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## Critical analysis of the main discourses of the Spanish press about the rescue of the ship

### *Aquarius*

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**Abstract**

This article presents an analysis of the main discourses that appear in a sample of Spanish newspapers before and after the arrival of the *Aquarius* at the port of Valencia in June 2018, in order to observe if there is a solidarity discourse or one that rejects the arrival of the rescued immigrants in Spain. The corpus consists of all the news published from June 10 to July 10, 2018 in the electronic version of the Spanish newspapers *ABC*, *El Mundo*, *El País* and *La Vanguardia*. The methodology is mainly qualitative-descriptive. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) was chosen to observe the main linguistic characteristics of the collected news items and the topics that appear in the articles. The analysis shows that the testimonies of politicians and members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) predominate, but there are few testimonies of immigrants. The solidarity and acceptance of Spain are strengthened, as well as the defense of human rights. This contrasts with the discourses that the press presents after the arrival of the ship in Valencia. A discourse related to the health of immigrants and their need for help and resources predominates, a fact that contributes to the alarm of the majority group.

**Keywords**

**Critical discourse analysis, immigrants, press, discourse, ship *Aquarius*.**

### 1. Introduction

The discourse of the media has a predominant role in society due to its influence on the mental models of people because it transmits social representations. There are many topics that the audience only knows about thanks to the social construction that the media transmit. In fact, the media in general and the press in particular have an effect on the creation of public opinion because they give credibility to what they broadcast. This is significant if the news items that are published have to do with immigration because, depending on the way the press represents immigrants, the audience will perceive them one way or another.

Generally, the media discourse is full of stereotypes and clichés that simplify reality and make the message convincing (Khalid, Baig & Muhammad, 2016). Consequently, analyzing such discourse is important to deconstruct the linguistic and visual characteristics used to represent social realities, including immigration. The discourse of the media in general and that of the press in particular are in the hands of white elites, who have the power to narrate reality and transmit it in a certain way (Bednarek & Caple, 2017).

The different linguistic and visual choices that journalists choose to create a news item are related to the context; there is a direct relationship between the meaning conveyed by the text and the social situation that frames it. In this sense, political elections establish power relations and reproduce ideologies (Fairclough, 2002), in this case between the Spanish society and immigrants. In this sense, ideology contributes to the internal reproduction of power and legitimation. In fact, the discourse of the press tends to reproduce the 'we-they' dichotomy to establish clear differences between the majority population and the immigrants.

Thus, the representation of immigrants in the press is crucial in forming of public opinion about their arrival in Spain, a country generally considered the gateway to Europe. The initiative of the Spanish government to offer Valencia as a port for *Aquarius*, *Orione* and *Dattilo* in June 2018 and the discourses about the arrival of these vessels enhances a very explicit positive image of Spanish society, as we will see in the analysis of the examples presented in this article.

The research question we ask ourselves is the following: what are the predominant discourses in the press regarding the Spanish government's decision to welcome immigrants on the *Aquarius* to Spain? Thus, this article tries to analyze the different discourses that arise about the rescue of *Aquarius* in order to observe whether we are facing a solidarity discourse or, on the contrary, a discourse that rejects the arrival in Spain of the rescued immigrants.

## **2. State of the art**

The arrival of immigrants in Spain began to be significant in 1997 (Arango, 2002; Rodríguez Breijo, 2010) due to economic problems and the difficult living conditions that immigrants suffer in their countries of origin. Since then, there have been many national and international studies that have focused on analyzing the discourse representing immigrants in the press, following the principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Bañón & Romero, 2013; KhosraviNik, 2010, 2014; Martínez Lirola, 2016, 2017a, 2017b; Moore, Gross & Threadgold, 2012; van Dijk, 2005, 2008; Wodak & Reisigl, 2001, among others).

These studies indicate that the general tendency of the press is to represent immigrants in a negative way, linking immigration with poverty, violence or illegality (Bañón, 2008; Casero, 2007). This fact does not support integration with the host society. Research on the visual and linguistic representation of immigrants in the Spanish press shows that immigrants are represented differently from the majority group of the population regarding origin, language, culture and appearance (Bañón & Fornielles, 2008; Martínez Lirola, 2014; van Dijk, 2005).

The tendency of the press is to problematize immigrants and to represent them as non-citizens (Anderson, 2013) and therefore different from the host society. This empowers the language used by the media, in Wodak's words (2011, p. 52): "The constant unity of language and other social matters ensures that language is entwined in social power in a number of ways: language indexes power and expresses power; language is involved where there is contention over and a challenge to power."

Representing immigrants as a people-problem, generally after the moment of arrival, when they require help from the majority group, emphasizes the negative representation. Furthermore, there are no references to the reasons why immigrants migrate or to the situation in their countries of origin. They are presented as a burden and a threat to the host society; their representation is usually full of prejudices (Sepúlveda, Gilberto, Rodrigo & Medina, 2008) and in many cases they are portrayed as asking for compassion and solidarity due to their vulnerable situation (Igartua, Moral-Toranzo & Fernández, 2011; Seoane Pérez, 2017).

In other cases, it has been shown that considering the situation of immigrants as a humanitarian emergency contributes to the media discourse "not stigmatizing regarding

migrants” (“no estigmatizante respecto de las personas migrantes”<sup>1</sup>) (Solves Almela & Arcos Urrutia, 2020, p. 22). There are also studies that delve into how the use of certain linguistic strategies contributes to depersonalization (Cruz Moya, 2020).

There are other studies related to immigrants and refugees published by organizations that focus on pointing out that the media reflect and contribute to creating opinion and attitudes in the audience by presenting data from different parts of Europe (CCME & WACC Europe, 2017). Other studies clarify concepts such as refugee, immigrant, mixed flows or asylum seeker and present their social situation (UNHCR, 2014, 2016). Some researchers focus on claiming the need to work on sound policies and action protocols in the face of humanitarian emergencies that affect immigrants (Faure, Gavás & Knoll, 2015).

Discourse is considered by CDA as a social practice, and it is analyzed framed in the social situation in which it occurs. Its eclectic and interdisciplinary orientation contributes to delving into social issues, in this case immigration, and to deconstructing the ideology and power that the discourse reproduces (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

CDA points out how discourse can legitimize and manipulate the groups that are empowered by society and those that are excluded (van Dijk, 2009, 2018; Zapata Barrero & van Dijk, 2007; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). In this sense, van Dijk (1997) delves into the binomial ‘we-they,’ where it is observed that there are differences between the majority group (we) and the minority groups (they, the immigrants in the case of this article). Therefore, CDA contributes to revealing how discourse reproduces racism by observing the patterns of discrimination that appear in the news items; it also highlights the importance of transforming the world into a place where justice and social transformation are promoted.

In this study we will use the CDA perspective to highlight the main discourses that appear in the Spanish press related to the rescue of the *Aquarius*. We will offer a critical approach in order to deepen into the ideology they transmit, and the relationship established between Spanish society and the rescued immigrants.

### 3. Objectives, data and methodology

The main objective of this article is to deconstruct the main types of discourses that are offered in a sample of the Spanish press about the rescue and reception of the 630 immigrants who arrived at the port of Valencia on June 17, 2018, after the decision from the Spanish government to offer Valencia as a safe harbor once the Italian government refused to host them. The main characteristics of these discourses will be analyzed using examples.

This article will focus on all the news items published in the newspapers *ABC*, *El País*, *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia* at two crucial moments related to the rescue of the *Aquarius*: 1) the moment when it was announced that Spain offered the port of Valencia for the arrival of immigrants and the discourses that arose before the arrival of these immigrants in Valencia, and 2) the moment when the *Aquarius* and the *Orione* and *Dattilo* arrive in Valencia with 630 people on board on June 17, 2018. The time frame prioritizes consequences over antecedents. That is, we have just seven days between the announcement of the reception (June 10, 2018) and the arrival of the ship (June 17, 2018), but we have more than twenty days after the arrival of the ship (until July 10, 2018).

*ABC* is considered a conservative newspaper and *El País* progressive; *El Mundo* considers itself liberal. *La Vanguardia* is a conservative Catalan newspaper. The news items were selected by reading the digital edition of these newspapers each day and selecting all that articles on the *Aquarius*, *Orione* and *Dattilo*. The selected time is framed from the announcement of the Spanish government to offer Valencia as a host port until one month later. There are 176 articles; distribution by newspapers can be seen in the following table:

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<sup>1</sup> The translation of all the examples has been done by the author.

**Table 1.** Distribution of the corpus.

Newspaper	Number of news items collected	Corpus percentage
<i>ABC</i>	55	31.25%
<i>El Mundo</i>	29	16.47%
<i>El País</i>	43	24.43%
<i>La Vanguardia</i>	49	27.84%
Total news items	176	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

Once the news items were collected, they were divided into those published before and after the arrival of the *Aquarius* in Spain. All the examples were analyzed paying special attention to the way in which the rescued people were referred to and to the discourses that politicians and NGOs offered. We consider that the total number of news items is sufficient to draw some conclusions, since it was observed that, before the arrival of the ship in Spain, discourses praising the solidarity of the Spanish society abound. However, after the arrival, the predominant discourses are related to the health of immigrants, to the positive image of Spain when welcoming the *Aquarius* and to the possible effects that the measure adopted by the Spanish government may have.

Next, we chose to use the perspective of CDA in order to deconstruct how a sample of the Spanish press transmitted the rescue and arrival in Spain of the *Aquarius*. CDA principles are useful to analyze the main discursive strategies used by journalists to represent immigrants. In this sense, the main linguistic characteristics were observed in order to deconstruct the power relations and ideology (both key issues in CDA) behind the journalists' selections. This will contribute to increasing the critical awareness of the audience and to becoming aware of the tools used by the press to build a power discourse (Armañanzas Sodupe & Díaz-Noci, 1996; Barrera, 2004).

Following the tradition of CDA, the methodology is mainly qualitative-descriptive, as some representative examples of the main discourses found in the corpus are presented in the following section. However, in Table 1 we have considered it appropriate to offer quantitative data related to the structure of the corpus. The fact that this research has a social purpose and is aimed at analyzing the discourse related to the arrival of immigrants on board the *Aquarius* justifies CDA as its general framework, due to its importance to deconstruct social issues. Furthermore, its relevance is justified by its usefulness for observing how a direct relationship is established between the discourse and the society in which it is framed.

#### **4. Analysis**

This section is divided into three sections. First, we present the main characteristics of the corpus. Next, we offer a sample of the main discourses in the Spanish press before the arrival of the *Aquarius*. Finally, an approach to the discourses that the press offers after the arrival of the *Aquarius* and the other two ships in Valencia is presented. The examples in each section have been selected because they show the main linguistic characteristics used by journalists to report on the rescue of the *Aquarius*.

##### **4.1. Linguistic approach to the analysis of the corpus**

The language that the press normally uses to refer to immigrants is usually negative, since it is very common to use collocations such as 'waves of immigrants,' 'massive arrivals' or 'illegal immigrants' (Martínez Lirola, 2017a). However, when analyzing the news items related to the rescue of the *Aquarius* and considering it as a humanitarian issue, it is observed that the three predominant words are 'immigrants' (629 cases), 'people' (355 examples) and 'refugees' (335 occasions). Other common ways of referring to immigrants are those presented in the following table, ordered from highest to lowest according to the number of times they appear.

**Table 2.** Lexicon used to refer to people rescued from *Aquarius* in 2018.

Word or collocation used	Number of examples
the rescued (los rescatados)	164
migrants (migrantes)	141
the castaways (los náufragos)	27
the welcomed ones (los acogidos)	14
the rescued migrants (los migrantes rescatados)	14
the rescued people (personas rescatadas)	9
the displaced (los desplazados)	5
the 630 immigrants rescued (los 630 inmigrantes rescatados)	2
the ship passengers (los pasajeros del barco)	2

Source: Own elaboration.

Once immigrants arrive in Valencia, there is a reference to the ‘call effect’ (ABC, 06-18-2018) that may arise after the humanitarian decision in Spain. The use of the expression ‘without papers’ highlights the illegal situation of immigrants. In the example that follows we also find the adjectives ‘irregular’ and ‘illegal,’ frequent descriptions in the press to refer to immigrants (Martínez Lirola, 2016) and that clearly mark the difference between them and the host population:

Cuando una persona pone su pie en territorio español a falta de permiso administrativo para ello estrena su estatus de sin papeles. Es un irregular o un ilegal que se arriesga a una detención y a un expediente de devolución a su país de origen (When a person sets foot in Spanish territory in the absence of administrative permission to do so, he/she releases his/her status as without papers. It is an irregular or illegal person that risks arrest and a return file to the country of origin) (*El Mundo*, 06-18-2018).

One of the constant features in the news related to immigrants has to do with the use of figures. In the following example we can see that, in addition to the repeated number of the 630 that arrived, the number of people arriving on each ship is specified:

El barco *Aquarius* de la ONG SOS Mediterráneo y de Médicos Sin Fronteras (MSF) lleva a 106 inmigrantes, de ellos 51 mujeres, 45 hombres y 10 niños, mientras que el resto lo harán repartidos en la nave *Orione* de la Marina italiana y en la *Dattilo* de los guardacostas, en total 630 inmigrantes según un nuevo recuento (The *Aquarius* ship of the NGO SOS Mediterráneo and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) carries 106 immigrants, of them 51 women, 45 men and 10 children, while the rest will be distributed in the *Orione* ship of the Italian Navy and in the Coast Guard *Dattilo*, a total of 630 immigrants according to a new count) (*La Vanguardia*, 06-12-2018).

Another characteristic is to present immigrants as recipients of the action of the majority group, since they receive the action of being rescued, as can be seen in this example: “Los inmigrantes serán trasladados a España por la Armada italiana” (“Immigrants will be transferred to Spain by the Italian Navy”) (*El Mundo*, 06-13-2018). In examples such as this one, we observe that the binomial ‘we-they’ coexist, which marks clear differences between the immigrants and the Spanish population.

#### 4.2. Approach to the discourses before the arrival of the *Aquarius*

The examples in this section show some of the white elite discourses about the arrival of the *Aquarius*. The ‘we-they’ binomial is clearly shown in the selected Spanish news items. There is a division between the Spanish population, more specifically the politicians who make decisions, and the immigrants who arrive and are rescued. The references to the people of the majority group are clear, and the proper names and political positions are presented. In addition, their testimonies are offered in quotation marks on the news items, so that journalists lose their own voice to give the voice to well-known people in politics. The

examples that follow show that, before the arrival of the *Aquarius* in Spain, a discourse that links Spain with a caring and supportive State and with the defense of human rights predominates.

The decision of the Spanish government chaired by Pedro Sánchez to welcome the 630 people on board the ship *Aquarius* and the *Orione* and *Dattilo*, after the refusal of Italy, carries with it a humanitarian discourse that favors the reception of immigrants, as we can see in the following testimony of Pedro Sánchez: “Es nuestra obligación ayudar a evitar una catástrofe humanitaria y ofrecer un puerto seguro a estas personas” (“It is our obligation to help prevent a humanitarian catastrophe and to offer a safe harbor to these people”) (*El País*, 06-11-2018).

The following statement by the Defense Minister, Margarita Robles, also links the rescue of the ships with the defense of human rights, since she makes an express declaration of the defense of life: “El derecho internacional exige la protección de la vida humana y ese derecho se plasma en otros textos internacionales, como la Carta de Naciones Unidas” (“International law requires the protection of human life and this right is embodied in other international texts, such as the United Nations Charter”) (*El Mundo*, 06-12-2018).

Once it was announced that Valencia would be the host port, the testimonies of people with political positions in which the solidarity of Spain in general and of Valencia in particular are praised, it was reiterated that it is a humanitarian matter to welcome the people who have been rescued, as the president of the Valencian Generalitat, Ximo Puig, points out: “La operación de país” para recibir en Valencia a los inmigrantes a bordo del *Aquarius* es “una cuestión de humanidad” y ha destacado “la riqueza espiritual extraordinaria” que representa para la Comunitat participar en una acción solidaria como esta” (“The country operation” to receive immigrants in Valencia aboard the *Aquarius* is “a matter of humanity” and has highlighted “the extraordinary spiritual wealth” that participating in a solidarity action like this represents for the Community”) (*La Vanguardia*, 06-12-2018).

The following testimony of Manuela Carmena, Mayor of Madrid, is a clear example of the welcoming discourse that predominates in the Spanish political elite concerning the rescue of the *Aquarius*. Affirming that Spain has the capacity to host contributes to the ‘we-they’ discourse, since it is ‘we,’ the host society, that helps, welcomes, shares its resources, while ‘they,’ in this case refugees, are the ones who receive help and are welcomed: “Les recibiremos con los brazos abiertos. España tiene el deber y la capacidad de acoger a refugiados” (“We will welcome you with open arms. Spain has the duty and the capacity to receive refugees”) (*La Vanguardia*, 06-11-2018).

In the two examples that follow we observe how two people with political positions, from the majority group and from white elites, insist on the need to respect international legislation that affects immigrants (‘they’). We are therefore faced with a discourse that emphasizes the need to comply with the law. The following example indicates that the President of the Government, Pedro Sánchez, has given instructions for Spain to “cumpla con los compromisos internacionales en materia de crisis humanitarias” (“comply with international commitments regarding humanitarian crises”) (*La Vanguardia*, 06-11-2018).

The Minister of Justice, Dolores Delgado, also refers to international responsibility, as she believes that the rescue of the *Aquarius* is not linked to generosity. In this case, an interpretation of the ‘we-they’ binomial leads us to refer to ‘we,’ the countries that must respect international agreements, and to ‘they,’ the immigrants affected by those agreements: “Tenemos asumido todos los estados que hemos suscrito tratados internacionales que no es una cuestión de buenismo o generosidad, sino de responsabilidad internacional” (“All the States have assumed that we have signed international treaties that are not a matter of goodwill or generosity, but of international responsibility”) (*El Mundo*, 06-12-2018).

The previous examples referring to international treaties contrast with some testimonies of people from NGOs that focus on the vulnerability of the rescued people and the defense of

human rights. These examples illustrate a discourse that calls for a humane treatment of immigrants.

David Beversluis, one of the doctors on board the ship belonging to the NGO Médicos sin Fronteras, refers to the vulnerability of some of the people on board, a fact that favors the promotion of a humanitarian discourse, which contributes to the population being willing to help: “La situación de la nave es actualmente estable; sin embargo, hay personas muy vulnerables que pueden empeorar durante la noche y no tenemos una capacidad médica avanzada para brindarles” (“The ship’s situation is currently stable; however, there are very vulnerable people who can worsen at night and we do not have the advanced medical capacity to provide for them”) (*ABC*, 06-11-2018).

The terrible situation of helplessness in which immigrants remain in the Mediterranean Sea means that their rescue is considered associated with the defense of human rights, something that Italy has neglected when closing its ports. The following testimony from the president of the SOS NGO, Daniel Méndez, clearly shows that welcoming people on board the *Aquarius* and the other ships is a matter of human rights. There is an indirect reference to the refusal of Italy and Malta to host the *Aquarius*, a fact that is considered an abandonment of people in a vulnerable situation and, therefore, human rights: “Pedimos al Gobierno de España que designe un puerto seguro y muestre así a Europa que no todos en el Mediterráneo están dispuestos a abandonar los Derechos Humanos” (“We ask the Government of Spain to designate a safe port and thus show to Europe that not everyone in the Mediterranean is willing to abandon human rights”) (*La Vanguardia*, 06-12-2018).

Before immigrants arrived in Valencia, we only found the words of two of the immigrants on board the *Aquarius*. This clearly shows that, as the rescue and reception are in the hands of the majority group, what predominates in the press are the opinions of people in political positions and some NGOs. The first example is the testimony of Kevin, a 20-year-old Nigerian immigrant, who left Libya twenty hours earlier. He refers to the words of Max Avis, the ship’s captain, *Aquarius*’s deputy rescue coordinator at the time of the rescue: “Caballeros, quédense sentados, mantengan la calma. Los vamos a rescatar a todos, uno por uno. Ayúdenos a que les ayudemos” (“Gentlemen, stay seated, stay calm. We are going to rescue everybody, one by one. Help us to help you”) (*El País*, 06-11-2018).

Next, Libya’s comparison with living in hell clearly shows the harshness of the situation that led so many people to risk their lives at sea. In addition, in this excerpt we know some of the human rights violations that are carried out in Libya, a fact that is not usually common since the press does not usually report on the situation of immigrants in their countries of origin or transit:

El cooperante de SOS Mediterráneo Alejandro Porro explicó que no fue hasta ayer cuando les comunicaron que el puerto de destino será Valencia, porque querían hacerlo de manera tranquila y correcta, utilizando mapas para mostrarles el camino. [...] “Lo apreciamos mucho, siempre que sea Europa y no vayamos de vuelta a Libia. Libia es como vivir en el infierno”, afirmó uno de los rescatados a la oenegé. Libia, repiten, es un país donde reciben tratos inhumanos, muchas veces obligados a trabajos forzosos o sometidos a torturas. (The SOS Mediterráneo cooperator Alejandro Porro explained that it was not until yesterday when they were informed that the destination port will be Valencia, because they wanted to do it calmly and correctly, using maps to show them the way. [...] “We appreciate it very much, as long as it is Europe and we do not go back to Libya. Libya is like living in hell,” said one of the rescued to the NGO. Libia, they repeat, is a country where they receive inhuman treatment, often forced into forced labor or subjected to torture) (*La Vanguardia*, 06-13-2018).

#### 4.3. Approach to the discourses after the arrival of the *Aquarius*

Once the 630 people on board the three boats arrived in Valencia on June 17, 2018, it is observed that one of the main discourses that arise refers to immigrants’ health. In the

following statement, it is pointed out that it was necessary to take care of burns after the arrival of immigrants, a fact that contributes to reassuring Spanish society:

En cuanto al estado de salud de los pasajeros, el subdirector general de Emergencia de la Generalitat Valenciana, Jorge Suárez, ha remarcado que, aunque no se han registrado incidencias graves, sí se ha detectado un porcentaje mayor de lo esperado de personas afectadas por tipologías menores como quemaduras (Regarding the state of health of the passengers, the deputy director general of emergency of the Generalitat Valenciana, Jorge Suárez, has remarked that, although no serious incidents have been registered, a higher percentage than expected of people affected by minor typologies such as burns) (*La Vanguardia*, 06-17-2018).

When reference is made to the fact that immigrants need health care, a discourse is generated about the need for help and resources that immigrants have. The use of figures serves to create the idea that there are many people who need State resources due to their vulnerable situation:

Los 630 inmigrantes del *Aquarius* completan todo el circuito sanitario y administrativo. El proceso se completó a las 22:34 de la noche del domingo. Un total de 200 personas requirieron atención sanitaria y 144 fueron desviadas a hospitales (The 630 immigrants from *Aquarius* completed the entire health and administrative process. The process was completed at 22:34 on Sunday night. A total of 200 people required health care and 144 were diverted to hospitals) (*ABC*, 06-18-2018).

The following statement helps to alert the Spanish population of possible infectious diseases that immigrants may have. In addition, it should be noted that 44 people are taken care of in hospital centers in Valencia, and the reference to 'massive arrival' generates a certain effect of invasion in the host society, since it is emphasized that many people have arrived and some have to use hospitals. The fact that there is the possibility that there are immigrants with infectious diseases generates a state of alarm in the national population, as this goes beyond the use of public resources; there is also the possibility of contagion, that is, the Spanish population could be threatened:

La llegada masiva de inmigrantes ha activado el protocolo de enfermedades infecciosas propias de sus países de origen en los hospitales valencianos. Aunque los servicios médicos confirmaron que la situación sanitaria de los acogidos era relativamente buena, 44 fueron remitidos a centros hospitalarios con problemas como contusiones en piernas y brazos (The massive arrival of immigrants has activated the protocol of diseases, infections typical of their countries of origin, in Valencian hospitals. Although the medical services confirmed that the health situation of the inmates was relatively good, 44 were taken to hospital centers with problems such as bruises on their legs and arms) (*El Mundo*, 06-18-2018).

The next example does not specify the health problems that immigrants are treated for, but it does indicate that they are receiving psychological help. Once again, the resources of the Spanish State are used in the reception and accompaniment process. The following testimony of the president of the Red Cross in Valencia, Rafael Gandía, refers to the type of medical care that immigrants received, pointing out that "[...] se basa en el tratamiento de síntomas variados y el acompañamiento psicológico mientras esperan, de modo que estas personas no se sientan solas" ("[...] it is based on the treatment of various symptoms and psychological support while they wait, so that these people do not feel alone") (*El Mundo*, 06-18-2018).

Although after the arrival of immigrants in Valencia what predominates is a discourse related to health, other discourses also appear. As mentioned in the previous section, Spain's position and the way in which it has reacted to a humanitarian crisis are praised and the need to respect the common regulations to be observed by the countries of the European Union is pointed out. The following example shows the opinion of the Vice President of the Government, Carmen Calvo:



Asimismo, ha señalado que el Gobierno ha afrontado la situación con una “respuesta democrática y estricta” a una crisis humanitaria pero que “obviamente” pone el tema en el debate europeo; “hay que cumplir nuestra normativa común” y dar “una respuesta razonable de las democracias europeas al mundo”, ha aseverado. Calvo ha añadido que cumplirán los “propios compromisos como Gobierno de España” y lo hará el “presidente en primera persona con la agenda que va a ir desarrollando” (She also noted that the Government has faced the situation with a “strict and democratic response” to a humanitarian crisis but that “obviously” puts the issue in the European debate; “we must comply with our common regulations” and give “a reasonable response from European democracies to the world,” she asserted. Calvo added that they will fulfill their “own commitments as the Government of Spain” and the “president himself with the agenda that he will develop” will do so.) (*La Vanguardia*, 06-18-2018).

The positive image of Spain is reinforced by contrasting it with the image that Italy presents when closing its ports to the arrival of immigrants. Referring to Italy’s lack of values as a threat to Europe contributes to offering a negative image of this country:

Porque el Gobierno de Italia, desde que se ha estrenado Salvini (aunque el primer ministro sea un tal Conte que dicen que está enfadado), está convirtiéndose en la mayor amenaza a los valores que ha representado Europa desde el fin de la Segunda Guerra Mundial. (Because the Government of Italy, since Salvini has been released (although the Prime Minister is a certain Conte who they say is angry), has become the greatest threat to the values that Europe has represented since the end of World War II) (*El País*, 06-22-2018).

The ‘we-they’ binomial (Spain-Italy) is reinforced by racist and xenophobic statements made by the Italian Interior Minister, Matteo Salvini. As you can see, he is glad that the immigrants have come to Spain and not to his country:

Hoy mismo, tras la llegada del *Aquarius* a Valencia, ha celebrado en su cuenta de Twitter que su país ya no es “el felpudo” de Europa. Salvini, el hecho de que por primera vez una nave de rescate que parte de Libia con destino a Italia ataque en otro país es un “signo de que algo está cambiando”. (Just today, after the *Aquarius* arrived in Valencia, he celebrated on his Twitter account that his country is no longer “the doormat” of Europe. Salvini, the fact that for the first time a rescue ship leaving Libya for Italy docks in another country is a “sign that something is changing”) (*El Mundo*, 06-18-2018).

Another issue that appears in the press, and that contributes to reinforcing the Spanish population-immigrants binomial, is to refer to the call effect that can cause people on board the *Aquarius* and the other two ships to be welcomed; their arrival may imply that many other people will try to reach our country due to the good treatment received:

Es cierto que esos 630 inmigrantes están a salvo, pero el efecto llamada que va a producirse es evidente. Como lo es también que otras rutas migratorias se están reactivando gracias a este “buenismo” que está calculando mal las consecuencias de una política ajena al corpus jurídico colectivo que se está imponiendo en Europa (It is true that those 630 immigrants are safe, but the effect that will take place is evident. As it is, also other migratory routes are reactivating thanks to this “goodness”, which is miscalculating the consequences of a policy outside the collective legal corpus that is being imposed in Europe) (*ABC*, 06-18-2018).

We must emphasize that the arrival of the *Aquarius* represents a turning point in relation to the reality of immigrants and migration policies that must lead to a change in some perspectives and to the design of effective migration policies. However, references to the number of people arriving, the medical care immigrants need, and the call effect can contribute to generating a racist discourse and of rejection of immigrants. This justifies the

following statement by David Noguera, the president of Médicos sin Fronteras, who fears that signs of xenophobia may arise: “Me preocupa que los discursos xenófobos se consoliden en Europa y eso cause más muerte y sufrimiento” (“I am concerned that xenophobic discourses will be consolidated in Europe and that this will cause more death and suffering”) (*ABC*, 06-17-2018).

Thanks to the following testimony from a member of the Red Cross, we know how much immigrants value receiving humane treatment and signs of affection. This has to lead us to reflect on how much we have in common with people, regardless of our background or culture. Respectful, careful and humanitarian treatment is equally well received anywhere in the world:

El responsable de Emergencias en la Comunidad Valenciana de Cruz Roja, Javier Gandía, dijo que lo que más notan de los inmigrantes son muestras de cariño que les agradecen “que se les dé un trato humano” y que están muy interesados en poder hablar con sus familias. “Muchos tienen móvil y por eso hemos puesto cargadores” (The person in charge of Emergencias in the Valencian Community of the Red Cross, Javier Gandía, said that what they most notice about immigrants are signs of affection that thank them “that they are treated humanely” and that they are very interested in being able to speak with their families. “Many have a mobile phone and that is why we have put chargers”) (*ABC*, 06-18-2018).

The following example is the human testimony of one of the rescued girls. Her name is not mentioned, only her age and her place of origin; however, the name of the volunteer is given, to which the girl comments on the importance of the hug received:

Una niña de 12 años, procedente de Guinea y que navegaba a bordo de la flota del *Aquarius*, que este domingo ha llegado al Puerto de Valencia tras ocho días de travesía por aguas del Mediterráneo, le ha dicho a uno de los voluntarios de la Cruz Roja que han trabajado en el operativo ‘Esperanza’: “Hace mucho tiempo que nadie me daba un abrazo como este”. Así lo ha contado a los medios de comunicación Fernando Justa, un voluntario que, visiblemente emocionado, ha relatado algunas de las vivencias de la jornada de este domingo durante el desembarque de los 630 inmigrantes que han llegado a la capital valenciana en la flota del *Aquarius* (A 12-year-old girl, from Guinea and who was sailing aboard the *Aquarius* fleet, who arrived at the Port of Valencia this Sunday after eight days of crossing the waters of the Mediterranean, told one of the volunteers of the Red Cross that has worked in the ‘Esperanza’ operation: “It has been a long time since anyone gave me a hug like this.” This was told to the media by Fernando Justa, a volunteer who, visibly moved, has related some of the experiences of the day on Sunday during the disembarkation of the 630 immigrants who have arrived in the Valencian capital in the *Aquarius* fleet) (*El Mundo*, 06-18-2018).

The voices of people with political responsibilities and of NGOs in the news items contrast with the almost non-existence of testimonies from immigrants. This contributes to enhancing the ‘we-they’ binomial and to placing immigrants in a passive situation, while the people of the majority group are in an active situation, since they are the decision makers and those who offer help. The following example shows how an immigrant makes clear that he needs care from the majority group, a fact that helps to point out the difference between ‘we-they.’ The majority group is an agent, and the group of immigrants receives the action: “‘Estoy contento, nos van a cuidar. Nuestra vida no es fácil’, decía Ibrahim cuando el barco aún estaba acercándose al puerto” (“‘I am happy, they will take care of us. Our life is not easy,’ said Ibrahim when the ship was still approaching the port”) (*El País*, 06-17-2018).

Despite the fact that the testimonies of immigrants are scarce compared to those of politicians and NGOs, they appear more often than they did before the arrival of the *Aquarius* in Spain. Sometimes we know immigrants’ opinions thanks to the testimony of someone from

the majority group. Thus, in the example that follows, which refers to immigrants who have been welcomed in Vigo, Ana Pardo, territorial manager of Provivienda in Galicia, informs us that immigrants are grateful for feeling welcomed, so that a positive image of Spain is offered again:

“Se quieren quedar aquí donde se han sentido acogidos. Son gente joven y sienten que han llegado aquí y que tienen una oportunidad nueva en sus vidas”, relata Pardo. [...] “Nosotros que trabajamos con ellos, vemos que son muy colaboradores y agradecidos y que solo buscan una oportunidad de futuro”, explica “They want to stay here where they have felt welcomed. They are young people, and they feel that they have arrived here and that they have a new opportunity in their lives,” says Pardo. [...] “We who work with them, we see that they are very collaborative and grateful and that they are only looking for an opportunity for the future,” he explains) (*ABC*, 06-27-2018).

In other cases, journalists give immigrants a voice in the news items although there is often little information offered from the person speaking. In the example that follows, only the name and age are referred to, but something is said about the terrible situation that this person suffered in his region: “España está muy bien, no se puede comparar a Darfur, de donde vengo”, confiesa Hassan, de 19 años. Darfur, una región que lleva años de violentos conflictos, ubicada entre Sudán y República Centroafricana, al sur y Chad y Libia, al oeste” (“Spain is very good, it cannot be compared to Darfur, where I come from,” Hassan, 19, confesses. Darfur, a region that has had years of violent conflict, located between Sudan and the Central African Republic in the south and Chad and Libya in the west”) (*ABC*, 06-18-2018).

The example presented below clearly shows that there are immigrants trying to stay in Spain, to integrate and to become citizens; the immigrant shows a clear interest in being part of the majority group. Again, we only know the name and the place of origin. The reasons that have led to Mohamed leaving his country are not explored in depth:

“Quiero aprender, convertirme en médico y quedarme en España”. [...] Mohamed Ommda huyó de Sudán porque no tenía futuro. Confiesa que está muy feliz de haber llegado a España donde no duda en quedarse y empezar una nueva vida (“I want to learn, become a doctor and stay in Spain.” [...] Mohamed Ommda fled Sudan because he had no future. He confesses that he is very happy to have arrived in Spain where he does not hesitate to stay and start a new life) (*ABC*, 06-18-2018).

Finally, the following example shows the surprise of an immigrant at the fact that there are people who do not really see that immigrants flee their countries due to the harsh living conditions: “[...] Nos cuesta entender que se vea con malos ojos a las personas que huyen de su país. Somos seres humanos y no entiendo que nos vean como gente que viene a saquear”, dijo. Rahat de Sri Lanka. (“[...] It is difficult for us to understand that they look down on people fleeing their country. We are human beings and I do not understand that they see us as people who come to loot,” said. Rahat from Sri Lanka) (*El Mundo*, 06-20-2018).

## 5. Discussion

Taking discourse as a social practice leads us to establish a direct relationship between the types of discourses that emerge before and after the arrival of the *Aquarius* in Spain and the social situation for this solidarity decision. Considering the rescue of these 630 people as a humanitarian issue determines the emergence of a first discourse related to reception and solidarity. However, once immigrants arrive and are welcomed, there appears a discourse that alerts the Spanish population about the health status of some newcomers and the possibility that they may have some infectious diseases.

In the news items analyzed, a positive image of Spain is offered, together with acceptance and solidarity in a situation considered to be a humanitarian crisis. This positive image is

further reinforced by contrasting it with the Italian government's refusal to open its ports to accommodate the rescued people. We are therefore faced with a clear contrast that enhances positive self-representation and Italy's negative representation. In promoting solidarity, the problematization of the arrival of immigrants is left aside, which is what usually prevails in the press.

The linguistic description of the testimonies of politicians is related to an ideology that enhances the decisions made as correct and extols the 'we,' who welcome and help, compared to the 'they,' who are both Italy, which rejects people aboard the *Aquarius*, and the rescued immigrants. The discourse of the NGOs claims to offer a humanitarian treatment to immigrants and to watch over their health and respect for human rights. The few examples of migrant testimonies suggest that they are considered a voiceless social group: their testimonies are rarely offered in the news analyzed.

Deepening on the different discourses related to the rescue of the *Aquarius* that the press transmits and offering some examples contributes to deconstructing ideology. It shows that the majority group has power both to make the decision to host and to generate a discourse that generates public opinion on the need to show solidarity in the face of a humanitarian crisis. Also, the few testimonies of immigrants place them in the background despite the fact that the news items are about them. Giving little space to listen to their opinions and their life stories in the analyzed news shows that their discourse is not sufficiently visible.

In this sense, it would be necessary for the press to delve into the harsh conditions that immigrants experience in their countries of origin, since it is these that determine that they risk their lives. Giving more space to the testimonies of immigrants in the news is essential for the audience to know the social reality that rescued people live in, in which essential rights violations are common. Thus, a majority discourse could be promoted that exerts pressure so that respect for human dignity is a reality in all countries.

## 6. Conclusions

Choosing the perspective of CDA to delve into a discourse that reproduces a complex social situation, such as the rescue of 630 immigrants, allows us to highlight the way in which the language used by the press plays a fundamental role in the narration of the different moments linked to the said rescue. The positive representation of Spain contributes to generating a positive feeling that relates the people of the majority group with solidarity. Therefore, we see the way the language expresses the power that the majority group has to offer positive self-representation. However, no information is provided for the reasons migrants migrate, a fact that contributes to presenting immigrants in a general way, without precise information about their situation, so that their humanization is not favored.

Offering an analysis of the different discourses that we observe in the Spanish press related to the rescue and the arrival of the *Aquarius* allows us to observe that the 'we-they' binomial is present in the news items analyzed, since there are many testimonies of people from the majority group, the one with the power, and there are few cases in which testimonies of immigrants are offered. Furthermore, 'we' welcome, help and care, while 'they' are welcomed, they are helped, they are cared for. That is, the majority group is active and immigrants are passive. This study would have been more complete if a multimodal analysis had been done, also paying attention to the images, but the space limitations of the article have not allowed this.

Going deeper into the way the press describes the decision to host the *Aquarius* and its subsequent arrival in Spain, it is observed that there is a tendency to offer a humanitarian discourse that enhances solidarity. However, we believe that it is necessary for the press to go one step further and offer a discourse more committed to social justice, in order to openly promote the inclusion and empowerment of rescued people. This would contribute directly to the construction of a power discourse and a social ideology that is committed to

naturalizing aid between countries and people for humanitarian issues, such as the one presented in this article. Consequently, progress would be made in building public opinion based on solidarity, respect for diversity and the defense of rights for all human beings.

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