Making News and Influencing Decisions:

Three Threshold Cases Concerning Forced Return of Immigrants

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Abstract

Some irregular immigrants get to stay, most are asked to leave. Many in the latter category appeal and seek media coverage to further their case. While the vast majority of these stories are not reported, some cases do receive coverage and some even cause policy change and a reversal of the return decision. In this article we discuss under what circumstances media coverage has such an effect. We analyse three cases where a residence permit was granted after sustained media coverage. In exploring these cases we found the notion of strong frames to be valuable, particularly in how they link to widely-held cultural values. The reversals, however, were also brought about as a result of resourceful frame supporters and journalistic engagement. Taken together, the paper contributes to the more general discussion of the dynamics of frame production, effects and power.

KEYWORDS: framing, news sociology, immigration policy; strong frames; frame sponsors
On a plane from Oslo to Moscow, 24 January 2011, Norwegian police escort a young woman who has been denied asylum. Her story has been extensively covered in the news media; a TV reporter is even accompanying her on the plane. The following day, 50 other people are deported to Moscow having had their applications turned down. As opposed to the young Russian woman, they are not objects of any media attention and their destinies are unknown. The young woman, on the other hand, is allowed to return to Norway after an extraordinary change in the Immigration Act tailored to her situation.

The above case is atypical. In general, Western governments have increasingly turned to a politics of deportation (De Genova and Peutz, 2010). Each year, thousands of people are returned by force to their native countries with their dreams of a better life shattered. Most of them appear to the public only as a number in the immigration statistics. In 2011, 4744 people were deported from Norway. While 95 of them were mentioned in either the three main national newspapers and/or the two main television channels, most appeared once in a single medium, and many were only mentioned in a few sentences. Of those very few reappearing in the headlines, women and children were strongly overrepresented. The stories relating to the aforementioned Russian woman, Maria Amelie, made up 42 percent of the 2011 coverage of irregular immigrants faced with deportation (N=3173) (Beyer and Figenschou, submitted) [not the authors of the present manuscript].

In this article we explore the commonalities between this case and two others that resulted in a decision-reverse by the immigration authorities after huge media coverage. The aim is to illuminate under what circumstances immigrant’s stories traverse high news thresholds and obtain sustained media attention followed by a policy change.

Many studies have demonstrated that the coverage of immigration issues in the western media is marked by polarized conflicts and stereotypes of different ethnic groups: Immigrants are framed as intruders or criminals threatening the established culture and
societal order, or, conversely, they are portrayed as victims that have escaped hardship in their countries of origin only to suffer xenophobia in their new countries (e.g., Every and Augoustinos, 2008; Innes, 2010; Van Gorp, 2005; Vliegenthart and Roggeband, 2007). With a few exceptions (e.g., Horsti, 2013), however, media coverage causing change in immigration policy has not been studied. Furthermore, few have heeded the call for framing theory to reach back to the sociology of news production, audiences and source strategies to study why certain frames are made salient in the news (Vliegenthart and Van Zoonen, 2011). Addressing this research gap, we combine theories of what constitute strong frames with current knowledge on source relations, frame sponsorship and advocacy journalism (Hanitzsch, 2007).

The next section discusses the theoretical framework of the article. A section on methodology follows before we analyse the three cases in depth. The last part of the article concludes and points to limitations and avenues for further research.

**Theoretical Framework: News, Frames and Migration**

Media research has frequently called attention to how news stories are framed (e.g., Reese, 2001). Framing denotes the activity of highlighting ‘some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described’ (Entman, 1993: 52, emphasis in original). A frame analysis could thus concentrate on looking for the problem of definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation. Of particular interest for this article is the notion of strong frames. Frames are considered to be strong when they ‘strike opinion leaders and audiences as being more compelling than alternative arguments’ (Chong and Druckman, 2007: 116). It is assumed that the frame-setting potential of a message, i.e., its ability to influence people’s perceptions and attitudes, increases when it is repeated.
frequently, comes from a credible source and resonates with consensus values and prior belief (Chong and Druckman, 2007). The capacity to stimulate support for or opposition to a side in a conflict can hence be measured by *cultural resonance* and *magnitude*. Culturally-resonant frames use words and images highly salient within the culture: they are noticeable, understandable, and memorable and emotionally charged. Magnitude assesses the prominence and repetition of the framing words and images (Entman, 2003; Miller and Riechert, 2001; Snow and Benford, 1998). It is demonstrated that frames relying on affective cues – frames that activate feelings – are more effective than frames relying on cognitive cues (Marcus, 2000). Experimental studies have provided evidence of the ‘frame’s capacity to trigger and direct emotional reactions into support for the argued policy position’ (Aarøe, 2011: 221).

As mentioned, it has been argued that the framing literature should connect with strands of news sociology by, for instance, relating to news values and source strategies (Vliegenthart and Van Zoonen, 2011). The types of frames held to be strong (effective) tend to concur with generic news values. A trend of popularization has magnified aspects of the emotional and personal in the news. Accounts are visually striking and tend to have a clear-cut conventional moral, presenting such stereotypes as victims, heroes and villains (Johnson-Cartee, 2005) Information packaged in a culturally-resonant way (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987), playing with well-known emotional and moral cues, will stand a better chance of crossing the news threshold and influencing public opinion and central societal actors, given sufficient magnitude.

Appeals to news values are seen as the most common source strategy through the creation or presentation of events in ways that meet these values (Palmer, 2000). One such criterion could be human interest, which translates to the generic human-interest frame (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000; Sparks and Dahlgren, 1992). When public relations and
communication professionals are able to use particular frames that connect their clients’ readings of issues to wider cultural phenomena, they can extend their appeal beyond single stories (Carragee and Roefs, 2004; Ihlen and Nitz, 2008). This has also been labelled framing expertise (Dan and Ihlen, 2011). To take advantage of strong emotional cues and to play with deep-seated societal values is held to be particularly vital for those who wish to raise sympathy for the ‘distant suffering’ of people living far away (Moeller, 2002). They are easily defined as ‘the other’, with an ambitious or even menacing moral status. To get through with stories of high emotional appeal about people that the public usually do not identify with, particular worthy and unambiguously-innocent victims are preferred. Such ‘poster victims’ can be placed in a hierarchy of innocence – in descending order, infants, children, pregnant women and teenage girls, all other women, teenage boys and all other men (Moeller, 2002).

Established professional journalistic ideology calls for journalists to be guardians of civil rights, which, in turn, could drive journalistic engagement with issues such as the above, Journalistic ideology also calls for protection of the individual by exposing power abuse by governing elites (Ettema and Glasser, 1998; Keane, 1991). In this connection, advocacy journalism opens up for an interventionist journalistic role that promotes change to the advantage of the socially disadvantaged (Hanitzsch, 2007). Such professional ideals can benefit groups like, for example, irregular immigrants fighting for residence permits. The world is marked by huge economic differences, compassion fatigue, attention deficit (Moeller, 1999), and popular support for a stricter immigration policy (Ceobanu, 2010).

Thus, the question remains: what does it takes for stories about forced returns to traverse the news threshold, to engage journalists and take the form of a strong frame involving both high magnitude and cultural resonance?

**Methodology**
The so-called Amelie case mentioned in the introduction was what first caught our attention and triggered the presented research question. After a bout of background interviews with immigration bureaucrats, journalists working with migration issues and NGO representatives in the field, we identified two other cases that involved huge media attention and a reversed decision over residence permits. What have been called the Navrud case and the Nathan case figured prominently in the news in 2010 and 2012 respectively (see discussion below). While these cases had nowhere close to the media attention that Maria Amelie received, they still figured prominently in the news. Searches in an online subscription database for Norwegian newspapers (http://web.retriever-info.com/) yielded 39 hits for the Navrud case in 2010. In addition, the local newspaper that broke the case had 46 items on its website. The case reached the national level when it was picked up by TV2, the second-largest television station, which had 22 items concerning the case on its website in 2010. The Nathan case yielded 133 hits in the database in 2012, and the newspaper that broke this story had 88 items on its website this year. When we compare this to the study of news coverage of migration issues (Beyer and Figenschou, submitted), we see that the cases are highly unrepresentative. In combination with their outcomes, this is exactly what makes them interesting for the purpose of this article.

Two datasets where then collected to study the cases in depth: the first consisted of qualitative semi-structured interviews with 25 informants in the central Norwegian immigration bureaucracy; 11 journalists in regional and national news media; and 6 representatives of NGOs within the immigration field. All interviews lasted approximately one hour; they were taped and transcribed before they were submitted for approval by the interviewee. No major changes were requested. All transcripts have been anonymized. The authors have translated all quotes.

The second dataset consisted of qualitative analysis of the media coverage of the three
cases, focusing on the most prominent arguments and frame elements appearing in the news. For the Navrud case we analysed the 39 hits in the mentioned database in 2010 (using the keyword search ‘Navrud’) and supplemented them with the other 46 items mentioned above. For the Amalie case we studied stories in the main regional and national newspapers (VG, Dagbladet, Aftenposten, Dagens Næringsliv, Dagsavisen, Klassekampen, Vårt Land) in the period when the coverage of her case peaked from 13 January–25 January, amounting to 450 news items retrieved through the national media database. For the Nathan case, we read through all the 133 items in the database for 2012 (using the keywords ‘Nathan PLUS Eshete’).

Inspired by grounded-theory research (Glaser and Strauss, 1999) we then followed an inductive stepwise approach to gain a clearer understanding of the cases and the frames constructed by the media, and to develop ideas about which factors contributed to the outcomes. We return to the methodological challenges in the conclusion section.

Analysis

This section first presents short sketches of the cases. We then move on to describe what we argue is a common frame in the three cases. This is followed by an analysis of what we argue are two other important factors that help to explain the magnitude and resonance of these three cases, namely sponsor activity and journalistic engagement.

Case Backgrounds

The Navrud case: In May 2010 the newspaper Drammens Tidende ran a story about an au pair from the Philippines who had broken the Immigration Act by taking on work in a café. The woman had married and recently given birth but was now to be deported (Bråthen, 2010b). Five months later, after a short period of extensive media coverage, the woman, Laila Navrud, obtained a residence permit. A new law was introduced that stated that, as a rule, foreigners who have worked illegally for less than two years are allowed to stay if they have
children born in Norway.

The Amelie case: In 2002, at the age of 17, Maria Amelie fled Russia together with her family. When their asylum application, a subsequent appeal and a lawsuit failed, the family went into hiding to avoid deportation. In 2010, Maria published an autobiography, *Illegally Norwegian*, and participated in the NGO-campaign ‘No one is illegal’. This resulted in a news magazine naming her Norwegian of the Year in 2010 (Ny Tid, 2010b). Still, after a new appeal had been denied, Maria was arrested and deported in January 2011. This caused headlines in all major news outlets. Five days after the arrest, however, the legislation on skilled expatriate workers was changed. Now it would be possible to apply for a work permit even if you have broken the Immigration Act and been expelled from the country (Foss, 2011). In 2011 only three other people were affected by the new rule.

The Nathan case: In November 2011, *Bergensavisen* ran a story about a family that the authorities wanted to return to Ethiopia, despite the fact that their son, Nathan, was born in Norway in 2005 (Jetmundsen and Bjørndal, 2011). The father said he could not go back since he was politically active, a claim rejected by Norwegian authorities. The story spread to all the main Norwegian news media, with the boy Nathan in focus. In March 2013, a court decided that the well-being of Nathan had not been sufficiently considered. The authorities did not appeal, citing that the boy should be spared from continued and sustained media exposure (Mikkelsen, 2013).

The media coverage of all three cases was referred to as intense and impossible to ignore by both media practitioners and bureaucrats in the Norwegian immigration bureaucracy. The time schedule of the political leadership was altered and the focus was on handling the media pressure.

*A Strong Frame*

Our reading of the media coverage of the three cases led us to conclude that a man-
against-the-system frame was used, and that this was made particularly strong due to a number of factors related to the characteristics of the individuals in question and the ‘obvious’ unfairness involved.

Problem definition: All three cases involved innocent, non-threatening, well-integrated immigrants that are ‘just like us’ but are made to suffer at the hands of a blind and faceless bureaucratic power apparatus. In the Navrud case, a family with an infant baby would be broken up. The first news story emphasized how Laila Navrud had received a tax card after the family had contacted the local police and local tax authorities to check if she could take on work (Bråthen, 2010b). The second largest television station aired the story, using the line ‘misunderstood a passport stamp and is thrown out of the country’ (Randsborg, Stiegler and Fredrikstad, 2010).

In the Amelie case, her autobiography was explicitly compared to the diaries of Anne Frank, the young Jewish girl who went into hiding to avoid the Nazi death camps during Second World War (Stoltenberg, 2010). The news coverage also emphasized how she had managed to complete higher education ‘with good grades’, worked as tour manager for a Norwegian rock group, coordinated festival volunteers and finished a master’s degree (Stoltenberg, 2010: 25). A journalist in the largest Norwegian newspaper called it a dilemma: ‘She talks perfect Norwegian, has lived here, got her education. She is like us, so why can’t she stay?’ (Interview 10 May 2011).

In the Nathan case, the problem was defined as the threat to the well-being of an innocent child. Nathan has never set foot in Ethiopia. Throughout the coverage of the family’s case, the journalists mostly focused on his connection to Norway and the local community: ‘He speaks broad [local dialect], supports the [local team], and plays football with [minor local team]. Now he and his family will be thrown out’ (Jetmundsen and Bjørndal, 2011).
**Causality:** In all the three instances, it was indicated that either the authorities had done a poor job getting the facts of the cases right and/or the authorities showed a clear lack of humanity. The ‘crime’ of Laila Navrud was not understanding a stamp in her passport (Bråthen, 2010b), whereas Maria Amelie and Nathan were children when their parents had broken the Immigration Act.

**Moral evaluation:** The clear moral evaluation presented in the coverage of the three cases was that humans are more important than rules. Good and innocent people should not be made to suffer from rigid rules. Neither Maria Amelie nor Nathan should be made to suffer for how their parents had violated the Immigration Act: the rights of the children should trump the consequences of the parents’ violation of the act – Norway has signed and must respect the UN’s declaration of the Rights of the Child. As for Laila Navrud, a strong moral signifier was that she was the mother of a baby born in Norway and that she was living with the Norwegian father.

In the Navrud case, it was implied that the law is an instrument to help create a good society, and not to make life difficult for law-abiding citizens. As the journalist who broke the Navrud story said: ‘It was so evident that she had acted in good faith ... And they had also tried to get information about what the code [in the passport] meant, and they did not get any help (interview, 17 October 2012). This, then, should function as evidence and reduce ‘the guilt’ to being a simple misunderstanding, something that many of us can relate to. A bureaucratic ‘detail’ should not be allowed to ruin the life of the family involved. It is human to make mistakes, and it is often difficult to understand legal language. Again, we argue that the frame had a strong cultural resonance with moral values (Entman, 2003; Miller and Riechert, 2001; Snow and Benford, 1998).

**Treatment recommendation:** Not very surprisingly, the treatment recommended in all three cases was to revoke the decision and let the people in question stay. As shown, the
frame often entailed an appeal for decency and human values, and for bureaucrats to look beyond the rigidity of the rules to become more aware of the difficult circumstances in which people find themselves. In other words, either the Immigration Act should be altered or the authorities should show more flexibility in their implementation of the immigration policy. The authorities could show some leeway with regard to how a person changes from being an au pair to take up ordinary work, particularly when a small child is involved. Similarly, the authorities could let the well-being of a Norwegian-born boy override other considerations. Taken together, we argue that a particularly strong frame was constructed in all three cases.

**Sponsor Activity**

All three cases contained a frame sponsored or supported by resourceful individuals or organizations with a broad local or elitist base. A common element was that the frame was picked up and given heavy support by other parties. Importantly, the Maria Amelie and Nathan cases also met the agenda of organizations working with the broader issues of irregular immigration. In the case of Nathan, national organizations had been working with the issue of children growing up in asylum centres. When *Bergens Tidende* devoted its front page to the case, the title read ‘Nathan is the new face of the asylum children’ (*Bergens Tidende*, 2012). In other words, the Nathan case was a much sought-after illustration of a larger problem. Media-savvy sources recognize how a human-interest angle can help secure coverage. The director of The Norwegian Centre Against Racism said they had found it difficult to work with Ethiopian asylum seekers in general (interview, 25 May 2011) but with Nathan, they had a better case. The main frame element played upon was tied to the rights of children, and it was argued that children should not suffer because of their parents’ (possible) mistakes. The counter argument is that the situation is the responsibility of the parents who refuse to return and allowing Nathan’s family to stay would be unfair for those families who had been returned under similar circumstances.
In the case of Maria Amelie, national organizations were working with the issue of asylum seekers without identity papers. The NGO-campaign ‘No one is illegal’ was run by several organization, among them Amnesty. The Norwegian general secretary pointed out that such campaigns are often difficult to get momentum behind them.

People do not really get it. … It sounds logical that people who have been hiding from the authorities over a long period of time … just have to leave. They have nothing here to do. They have lived off us. … And then [the arrival of Maria Amelie] becomes an excellent opportunity. … She becomes the Poster Girl. … She is good, she speaks perfect Norwegian, she appeals to people, she has written a book, she has a story that people can relate to immediately (interview, 19 May 2011).

Again, this quote points to the importance of fitting the frame to a larger political context where different actors have different needs and can utilize the case and the frame in an extension beyond the individual case (Carragee and Roefs, 2004; Ihlen and Nitz, 2008).

Another important factor was strong local engagement among resourceful key individuals. The day after the first story about the Navrud case was printed, a host of local politicians from across the political spectrum called for something to be done. The fact that the support came from all parties along the political spectrum is important. *Drammens Tidende* also contacted the spokesperson on immigration issues from the Progress Party, which advocates a strict immigration policy. Even he criticized the decision: Laila Navrud should have received better information. Furthermore, some of the key politicians in the major political party in the government coalition have their home base in the region where Navrud lives. And, after the case made national news and the whole bench from Navrud’s home county declared its support, the Prime Minister’s office transported the family to a meeting at the Youth camp of the Labour Party where the Prime Minister in his speech declared that the rules would be changed.
The local engagement with Nathan was even stronger. A resourceful neighbour in the small community (2,560 inhabitants) formed a support group. The local woman, trained in law, took it upon herself to be a spokesperson, having learnt about the story from the newspaper. Her son was said to be the best friend of Nathan, but she did not know that the parents had been expelled:

I have written to the newspapers, arranged a torchlight procession in our community, Ytre Arna, written a letter to [the PM], to the city council of Bergen ... and to the county council. I have opened Facebook pages ... and arranged a huge rally for Wednesday this week. And although I have never been to a political meeting, I have held three appeals at annual meetings (Lundgaard, 2012).

Strong, cross-party support was found for this case, too, and the centre vs. periphery dimension that has been very important in Norwegian politics was also played up (see Arter, 1999). On 6 February 2012, a united city council in Bergen sent a letter to the government expressing support for Nathan and his family. National politicians were also engaged early on and the case could be tied to the larger political context surrounding the fate of children living in asylum centres.

While the Navrud and Nathan cases involved local sponsors, the Maria Amelie case involved primarily elite sponsors. Maria Amelie had working for her case a large and influential personal network close to key people in the Government. They arranged public protests, established Facebook groups and serviced the press. Her ethnic Norwegian boyfriend, a young journalist and activist, was central as he took up the role as a spokesperson (Ertesvåg, 2011). As another journalist, in the largest newspaper, said:

She had a really strong network around her. And ... I was not aware of this for a long time; who was behind her and helped to front her story. And the strength they did this with and the knowledge they had (interview 10 May 2011).
Intense public pressure was mounted on the government by editors, politicians, NGOs, public persons and celebrities: Maria Amelie should be allowed to stay in Norway. Within the coalition Government, the minority party (The Socialist Left Party) and the majority party (The Labour Party) were split in their views. The former supported Maria Amelie while the latter maintained that exceptions for single cases were unacceptable.

*Journalistic Engagement*

In all three cases, journalistic engagement was evident and could be related to both personal involvement and professional needs. The interviewed journalists pointed out that they were frequently contacted by immigrants wanting media attention for their cases (interviews, 28 August 2012) but, often these stories did not survive fact checks or appeared too complicated and ‘fuzzy’. The three cases focused on in this article evidently did not. The journalist who broke the Navrud case talked about his engagement this way: ‘Even if you are a journalist, you are also a human being. And I felt that [Laila Navrud] had been grossly mistreated by the Norwegian state’ (interview, 17 October 2012). He said ‘out of instinct’ he spent hours reading up on the case documents after he was tipped off about the case by an acquaintance of the family. He felt he could help the ‘little man’ stand up against the powerful, just as the professional journalistic norm requires (Ettema and Glasser, 1998; Keane, 1991). The cameraman covering the story for the national television station later says he cried when Navrud was allowed to stay: ‘Those were tears of joy. I felt that it was *Drammens Tidende* and TV2 that had contributed to this outcome. We went down to [a restaurant area] and uncorked a champagne bottle. It was the best working day in my life’ (Selmer-Anderssen, 2011). The editorial in the largest national newspaper read ‘Reason prevailed’ (VG, 2010).

Backed by very active sponsors feeding journalists with new information and new events to cover, editorial decisions were made to follow up the cases. In the Navrud case, the
journalist had invested both personally and professionally in the story with the amount of time he had used. The day after the initial story was printed (Bråthen, 2010b), he followed up with reactions from the local politicians and the district’s members of parliament (Bråthen, 2010a). Five months later, the paper had produced 39 stories about the case (http://dt.no/nyheter/alt-om-navrud-saken-1.5457390).

The Maria Amelie case was not ‘owned’ by one media outlet, although the news magazine Ny Tid took an early stance, as witnessed by editorials (Ny Tid, 2010a) and the magazine also named her Norwegian of the Year (Ny Tid, 2010b) as a way of keeping the story alive. The interviewed journalists pointed to how the dilemma of the case in itself made it good news (interview, 10 May 2011). Editorials in the main national newspapers stated that the decision to deport Maria Amelie was inhuman and irrational, a result of a rigid bureaucracy, and that it was ‘insane’ to deport a ‘dream-immigrant’ like her while criminals were allowed to stay (e.g., VG, 2011).

Journalists were also actively engaged in the Nathan case. The journalist in Bergensavisen who wrote the first piece on Nathan explicitly talked about campaign journalism: ‘We actively used journalism to get another result for this case that was to be the best for this family’ (interview, 28 August 2012). According to him, the Nathan case was clear cut:

The Nathan-case is really simple. It is about a boy from Bergen … whose mother and father could be accused of using this for all it is worth. But I would have done the same thing. … But he is from Bergen and that means that we should take care of him (interview, 28 August 2012).

Here, then, the journalists clearly identify with a local sentiment of compassion and patriotism. In addition, here too, the journalists devised strategies for how to keep the issue alive. The journalist in Bergens Tidende also identified a type of issue ownership:
We just started to write down a list of the things that were interesting concerning this case. What we had to look closer into, what we could turn around, what we could develop in this case so that we could hold on to it. Because then we had seen that we were starting to be cited in many media outlets in [the capitol], and all of a sudden [the second-largest national television station] was with [Nathan’s family]. … So then we wanted to continue to be in the lead on this (interview, 28 August 2012).

This illustrates how journalistic needs can work in concert to pick up a powerful frame, strengthen it and make sure coverage is continued. One of the journalists covering the Nathan case for Bergens Tidende agreed and also pointed to how this was a good story since it provided good photos and emotions. He explicitly explained why they focused on Nathan, as he was characterized as being particularly charming. The journalist who broke the story in Bergensavisen said: ‘When you have someone like Nathan, who is so charming, who looks right into the camera and smiles… You might even end up selling newspapers if you put him on the front page’ (interview, 28 August 2012).

Conclusion

We argue that the three cases analysed in this article share a particular frame that we call man against the system. Following Entman’s (1993) framing approach, the problem is human suffering caused by a rigid state apparatus that ignores humanitarian values. This frame has cultural resonance, drawing on fictional works such as Franz Kafka’s The Process and the biblical story of David vs. Goliath (Entman, 2003; Miller and Riechert, 2001; Snow and Benford, 1998). The frame shares some traits with the victim frame that has been found in studies of immigration coverage (e.g., Van Gorp, 2005). It fits well with the media’s self-understanding of being society’s watchdog (Gans, 1980). This frame is also compatible with traditional news criteria; it can involve polarization and drama; and it can present a clear-cut moral evaluation of right and wrong involving victims, heroes and villains. Nevertheless, in a
world where thousands of irregular immigrants in painful situations face deportation, the threshold for these types of stories is high: the alternative stories of the foreign intruder can easily become prevalent. Hence, we argue that other factors beyond human suffering are important. Based on our findings, we present three hypotheses for when a frame passes the threshold and influences decisions within the immigration field.

First, the frame has to be made particularly strong, something that is helped by having an idealized victim. The three cases that were studied involved well-integrated and non-threatening immigrants, each perceived as an ideal citizen, or ‘one of us.’ The main persons are all high on the hierarchy of innocence (Moeller, 2002): they concern a child, a young woman who arrived in the country as a teenager, and a mother with a baby. Their photos provide an immediate aesthetic and emotional appeal. Like Horsti (2013) we find a strong tendency to ‘de-ethnicize’ the immigrants in focus. All three are portrayed as already Norwegian in various ways: they speak Norwegian; they follow a Norwegian lifestyle; and they wear modern western-style clothing. This seems to be a crucial element in a strong frame within this field.

Second, a resourceful sponsor that belongs to the national majority is necessary. In the case of immigration, this means that applicants need a strong personal, local or central elitist network. A local community should rally around and the network should have media contacts or knowledge about how to gain media coverage (Dan and Ihlen, 2011; Palmer, 2000). The sponsors could also be an NGO or a politician, and the case could then serve their needs in a larger political context (Carragee and Roefs, 2004; Ihlen and Nitz, 2008). In the present analysis, it was shown how individuals were turned into figureheads illustrating a larger problem that actors sought to address. Both Maria Amelie and Nathan served to give a face to an otherwise-anonymous group of individuals that NGOs worked to help.

Third, there has to be strong journalistic engagement, preferably amounting to
campaign journalism. The story has to be kept alive through a sustained period of time and the introduction of new twists and turns. Often this type of coverage is legitimized as a form of journalism that lives up to the journalistic credo of *speaking truth to power* (Ettema and Glasser, 1998; Keane, 1991). Journalistic engagement most likely arises in cases involving idealized victims with high audience appeal, allowing the fusing of idealism with commercial considerations. Journalists with an issue of ownership to the case find it attractive to keep the lead when the story spreads to other media outlets.

Studies of the media coverage of immigration seldom relate their findings to the broader theoretical theories of news production and media influence. We add to the literature with a combined focus that addresses the dynamics of frame production, effects and power. Far from all stories about forced returns are covered, and far from all stories that are covered result in policy change. Above, we have pointed to some factors we believe are crucial for media coverage to create pressure on immigration authorities. In relation to the particular issue of forced returns of immigrants, it might be asked whether or not strong frames backed by strategic media campaigns are necessary to get a fair migration policy. The looming question, then, is where that leaves those without the necessary means to instigate such campaigns. We do see the contours of a pattern in these cases that are not necessarily to the advantage of those most in need.

We hasten to point out, however, that our analysis has only focused on one particular issue in one particular field in one particular country. The presented hypotheses should be tested in other settings and for other issues. Could it, for instance, be that the same factors influence decisions in health and social policies? Furthermore, there are several methodological challenges arising from a study like this. Through a design built on elite interviews and media coverage, we have substantiated the claim that the media played a key role in the outcome of the cases in focus. That said, real life does not allow for experiments,
and the isolation of the media from other factors with possible impact is not possible.

Furthermore, we did not research those cases that did not make it into print. Theoretically, these stories could also have strong frames and a local network behind them without getting covered. Still, we argue that some interesting hypotheses have been generated from this study that can be tested in other settings. Further research could also test our assumptions about what makes a strong frame, for instance, through quantitative or experimental methods designed to gain more insight into what values the public hold and what attributes create strong frames.

Note:

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