



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



The Good, the Bad and the Balanced: A critical analysis of the representation of the black African migrants in the South African Daily News and Daily Sun newspapers, 2016-2017

Clifford Jani *

University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Department of Culture, Communication and Media Studies. Durban, South Africa.

International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 2025, 17(02), 687–700

Publication history: Received on 08 October 2025; revised on 14 November 2025; accepted on 17 November 2025

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijrsra.2025.17.2.3085>

Abstract

Migration is a human practice that has connected different civilizations across the world. However, some of its modern manifestations can threaten peace and security. For those outside migration's immediate reach, the news media is an important source for public understanding of its flows and consequences. The existing body of research on media representation of African migrants suggests that the media focus on the negative stories. Previous studies of Mawadza (2012) and Pineteh (2017) have not dealt with how online press portrays black African migrants in South Africa. This study examines the close and dynamic relationship between the contemporary media and migration. The study examines how black African migrants are represented in two of the dominant online newspapers in South Africa; *Daily News* and *Daily Sun*. Data for this study was collected using content analysis by coding stories into categories and critical discourse analysis was then used to analyse patterns and themes found in the data. A twostep analysis of content and critical discourse analyses was used to examine the representation of black African migrants in these two newspapers. News stories about refugees, immigrants, foreigners and asylum seekers were selected for analysis across 40 news articles, analysing the linguistic character of newspaper content pertaining to black African migrants during the period 2016–2017. Themes such as job stealers, illegal, undocumented, drug lords and criminals were found to be popular in the news stories. Analysis showed that the media has improved and moved away from using demeaning words when covering African migrants in SA. Overall, this study strengthens the idea that the media is still hostile towards African migrants however; positive portrayal of African migrants is noticeable in the press.

Keywords: Representation; Black African Migrant; Discourse; Immigrant; Foreigner; News

1. Introduction

People migrate for different reasons all over the world and South Africa (hereafter referred to as SA) is one of the places that attract migrants, refugees and asylum seekers from the African continent (Ukwandu, 2017). Although, news reports seem to indicate that South Africa is one of the most violent places on earth (Dube 2018). SA still attracts millions of black African migrants who are in search of jobs, economic opportunities, education and political stability (Ukwandu, 2017).

Immigration is one of the problems facing SA and the representations of migrants in the newspapers are central in shaping their identity as people. As the media influence how people perceive migrants and immigration in general. Hence negative representation of black African migrants in the press as witnessed in the past studies (Pineteh, 2017; Koene and Maphunye, 2015) leads to negative stereotypical attitudes that may perhaps produce Afrophobia toward (Dube, 2018). Hence this study develops an interest in highlighting the language used by *Daily News* and *Daily Sun*.

* Corresponding author: Clifford Jani

The media should do more than just tell people what happened. It needs to give people background information so they can understand complicated topics. When news stories have context, the public can grasp the bigger picture. This helps people become more informed citizens (Entman, 1993). This way of reporting is less about exciting stories and more about thinking carefully about the news. The core of good journalism is getting the facts right. Reporters need to check information carefully. They should use different, reliable sources to avoid mistakes and false information (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007). Fact checking stops misinformation from spreading. It also helps the media earn the public's trust. Media companies need to correct errors quickly and openly. This shows they are responsible. This builds confidence in the news they provide.

The role of the press is therefore critical because it plays a vital role in society. It acts as a key source of information for the public. It also helps shape debate and ensure those in power are held responsible. The media keeps people informed about current affairs and government actions. It presents issues in ways that influence public opinion and reaction. Newspapers are an important medium for constructing and dispersing representations as they play a role in the way local people perceive and understand immigration and migrants (Kariithi, Mawadza, and Carciotto, 2017). The last few years has witnessed the birth of media initiatives promoting diversity awareness in the media such as Media4Diversity and the Charter of Rome for reporting on migrants and refugees (Triandafyllidou, 2017). This shows there has been some movements towards covering the migration issues in a more favourable and positive way (Allen and Blinder, 2018).

The primary objective of this study is to critically analyse the portrayal of black African migrants in two prominent South African newspapers, *Daily News* and *Daily Sun*, during the period 2016–2017. The media serves a pivotal role in society by facilitating communication between publishers and the public, shaping individuals' understanding of their social and political environments. As Hadesian (2006) notes, the media has become an inescapable facet of everyday life and functions as a powerful political instrument. Semotam (2012) further emphasizes that mass media often acts as a crucial bridge linking people's lived experiences to the broader public world. Building on this understanding, the study seeks to: first, identify how the media differentiates between black African migrants and South African nationals based on nationality; second, examine the dominant media discourses that label black African migrants as foreigners and explore their representation within the two newspapers; and third, assess whether these representations are predominantly positive, negative, or balanced.

These objectives are addressed through the following research questions: How are black African migrants portrayed in *Daily News* and *Daily Sun* between 2016 and 2017? How do these portrayals compare to migrant representation patterns from 2000 to 2015? What discursive strategies underpin the representation of migrants in the selected newspapers? To what extent do these newspapers reproduce stereotypes based on difference, and through which mechanisms? Finally, what categorical frameworks are employed to discuss Black African migrants within these media texts? This inquiry provides a foundation for understanding media constructions of migration and their broader social implications.

1.1. Problem statement

Unfortunately, the press coverage of migrants in SA is characterised by sensational and anti-immigrant language (Pineteh, 2017). It turns complicated migration issues into simple stories of danger and chaos. Studies show that the media often presents migration as a major risk to the country's safety and economy (Kariithi et al., 2017). News reports often focus on crime and unrest involving migrants. They ignore the deeper reasons people migrate. This way of reporting isolates migrant groups and spreads negative ideas about them (Pineteh, 2017). It can also worsen anti-immigrant feelings, which may justify unfair rules and even encourage violence. Recent research shows that the media has contributed to this perception by continually publishing negative stories about black African migrants and continue to associate bad news with migrants (Hairsine, 2019). Unfavourable coverage of migration tends to be twice visible than the favourable discourses not only in SA but in most developed nations around the world (Allen and Blinder 2018). News on black African migrants are gathered when something sensational and worth reporting happens. And this is usually something 'bad' related to migrants. Coverage on migration is often dictated by the more general political agenda and by for example during election campaigns (Triandafyllidou, 2017).

This is due to how journalists work and the country's social and political issues. South Africa's past and present shape how the media works (Gao, 2022). The country's history of unequal treatment, along with social and money problems, makes it easy to blame migrants. This distracts from bigger problems. Politicians might use these stories to get people on their side. The media might then spread biased ideas that show conflict instead of the full picture (Gao, 2022) This leads to the problem of violent and media attacks on nationals from other African countries are a reality that SA has come to expect from time to time. The situation in most SA townships seems to be pointing the other direction. At least

since early 2000, there have been an increase of violence and hatred against black African migrants such as Somalis, Nigerians, Congolese, Zimbabweans and Malawians just to mention a few (Koanene and Maphunye, 2015).

The violence is also witnessed through the way newspapers report about black African migrants as a 'problem' that SA has to deal with (Pineteh, 2017). In more recent times, we are witnessing an increase in violence against fellow black African migrants. Despite efforts to educate, inform and engage South Africans about the effects of violence against black African migrants, this violence has increased since the outbreak of the xenophobic attacks in May 2008. Violence against black African migrants in SA has not stopped since 2008 (Tarisayi and Manik, 2020).

Recently, researchers have shown an increased interest in the study of media representation of migrants in host countries. For example, in their 2022 study, Chiumbu and Moyo examined how certain print media in South Africa portray immigrants in relation to identity and belonging. They investigated the thematic frames that the chosen newspapers employed to create the image of immigrants during three instances of xenophobic violence in 2008, 2015, and 2017 using theories of media and national identity. Their major contention is that, despite the media's important contribution to raising awareness of the problem of xenophobia, they have unintentionally or intentionally employed narrative frames that defend the exclusion of foreigners, solidifying the idea of insiders and outsiders, citizens and non-citizens.

However, much of the research on the representation of migrants in the media up to now has been limited in nature and fails to articulate the positive narratives that are covered by the press in particular. This study however, exposes the good, the bad and the balanced narratives that are found in the South African press by analysing 41 news articles from popular newspapers *Daily Sun* and *Daily News*.

2. Literature review

The media plays a critical role in relaying messages and are a powerful means of communicating developmental, educational and political messages (Danso and McDonald, 2000). Hence, to study how the media constructs reality is significant in social sciences. This section presents an examination of previous literature pertaining to the representation of black African migrants in the press. It analyses past relevant studies, that aid in researching this phenomenon today (Crush and Pendleton, 2004; Solomon and Kosaka, 2003; Pineteh, 2017 and Kariithi *et al.*, 2017). This study is situated within cultural and media studies that investigates the relationship of language, discourse and power. This research is analysing the relationship between texts (newspaper articles), contexts (society, dominant groups) and how meanings are produced and represented (Tomaselli, 2012). The Humanities tend to examine the forms of representation, while social sciences analyse procedures and conditions out of which a text emerge (Tomaselli, 2012). This study therefore encompasses the two concepts in the quest to expose portray of black African migrants in the daily newspapers.

Previous newspaper discourses that have been used to describe black African migrants in the past years is critically analysed and explained in this chapter in relation to the modern-day representations. The past studies will be compared to the present study to ascertain whether the concepts, themes and discourses have changed or the reporting of migrants is still the same as was the case in early 2000s to 2016.

Preceding studies (Harris, 2001; Murray, 2003; McDonald and Jacobs, 2005) have been carried out within innumerable socio-political contexts, and research aims. These studies researched the anti-migrant discourses in the print media, public and political movements. They have focused on street, government and media narratives on black African migrants, in the post-colonial times in South Africa.

This section thus reviews relevant literature that surrounds the representation of black African migrants in the South African newspapers. It shows that major studies (Danso and McDonald, 2001; Mawadza and Crush, 2010; Fine and Bird, 2003) have been carried out to ascertain how black African migrants are portrayed, and indeed the studies confirmed the negative and stereotypical representations available in the press.

With reference to past studies this research has unpacked key concepts, terms and themes such as black African migrants as illegals, undocumented people, drug lords, criminals and job stealers. This helps to evaluate how the study combines and integrates the concepts to assess and answer the research questions. In addition, the relationship and the frequency of bias and unbiased reporting of migrants in the press is discussed as this further clarifies the role of the media in creating migrant identities in the press.

The study by Mawadza (2012) critically examines how Zimbabwean immigrants are represented in the South African print media, using a multimodal discourse analysis approach. The research identifies several key themes, findings, theoretical frameworks, and limitations, as well as gaps for future research.

The study finds that Zimbabwean immigrants are predominantly portrayed negatively in the South African media, often depicted as "aliens," "criminals," "burdens," and "folk devils" through the use of metaphors such as "dangerous waters," "containers," and "nation as clothing."

While verbal texts are overwhelmingly negative, visual images in the media sometimes present a more sympathetic view, depicting immigrants as victims of circumstances, evoking empathy and highlighting their suffering. However, Female Zimbabwean immigrants are often portrayed as either sex workers, unfit mothers, or victims, reinforcing gendered stereotypes and marginalizing their experiences (Mawadza 2012)

The study draws on the work of Fairclough, Van Dijk, and Wodak to analyse how language is used to construct and perpetuate negative representations of immigrants. The research incorporates Kress and Van Leeuwen's multimodal theory to examine how both verbal and visual texts interact to shape public perceptions of immigrants. Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive metaphor theory is used to unpack how metaphors (e.g., "aliens," "dangerous waters") are deployed to frame immigration as a threat. The study applies Stanley Cohen's concept of moral panic to explain how media discourse amplifies fears about immigration and constructs immigrants as scapegoats for social problems.

The research is limited to media representations during a specific period of economic and political turmoil in Zimbabwe, and does not cover other time frames or contexts. The study focuses exclusively on Zimbabwean immigrants, leaving out other nationalities and broader migration patterns in South Africa. The analysis is restricted to print media, with limited consideration of digital news media.

Mawadza's study provides a detailed and critical analysis of media representations of Zimbabwean immigrants in South Africa, highlighting the complex interplay between language, visuals, and social context. The research underscores the need for a multi semiotic approach to understanding media discourse on migration and points to important areas for future investigation.

The study by Solomon and Kosaka critically analyses xenophobia in South Africa, focusing on the fear and hatred of foreigners manifested in discriminatory behaviour and violent attacks. It finds that xenophobia in South Africa is primarily driven by economic anxieties, perceptions of foreigners as threats to jobs and resources, and media driven stereotypes that criminalize African immigrants. The study highlights how xenophobia is uniquely racialised, primarily targeting black African migrants, and exacerbated by historical legacies such as apartheid and contemporary political discourses emphasizing exclusivity in citizenship (Solomon and Kosaka, 2013).

They use qualitative research, including interviews with victims of xenophobic attacks, to illuminate the lived experiences of migrants who face violence, exclusion, and economic marginalization. The study situates its analysis within theories of nationalism, scapegoating, and post coloniality to explain how xenophobia is constructed and maintained. It critiques South African media and political discourses for reinforcing enemy images of migrants, which undermines social cohesion and regional integration efforts (Solomon and Kosaka, 2013).

Key limitations include the qualitative focus on specific locales (e.g., Mbekweni, Bloemfontein), which may not represent the full national experience, and the complex interplay of crime and xenophobia, where some violence is rooted in broader social issues like poverty. The study also notes challenges in addressing xenophobia given its deep social roots and the contradictory role of government rhetoric and policies (Solomon and Kosaka, 2013).

Remaining gaps identified include the need for broader educational interventions to dismantle stereotypes, more inclusive citizenship policies that go beyond indigenous definitions, and improved government and media roles in fostering positive narratives about migrants. There is also a call for stronger regional cooperation within SADC to build solidarity and effective migration management (Solomon and Kosaka, 2013).

Thus, this study contributes a nuanced understanding of xenophobia in South Africa, combining victim narratives with socio political analysis, but points to on-going challenges in policy and societal attitudes needing comprehensive, multi-level responses (Solomon and Kosaka, 2013).

The study by Pineteh (2017) critically analyses the framing of African migrants and xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa. Using qualitative data from interviews, political speeches, and print media, the study finds dominant narratives

construct African migrants as scapegoats for economic hardship, crime, and social disorder, often employing metaphors that demonize migrants as "illegal aliens," "demons," or "parasites." Such frames reinforce xenophobic attitudes and justify recurrent violence against migrants, with street level, political, and media narratives intersecting to popularize anti African sentiments (Pineteh, 2017).

The study employs framing theory as its primary theoretical framework, focusing on how message construction in media and political discourse shape's public opinion and behaviours towards migrants. This approach draws from media and communication studies to explain how metaphors, idioms, and rhetoric influence societal attitudes and legitimize exclusion and violence (Pineteh, 2017).

Findings reveal that xenophobia is fuelled by perceptions of African migrants as economic competitors and criminals, despite legal protections and evidence of migrants' economic contributions. Political rhetoric often scapegoats' migrants for governance failures, while media coverage tends to sensationalize and normalize violence, intensifying social divisions. The narratives are racialised and deeply entwined with South Africa's apartheid legacy and contemporary political anxieties (Pineteh, 2017).

Limitations include a focus on selected urban settings, reliance mainly on print media, and underexplored migrant voices. The study acknowledges difficulty in disentangling xenophobia from structural social problems like poverty and unemployment, as well as the challenge of shifting entrenched public perceptions shaped by decades of exclusionary discourse (Pineteh, 2017).

Research gaps remain in developing counter narratives that humanize migrants, the role of newer media forms, and broader regional political economic dynamics influencing migration and xenophobia. The study calls for multi sectoral responses, engaging media, politics, education, and civil society to foster more inclusive frameworks of belonging and challenge hegemonic anti migrant discourses in South Africa (Pineteh, 2017).

In summary, Pineteh's work critically unpacks how framing practices in post-apartheid South Africa perpetuate xenophobia, blending individual, institutional, and historical factors, highlighting the urgent need for transformative social and political interventions to reduce migrant marginalization and violence (Pineteh, 2017).

This analysis integrates insights from the previous studies on xenophobia in South Africa (Mawadza, 2012; Solomon and Kosaka, 2013) that reveal consistent themes of media and political scapegoating of African migrants, moral panic, and structural socio-economic tensions driving exclusion and violence. Collectively, these studies use discourse and framing theories to elucidate the complex socio-political underpinnings of xenophobia while noting limitations related to representation and scope, and call for expanded research on media roles, migrant agency, and policy development.

Kariithi, et al., (2017) explore how South African print media between 2011 and 2015 constructed migration discourses through linguistic framing. Their corpus analysis of over 5,000 news articles (approximately 920,000 words) identifies dominant themes of *illegality*, *economic threat*, *small business competition* (the "spaza" narrative), and *violence* associated with migration. These findings reveal that media outlets predominantly portray African migrants as "illegal foreigners" and economic competitors rather than as contributors to South African society. Such representations reinforce exclusionary frames and help sustain xenophobic sentiments in public discourse, particularly during periods of violent unrest such as the 2015 xenophobic attacks (Kariithi et al., 2017).

The authors employ a corpus linguistic approach grounded in the RASIM (Refugee, Asylum Seeker, Immigrant, Migrant) model, extended to RASFIM to include the term *foreigner* (Baker et al., 2008). By combining the computational tools TLAB and Sketch Engine, they identify word frequency, keyness, and collocation patterns to expose the linguistic framing of migrants. This methodological framework draws on theories of media framing and agenda setting, illustrating how repeated lexical choices construct migrants as social problems rather than as individuals with agency (Entman, 1993; McCombs and Shaw, 1972). The study's theoretical grounding is thus consistent with established media discourse frameworks but stops short of exploring audience reception or political economic factors that sustain these frames.

While the study's large dataset and dual tool analysis enhance its reliability, several limitations remain. Automated corpus techniques quantify linguistic associations but cannot fully capture tone, irony, or journalists' intentions. Furthermore, the exclusion of tabloid newspapers and social media, owing to digitisation limits, narrows the representativeness of the dataset (Kariithi et al., 2017). Media ownership concentration and article syndication also risk inflating particular discourses despite de duplication efforts. The authors acknowledge that the data capture the *supply*

of media discourse rather than its *reception* by audiences – a limitation that future research should address through qualitative methods such as audience studies or newsroom ethnographies.

Gaps therefore remain in understanding how these lexical frames influence public attitudes toward migrants, and whether counter frames or alternative narratives have emerged in digital and community media spaces. A more holistic approach incorporating reception analysis, media production contexts, and comparative cross-national research could deepen insights into the persistence of exclusionary representations. Longitudinal studies following developments beyond 2015 would also help assess whether media reform or social change has altered the framing of migration.

The study by Tarisayi and Manik critically maps how South African online media portrayed the September 2019 outbreak of violence against foreign nationals, identifying a set of recurring narrative themes: chronological event reporting, the framing of attacks as *Afrophobia* (a race inflected form of xenophobia), the role of instigators, government denial/inaction, links to poverty, and concerns about reputational damage to South Africa (Tarisayi and Manik, 2020).

These themes show that reportage did not present a single causal account but rather a plurality of competing explanations – from immediate triggers (the taxi driver killing) to deeper structural drivers (poverty, political opportunism, collective trauma) and that media texts routinely used criminalising language (e.g. “drug dealers”, “illegals”) and martyr narratives that shaped public sense making around the violence (Tarisayi and Manik, 2020).

The paper’s principal findings are that online media narratives overwhelmingly positioned the September 2019 violence as targeted against black African foreigners (hence the authors’ preference for the term *Afrophobia*), that instigatory actors and inflammatory rhetoric amplified the outbreaks, and that government denial and weak responses were a recurrent frame used to explain the persistence of such violence (Tarisayi and Manik, 2020). At the same time, the authors are careful to note methodological and interpretive limitations: the sample was limited to 30 purposively selected online articles surfaced via Google (first three result pages), which risks selection bias and reduces generalisability; content analysis of media texts reveals how events are represented but cannot on its own establish causal links to public attitudes or on the ground violence; and the exclusion of social media, radio and non-digitised tabloids constrains the breadth of media ecologies considered (Tarisayi and Manik, 2020). These limitations mean the findings are strong for describing media frames within the sampled texts but are limited as evidence of broader media effects or of the full information environment in which the outbreaks occurred.

Theoretical and analytical framing in the article combines cultivation theory, agenda setting theory and collective violence theory. Cultivation theory is used to argue that repeated negative media portrayals may shape public perceptions of immigrants (Gerbner; Punyanunt Carter, as cited in Tarisayi and Manik, 2020), agenda setting theory explains how media salience influences what the public deems important (McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Tarisayi and Manik, 2020), and collective violence theory helps make sense of how group dynamics and instigators can instrumentalise grievances to produce outbreaks of violence (Mattaini and Strickland; Mogapi, as discussed by the authors). This multi theoretical approach is a strength because it connects textual representation to potential social effects and group behaviour, but the paper does not empirically test causal pathways (for example, media → perception → violence) nor does it interrogate newsroom production processes or ownership structures that might explain why particular frames recur.

Important gaps remain and point to productive next steps for research. First, reception and impact: we lack audience centred studies (surveys, focus groups, experiments) to test whether and how the identified frames influence attitudes or behaviour toward migrants. Second, media ecology breadth: excluding social platforms, radio, television and under digitised tabloids omits channels where sensationalist or mobilising messages often circulate; incorporating these would give a fuller picture of discursive circulation. Third, production side analysis: newsroom ethnographies, interviews with editors/reporters and political economy analyses of media ownership could explain structural drivers behind persistent framings. Finally, longitudinal and comparative work (post 2019 follow ups and cross-national comparisons) would establish whether framing practices and their social effects are stable, cyclical or responsive to interventions (e.g. editorial guidelines, civic education). Addressing these gaps would move the field beyond descriptive mapping of frames toward causal and policy relevant knowledge about media, migration and violence (Tarisayi and Manik, 2020).

3. Research methodology

The aim of this study was to explore how *Daily News* and *Daily Sun* newspapers represent Black African migrants in South Africa. The study sought to uncover the dominant discourses, metaphors, and stereotypes used in newspaper reporting, and to understand how such representations construct social meanings about migration.

3.1. Research Paradigm

This study was located within the interpretivist paradigm, which views reality as socially constructed and context dependent. Interpretivism assumes that knowledge is created through understanding people's subjective meanings and lived experiences (Thanh and Thanh, 2015). Within this worldview, truth is not absolute but is shaped by language, culture, and social interaction (Willis, 2007). The interpretive stance suited this study because it sought to understand how media discourses shape perceptions of Black African migrants through language. The researcher recognised that both the media and audiences interpret social reality, and therefore meanings about migration are constructed rather than discovered.

3.2. Research Approach

The study adopted a qualitative research approach because it focuses on understanding meaning and context rather than measurement. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research allows for exploration of social phenomena through rich, descriptive data. This approach enabled the researcher to examine how newspapers linguistically frame migration issues and how these framings reveal underlying attitudes, ideologies, and social relations. Qualitative research was suitable because it allows for inductive reasoning drawing themes and insights from the data rather than testing hypotheses (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

3.3. Research Design

The study followed a qualitative descriptive design, combining content analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA) to interpret newspaper texts. This design was chosen because it enabled systematic examination of how media language constructs social meanings and power relations. CDA was used to expose ideologies, metaphors, and linguistic patterns that reflect or reinforce inequality (Deacon et al., 2007). As Van Dijk (1997) argues, discourse analysis reveals how power and racism are reproduced through everyday language. This research design thus supported the interpretivist goal of exploring how social realities such as "us vs them" distinctions are constructed in media texts.

3.4. Data Collection

Data were purposively collected from two major South African newspapers *Daily Sun* and *Daily News* which have high circulation and are influential in shaping public opinion. Articles were downloaded from their online databases, focusing on stories that directly mentioned or discussed Black African migrants. These newspapers were chosen because they represent both tabloid and mainstream perspectives, allowing for comparative insight into how different segments of the press frame migration. The sample included news articles, features, and opinion pieces that contained explicit or implicit references to migrants. Headlines and leads were given special attention because they often signal framing and ideological stance.

3.5. Sample Description

The study employed a purposive sampling strategy to select newspaper articles that specifically addressed the representation of Black African migrants in South Africa. The sample consisted of forty-one (41) news articles drawn from two widely circulated South African newspapers the *Daily Sun* and the *Daily News* covering the period 2016 to 2017. These two publications were deliberately chosen because they represent distinct genres and readership profiles within the South African media landscape: *Daily News* is a mainstream broadsheet with a relatively formal editorial style, while *Daily Sun* is a tabloid newspaper with a large working-class readership and a more sensationalist tone. This contrast allowed the study to explore differences and similarities in the ways each outlet frames migration and foreign nationals.

The purposive sampling approach ensured that only articles directly relevant to the study's focus that is, those mentioning or discussing Black African migrants were included in the dataset. The selection criteria required that each article make explicit reference to migration, migrants, foreigners, xenophobia, or related social issues such as crime, employment, and social integration. Articles were retrieved from the newspapers' online archives and digital databases. These included hard news stories, feature articles, editorials, and opinion pieces, as well as human interest stories. Headlines and introductory paragraphs were given particular analytical weight because they often encapsulate the framing and ideological orientation of each article.

The final sample size of forty-one articles was deemed adequate for qualitative discourse analysis, as it allowed for in depth textual interpretation and cross comparison without compromising analytical rigour. The inclusion of both broadsheet and tabloid formats provided a broader perspective on how different journalistic traditions construct narratives about migration. Furthermore, by focusing on the 2016–2017 period a time marked by heightened public

debate on migration and xenophobia in South Africa the study captured a snapshot of media discourse during a significant socio-political moment.

Table 1 Sample Size

Newspaper	2016 Number of Articles	2017 Number of Articles
<i>Daily Sun</i>	13	11
<i>Daily News</i>	8	9

While the sample provided rich qualitative data, it was not intended to be statistically representative of all South African media coverage of migration. The focus was instead on depth of interpretation and thematic diversity. The researcher acknowledges that reliance on online archives may have excluded some print only content or regional publications. However, the chosen sample effectively reflected the dominant narratives within urban, English language print media and offered valuable insights into how language and representation shape perceptions of African migrants in the South African context.

The choice of purposive sampling was guided by the study's interpretivist and qualitative orientation, which prioritises depth of understanding over numerical generalisability. As the research aimed to explore how media discourse constructs meanings around Black African migrants, it was essential to select texts that were information rich and directly relevant to the research questions (Patton, 2015). Purposive sampling is particularly appropriate for critical discourse analysis because it allows the researcher to identify cases that illustrate recurring linguistic and ideological patterns within specific contexts (Silverman, 2014).

The selection of the *Daily News* and the *Daily Sun* was further justified by their contrasting editorial styles and readership demographics. The *Daily News*, a mainstream broadsheet, targets middle class and professional audiences, often adopting formal and institutional reporting practices. In contrast, the *Daily Sun* is a mass market tabloid that reaches a large working-class readership and tends to use emotive and sensational language. Including both publications enhanced the comparative and contextual validity of the study by showing how different journalistic cultures frame migration issues.

Furthermore, focusing on the period 2016–2017 was methodologically sound, as this timeframe coincided with increased national attention on migration, xenophobic tensions, and debates about economic inequality. Analysing this period provided a concentrated window for examining the media's role in shaping public discourse during a politically charged moment.

3.6. Data Processing and Analysis

Data were first sorted and trimmed to remove irrelevant material. Qualitative content analysis was used to code and categorise the data into themes such as *criminality*, *violence*, *economic competition*, and *victimhood* (Elo and Kyngäs, 2007). Through thematic analysis, recurring patterns of meaning were identified within the texts (Braun and Clarke, 2006). CDA was then applied to examine how linguistic elements – metaphors, adjectives, and lexical choices contributed to constructing representations of migrants. For example, terms such as “illegals” or “makwerekwere” were analysed for their ideological implications. The analysis was guided by Hall's (1997, 2013) theory of representation, which emphasises how language creates meaning within cultural contexts.

3.7. Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation of analytical techniques (content analysis and CDA) and by maintaining a transparent audit trail of coding decisions. Reflexivity was employed throughout – the researcher acknowledged their interpretive role and possible biases. To enhance credibility, key findings were cross checked with existing literature on media representations of migrants (e.g., Danso and McDonald, 2001; Pineteh, 2017). Ethical principles were upheld by using publicly available media data, ensuring that no identifiable individuals were harmed or misrepresented. Data were cited accurately and used strictly for academic purposes.

Challenges and Limitations

The study faced limitations common to qualitative media analysis. The sample was limited to two newspapers, which restricts the generalisability of findings. Online archives may not include all published content, leading to possible data

omissions. Moreover, qualitative interpretation is inherently subjective meaning that researcher bias cannot be entirely eliminated. Time constraints also limited the depth of comparative analysis between different media genres. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into how South African newspapers construct narratives about Black African migrants, contributing to broader debates on migration, media, and social representation.

4. Results

The analysis of forty-one news articles from *Daily Sun* and *Daily News* (2016–2017) revealed a predominantly negative representation of Black African migrants in South African print media. Both newspapers were found to rely heavily on discursive patterns that linked migrants with *crime, illegality, violence, and social disruption*. While the study did identify a few positive or balanced portrayals, these were marginal and often framed as *exceptions* rather than part of a consistent narrative. The findings confirm earlier research (Danso and McDonald, 2001; Kariithi et al., 2017; Pineteh, 2017) that South African media continues to reproduce exclusionary and xenophobic discourses which reinforce “us versus them” distinctions between citizens and foreign nationals.

4.1. Negative Discourses and Criminalisation

The most dominant discursive theme was the criminalisation of migrants. Articles frequently associated Black African migrants with “drug dealing”, “murder”, and “illegal activities”, constructing them as a social threat to law and order. Terms such as “*illegal immigrants*”, “*aliens*”, and “*makwerekwere*” were common in *Daily Sun*, reinforcing derogatory and racialised stereotypes. *Daily News*, though more formal in tone, also reproduced negative frames by emphasising conflict and criminality. This framing aligns with what Van Dijk (1994) calls the *ideological square*, where the in group (South Africans) is depicted positively while the out group (migrants) is described in negative terms. Such representations not only dehumanise migrants but also normalise exclusionary attitudes and justify xenophobic violence (Hall, 1997).

4.2. “Us vs. Them” and Othering

Another key finding was the recurring theme of othering, where migrants were constructed as outsiders who do not belong in South African society. Both newspapers often used national identity as a marker of difference, reinforcing binary oppositions such as *citizen vs foreigner* and *lawful vs illegal*. This reflects Hall’s (2013) concept of *representation and difference*, where meaning is produced through contrast. Headlines and photographs further intensified this binary by portraying migrants as “invaders” or “job stealers”. The language of othering was particularly visible in *Daily Sun*, whose tabloid format relies on emotive and sensational storytelling. This form of reporting resonates with Galtung and Ruge’s (1965) news values of negativity and frequency, where dramatic and conflict-based stories are more newsworthy than positive ones.

4.3. Metaphoric and Linguistic Representations

Critical Discourse Analysis uncovered recurring **metaphors** that constructed migrants as natural disasters or economic burdens phrases like “*floods of foreigners*” and “*waves of immigrants*” implied invasion and loss of control. Such linguistic devices frame migration as a threat to national stability and social cohesion. Similarly, the repeated use of *economic metaphors* depicting migrants as “job stealers” or “cheap labourers” reduces complex human experiences to transactional categories. These metaphors perpetuate what Fairclough (1995) describes as *ideological framing*, whereby language naturalises inequality and rationalises exclusion.

4.4. Limited Positive Coverage

While negative portrayals dominated, a small number of articles did highlight positive contributions of black African migrants, such as entrepreneurship, community involvement, and cultural diversity. However, these stories were often framed as exceptional and conditional presenting migrants as “good foreigners” who succeed through assimilation or charity. This selective positivity demonstrates what Spoonley and Butcher (2009) call *conditional acceptance*, where migrants are only valued when they conform to dominant social norms. Thus, even seemingly positive stories reproduce hierarchical narratives that centre South African identity as superior and normative.

4.5. Comparative Framing: Broadsheet vs. Tabloid

The comparative analysis revealed notable differences in tone and style between *Daily News* (broadsheet) and *Daily Sun* (tabloid). *Daily News* adopted a more formal register and occasionally included official perspectives, but still framed migrants within state led discourses of legality, regulation, and control. *Daily Sun*, conversely, employed sensational language and vivid imagery, often personalising stories around conflict and crime. Despite stylistic differences, both

newspapers reinforced similar ideological boundaries. This supports the argument that media representations are structured by shared social assumptions rather than individual editorial agendas (Fairclough, 2003; Richardson, 2007).

4.6. Overall Interpretation and Significance

The findings demonstrate that the South African print media continue to act as a discursive site for reproducing xenophobic ideologies. Through selective language, framing, and metaphor, newspapers construct migrants as dangerous outsiders, thereby legitimising exclusion and hostility. The analysis confirms Hall's (1997) theory of *representation as construction* that media do not simply reflect reality but actively create and circulate meaning. These representations have material consequences, influencing public perceptions and potentially fuelling social tension (Pineteh, 2017). The study therefore contributes to understanding the relationship between media discourse and social cohesion in post-apartheid South Africa.

Limitations and Implications

While the study provided rich qualitative insight, its focus on two newspapers limits generalisability. Moreover, the exclusion of television, radio, and social media leaves other influential forms of discourse unexplored. Despite these constraints, the findings underline the need for more balanced journalism and media literacy initiatives that challenge negative stereotypes and promote inclusive narratives about migration. Future research could extend the timeframe or include audience reception studies to assess how such media representations are internalised or resisted by South African readers.

5. Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study reveal that South African newspapers *Daily News* and *Daily Sun* continue to reproduce negative, stereotypical, and exclusionary representations of Black African migrants. Through frames of *criminality*, *illegality*, *economic threat*, and *social disorder*, both outlets construct migrants as outsiders who undermine national stability. This section interprets these findings through theoretical frameworks of representation (Hall, 1997, 2013), critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995, 2003; Van Dijk, 1994), and ideology and othering (Said, 1978; Wodak, 2015).

5.1. Media and the Construction of “the Other”

Consistent with Hall's (1997) notion that representation is a process of meaning making, the newspapers did not merely report on migrants but actively *constructed* them through selective language and imagery. Migrants were framed as “illegal”, “unwanted”, or “dangerous”, reinforcing an “us versus them” dichotomy that positions South Africans as victims and foreigners as aggressors. This mirrors Van Dijk's (1994) *ideological square*, in which media discourse systematically emphasises the positive attributes of the in group while highlighting the negative traits of the out group. Such representation transforms difference into deviance, rendering migrants as cultural, moral, and economic threats.

The discourse of *othering* observed in the newspapers also reflects Said's (1978) theory of *Orientalism*, whereby dominant groups construct outsiders as inferior and threatening to justify exclusion and control. By portraying African migrants as an “invasive” or “flooding” presence, the newspapers reproduce colonial hierarchies of race and belonging. The use of metaphors such as “waves of foreigners” and “floods of illegals” exemplifies what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) call *conceptual metaphors*, which frame social issues through imagery that evokes fear and urgency. This language transforms human mobility into a crisis narrative and justifies restrictive policy measures and social hostility toward migrants.

5.2. Ideology, Power, and Media Framing

The findings affirm Fairclough's (1995, 2003) argument that discourse is a form of social practice embedded in relations of power and ideology. By repeatedly associating migrants with crime and poverty, the newspapers reproduce hegemonic discourses that protect the interests of dominant groups. These representations legitimise state surveillance, policing, and deportation, while diverting attention from structural issues such as inequality, corruption, and unemployment. The *Daily News* tended to reinforce state narratives of control, often citing government sources that emphasised border management or law enforcement. In contrast, the *Daily Sun*, while more sensationalist, reinforced similar ideological assumptions through emotive and populist language. Despite stylistic differences, both papers circulated the same underlying discourse of exclusion.

The privileging of conflict, crime, and negativity reflects Galtung and Ruge's (1965) *news values*, which show how journalists select and prioritise stories that are dramatic or deviant. This commercial logic interacts with deeper social ideologies, producing a news environment that equates migration with danger. As Fairclough (2003) observes, the repetition of such frames across outlets normalises certain ways of thinking what he calls *discursive hegemony*. The consequence is that xenophobic attitudes appear common sense rather than ideological.

5.3. Representation, Identity, and Nationhood

The study's findings also speak to the question of national identity in post-apartheid South Africa. The portrayal of Black African migrants as threats to employment and security suggests that national belonging remains racially and geographically bounded. This supports Neocosmos' (2010) argument that post 1994 nationalism in South Africa has been defined through exclusion rather than inclusion. Media discourse thus functions as a symbolic border, delineating who is a legitimate member of the nation. Through the persistent use of "illegal foreigner" and "Makwerekwere", the press reasserts hierarchies of citizenship and re inscribes apartheid era racial logics into contemporary media language.

Furthermore, the limited positive stories those that portrayed migrants as entrepreneurs or community builders illustrate what Spoonley and Butcher (2009) term *conditional acceptance*. Migrants are celebrated only when they assimilate or contribute economically, reinforcing neoliberal values of productivity and utility. Even these "positive" frames, therefore, sustain unequal power relations by defining worth through economic contribution rather than shared humanity.

5.4. Implications for Media Practice and Social Cohesion

The persistence of negative frames has serious implications for social cohesion and public policy. By portraying migrants as criminal or parasitic, media narratives can indirectly legitimise xenophobic violence (Pineteh, 2017; Danso and McDonald, 2001). Public opinion research shows that exposure to such negative framing heightens perceptions of threat and reduces empathy toward migrants (Esses et al., 2013). The media, therefore, play a central role in cultivating what Gerbner (1998) calls *symbolic victimisation* a worldview shaped by repeated images of danger and conflict.

Journalistic training and editorial policies need to address these biases by promoting ethical reporting and inclusive language. Adopting rights-based journalism and intercultural reporting frameworks could help challenge stereotypes and foster mutual understanding. The study's findings thus contribute to ongoing debates about media ethics, responsible journalism, and nation building in diverse societies.

This study set out to examine how *Daily News* and *Daily Sun* newspapers represent Black African migrants in South Africa and to explore how media discourse contributes to broader constructions of identity, belonging, and exclusion. Drawing on qualitative content analysis and critical discourse analysis, the study revealed that both newspapers predominantly portray migrants in negative, stereotypical, and dehumanising ways. The findings demonstrated that South African print media continues to reproduce discourses that criminalise, marginalise, and other Black African migrants, thereby reinforcing xenophobic attitudes and deepening social divisions.

A key conclusion emerging from this research is that media discourse is not neutral. Consistent with Hall's (1997, 2013) theory of representation, the study confirms that language plays an active role in shaping social meaning and public understanding of migration. The newspapers did not merely mirror reality; they *constructed* it through selective lexical choices, framing, and imagery. Migrants were frequently described as "illegal", "dangerous", or "unwanted", while South Africans were positioned as victims of crime, poverty, and unemployment. This binary aligns with Van Dijk's (1994) *ideological square*, where the in group is portrayed positively and the out group negatively. Such framing transforms migration into a moral and security crisis, legitimising exclusionary attitudes and policies.

The study also concludes that these representations are rooted in deeper historical and structural ideologies. As Neocosmos (2010) argues, post-apartheid nationalism in South Africa has been defined by exclusionary logics that construct belonging through opposition to the foreign "other". The newspapers examined in this study reproduce these ideological boundaries by defining national identity in opposition to African migrants. Even when the press portrayed migrants positively, these narratives were framed through *conditional acceptance* celebrating migrants only when they assimilated, contributed economically, or remained apolitical (Spoonley and Butcher, 2009). Hence, both negative and positive portrayals serve to maintain power hierarchies that privilege South African citizenship while marginalising non-nationals.

Another important conclusion is that commercial and institutional factors shape how migration is reported. The *Daily Sun*, as a tabloid, relies on sensationalism, emotive headlines, and conflict-based storytelling to attract readership, which

amplifies stereotypes and fear-based narratives. The *Daily News*, while adopting a more formal tone, similarly prioritised official sources and state narratives around legality, control, and border management. Both approaches reflect Fairclough's (1995, 2003) assertion that media institutions operate within ideological and economic systems that shape discourse production. The press, therefore, participates in reproducing dominant ideologies rather than challenging them.

This study contributes to existing literature by offering empirical evidence of how xenophobic discourse persists in South African print media, even two decades after democracy. The persistence of these narratives suggests that social transformation has not yet translated into inclusive cultural representation. Media coverage continues to reflect anxieties about economic competition, national identity, and social change, using migrants as scapegoats for broader societal challenges (Danso and McDonald, 2001; Pineteh, 2017). The implication is that xenophobia is not only a social or political issue but also a *discursive* one sustained by everyday language and storytelling practices in the media.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study underscores the value of integrating critical discourse analysis with representation theory in examining how ideologies are embedded in language. This combined approach revealed that exclusionary frames are maintained not only through explicit bias but also through subtle linguistic strategies such as metaphors, lexical repetition, and headline framing. Such findings advance understanding of how racism and xenophobia are reproduced through "common sense" discourse.

Finally, this research acknowledges its limitations. The focus on two newspapers limits the generalisability of the findings, and the exclusion of broadcast and social media leaves out other influential discursive spaces. Moreover, while the study identifies patterns of representation, it does not empirically measure audience reception or impact. Future research should therefore explore how readers interpret and respond to such representations and whether alternative media platforms (community radio, social media, or online citizen journalism) offer more inclusive counter narratives.

This study demonstrates that South African online print media remains a powerful arena for constructing social meanings about migration. The persistent framing of Black African migrants as "others" not only reflects societal anxieties but also shapes them. Addressing this requires ethical journalism that promotes fairness, accuracy, and diversity of voices. A more inclusive media landscape one that recognises migrants as human beings with agency rather than as problems would contribute to social cohesion and the realisation of South Africa's democratic ideals.

6. Conclusion

The study revealed that South African print media, specifically *Daily News* and *Daily Sun*, predominantly portray Black African migrants in a negative and stereotypical light, reinforcing xenophobic attitudes and social exclusion through discourses of criminality, illegality, and othering. While there are occasional positive portrayals, these are limited and conditional, reinforcing existing power hierarchies around national identity and belonging. This research highlights the critical role of media in shaping public perceptions and sustaining exclusionary ideologies in post-apartheid South Africa. The study's findings call for more ethical journalism and inclusive media representations to foster social cohesion and mutual understanding. Ultimately, this study benefits society by illuminating the media's impact on migrant representation and offers a way forward for more balanced and responsible reporting that promotes inclusivity and counters Afrophobic narratives.

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