenges journalists faced in reporting migration could impact the depth and degree to which they wished to pursue a news story (depending on the emotional toll, editorial

gatekeeping etc.); the challenges of polarization pertained to how they could choose to tell their story. Self-censorship could be a risk due to perceived level of polarization, at least one famous TV anchor commented so on their news channel, receiving confirmation from thousands of comments underneath⁴⁶, describing how the fear of backlash from polarized audiences constrains their ability to report freely and how reporters were wary of being labeled as "racist". In my interviews with journalists, I found that being considered "pro-immigrant" was an equally dreaded label. Thought this way, hate-speech and violence in online engagements with audiences could deter journalists, and indeed deterred 3 in my sample by compelling them to reduce their visibility on the subject. However, majority of my participants underlined that they are not disheartened to conduct migration journalism in the way they do, abiding by morals and principles through which they produced their stories initially.

Asking how polarization impacts their work, I found that my participants recognized an increasing demand for sensational news (stories that would confirm the other party to be everything we are not) which was thought to be as both a symptom and a driver of polarization. Major news agencies and mainstream news outlets believed the public wanted to hear about the number of captured irregular migrants, for example, these were easy to produce news and satisfied a need of control over border insecurities. A vicious cycle exists with sensational news and polarization: news set the agenda to include border crossings, existing biases and fears are primed over demographic change, fear-driven reporting fuels public anxiety, which, in turn, escalates the need for even more sensational content.

⁴⁶ See Chapter 7 first two pages for a detailed discussion.

More importantly, polarization, as I construed it, created a charged news media landscape where dialogue between two conflicting views was inconceivable; and the types of news in demand were changing. This loss of dialogue or shrinking of the middle ground between the two poles was exactly why I wished to look at polarization separately than migration reporting. The analysis of selected news stories had shown that it was particularly difficult to report on migration statistics since the journalists did not trust government's records and were not familiar with supporting data sources; however, I believe their experience of mistrust could be explained by polarization and not by the fact that they were reporting on migration.

This heated media landscape also meant that journalists needed to walk a fine line in their engagement with extremely polarized people from either one of the anti or pro RASIM poles. From colleagues to life-long friends, journalists at times receive negative responses for displaying positive attitudes towards RASIM; rarely they also get strong reactions for being racists or anti-migration. What was more important that with this heated background the risk of harming persons with your reporting was increased. With so many entrenched and polarized views on the subject, journalists feared triggering hate-speech and lynching incidents through their reporting.

Despite these challenges, one positive aspect to polarization could be the increased audience engagement with news production within this polarized context. Citizens who were dissatisfied with mainstream narratives used social media to share their perspectives, some started their own news portals or social media accounts through which they reported brief news stories.

As part of our discussions on polarization's foreseeable harms to journalism, my participants highlighted three main problems: First was the increased demand for faster and sensational news, second was the self-censorship in fear of public outrage or prosecution by government, and lastly there was the elevated risk of harming individuals by mistake or false reporting. The theoretical implication of these, however, were not necessarily negative since they challenged journalists to come up or develop strategies to avoid these harms. In re-evaluating the scope of their news stories and their real-world impact, journalists began adopting new roles and responsibilities, such as mediating between polarized groups, serving as watchdogs for citizens' concerns, or steering clear of polarizing content altogether.

Outside these three harms, a potential benefit of polarization for reporting surfaced in the interviews, when participants referred to numbers of user interactions they receive over migration subjects. The democratization of access to media with proliferation of social media and mobile technologies allows citizens to not only express their viewpoints but also to challenge the dominant discourse which they believe excludes them and possibly come together with like-minded individuals. It enables individuals to shape the narratives that influence their lives, making the news production process more inclusive and participatory. However, this comes with challenges, as newsfluencers typically lack the editorial supervision and ethical standards of traditional media, increasing the potential for misinformation and bias.

9.5 What Are the Barriers and Facilitators to Improving Migration Reporting?

Last but not least, this dissertation aimed at coming up with practical solutions to some of the challenges and shortcomings it observed in migration reporting in Türkiye.

Four major recommendations on how to improve the quality and depth of migration reporting were identified during the interviews with journalists and editors who had over five years of experience covering migration

Before moving onto these recommendations, I would like to add one of my own on the urgency of creating trainings for migration reporting but also making them more accessible for journalists. Majority of the participants (78%) stated they were not familiar with any existing trainings to help prepare them for migration reporting, although my review of online resources in Chapter 1 in fact shows EJN's Migration Reporting Toolkit and other resources such as the initiative Trauma Reporting⁴⁷ does provide substantial content and training on PTSD and trauma related subjects⁴⁸. Two participants believed these resources were limited to fancy overseas academic trips which were in their view 'useless' in practice. This finding is an important takeaway for this study, pointing to major hinderances in the way of generating and circulating know-how on migration reporting and extra measures that needed to be taken to help reporters become aware these sources.

Against this backdrop, Chapter 8 provided insights into what journalists in Türkiye believe better coverage of migration looks like as participants are asked to come up with practical solutions for improving migration reporting, guided by their perception of existing media trends. A critical takeaway from this chapter was the call by several participants to separate the human from the deed in migration reporting, which they argue is essential for achieving a more nuanced and ethical representation of RASIM. This approach involves developing two distinct journalistic agendas: one that addresses the

⁴⁷ See <https://www.traumareporting.com>

⁴⁸ See <https://e-learning.fra.europa.eu/course/view.php?id=8#section-6>

'5Ws and 1H of Migration'—the structural, legal, and political aspects of migration—and another that focuses on the '5Ws and 1H of the Migrant,' reflecting the personal experiences and identities of those involved.

Participants emphasized three important strategies for improving migration reporting; namely striving for diversity of sources, data access and transparency and systemic and satisfactory profiling of migration trends. Several participants recommended cultivating relationships with not only “usual suspects” such as NGOs, academic researchers, and grassroots organizations but also to reach out to local elites such as political party headmen to ensure reporting captures a broader, more accurate picture of migration.

Mistrust in government data was a recurring theme, with participants noting inconsistencies and perceived manipulation of migration statistics. They called for increased collaboration between journalists, government agencies, and other stakeholders to create mechanisms for real-time, transparent data sharing. Building up on their recommendations, I also underlined the importance of collaboration among journalists, government agencies, and other stakeholders to improve data transparency. By working together, the media and public institutions can mitigate misinformation and foster a reporting environment where both accuracy and empathy coexist. Of course, this needs to be done in a way that safeguards press freedom.

Finally, my participants emphasized the need for a systemic approach in profiling migration trends, to counter further spread of misinformation. This involved shifting the focus from reactive coverage of isolated events to proactive, structural reporting. Whether

they were pro or anti-RASIM, they needed to have infographics and datasets that is up-to-date and in accordance with legislation.

Having conducted fieldwork with PMM in the past, and having spent years tracking announcements and updates on their website, I can attest to the fact that PMM has been doing an excellent job modernizing Türkiye's migration management infrastructure and I personally find their website and infographics easy to access; however, I agree with my participants in that the data could be made much more transparent and expanded to show some of the dire needs in the field.

In conclusion, the barriers and facilitators to improving migration reporting in Türkiye are deeply intertwined with the challenges posed by limited training, mistrust in data sources, and the systemic issues in the media landscape. While journalists face significant obstacles, including editorial pressures, societal polarization, and misinformation, the recommendations emerging from this study offer a roadmap for getting started with addressing these issues.

9.6 Limitations

As with any research, this dissertation has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. The most significant of these is the limited number of participants interviewed for the study. While the insights gained from the interviews offer valuable perspectives on migration reporting in Türkiye, a larger and more diverse sample of journalists would have further enriched the analysis, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics at play. Additionally, the scope of the content analysis, while thorough, was limited to a specific period (January 2022 to August 2023) and media outlets. Expanding the timeframe and including a wider variety of media

platforms, such as smaller, regional news outlets or non-mainstream digital spaces, could offer deeper insights into how migration is portrayed across different segments of the media landscape.

Another limitation stems from the reliance on self-reported data in the interviews. Journalists' reflections on their own practices may not fully capture the external pressures they face, particularly regarding editorial policies, ownership structures, and political influence. Moreover, this study focused on migration reporting in Türkiye, a highly polarized context, and while many of the findings have broader implications, cross-country comparisons would allow us to see how similar issues play out in different political and media environments.

9.7 Future Directions and Final Words

Despite these limitations, this dissertation makes important contributions to both migration and media studies. It illuminates how journalists in a polarized media system perceive their roles and navigate the pressures of reporting on a sensitive and politically charged topic. This is seen on journalists' perception of aggregated use of sensational news stories by other news outlets, enticing feelings of being compelled to produce 'faster' and sensationalized news stories. More importantly, this dissertation complicates the common assumptions on polarization by approaching it as not only the ideological break between two parties but as a phenomenon that requires more fluidity between different political identities in its assessment. For example, it was found that anti-RASIM attitudes and beliefs could be performed by people on both the political left and right in Türkiye. In this sense, this dissertation rather focused on the loss of dialogue between two parties and looked for challenges in the way of this dialogue.

By identifying key challenges in migration reporting—such as the tendency to prioritize security narratives over human rights perspectives—the study highlights the need for more balanced, informed, and ethical journalism. The dual approach suggested by the participants, separating the structural aspects of migration from the human stories of migrants themselves, offers a valuable framework for future iterations of migration reporting.

Circling back to a key theory question raised in the earlier sections (building up from the Kantian universal principle of hospitality and Arendt's formulation of the right to have rights), the question of what 'better' migration would look like, particularly for equitable implementation of RASIM's right to present themselves to the society, this dissertation offered several practical solutions. However, Kant stands not corrected in that such offers of practical solutions are nothing beyond a principle, i.e. principle of hospitality, that can be rejected, though needs not be dismissed⁴⁹. Arendtian 'right to have rights' prove to be a particularly important theoretical construct to operationalize in media studies for justifications to indeed act on this principle of hospitality. Following the trail of their and many other revered scholarly works referenced in this study, my response to that earlier question is that better migration coverage starts from an understanding that efforts towards such an aim would not be acts of charity or service but duties resulting from a universal right every individual has to 'present themselves to society' equitably and systematically.

While the end-product may not look drastically different than a 'good' journalism piece written on any given subject, 'better' migration reporting comes with significant

⁴⁹ See Kantian understanding of morality needing to result from a sense of duty in the first place rather than practical outcomes.

area-specific challenges and need to be further studied in future and other country contexts.

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