

Harvesting Prejudice: Media Framing of Migrant Grape Pickers in French News

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Abstract

France sells its wine as heritage, elegance, national pride. That's the story tourists hear. But the hands picking those grapes tell a different one. Thousands of migrant labourers – mostly from West Africa, North Africa, and Eastern Europe – work harvest seasons under conditions that regularly fall below basic standards. The 2025 Anavim trafficking case in Champagne pulled back the curtain: overcrowded housing, withheld pay, workers trapped by debt or documents. What do French news media actually say about these workers? This study looks at 30 articles published between 2023 and 2026 in Le Monde, Le Figaro, and France Info. Using qualitative content analysis, I tracked how journalists frame migrants, whether they mention race or nationality, and whose voices get quoted. Three frames dominate. Exploitation exposés – reports on bad housing, low wages, trafficking. Economic necessity – migrants as a labour supply, nothing more. And criminal othering – illegality, fraud, social burden. Nearly two-thirds of the articles contain zero direct quotes from migrant workers. Positive representations? Almost absent. So, here's the contradiction: French wine gets celebrated as cultural treasure, while the racialised labour that makes it possible stays invisible or victimised. That pattern isn't accidental. It echoes colonial hierarchies of visibility. A decolonial approach to journalism – one that actually includes migrant voices – would change not just reporting but how France sees who really feeds its wine industry.

Keywords: Media Framing, Migrant Labour, French Wine Industry, Racialisation, Decolonial Studies, Agricultural Workers, Content Analysis, France



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Introduction

Ask someone in Paris, Lyon, or Bordeaux what defines French culture. Wine will come up before long. Not just any wine – the idea of wine: heritage in a glass, centuries of craft, the mystery of *terroir*. Tourism campaigns sell it. Chefs celebrate it. French presidents pose with it.

Now ask who picks the grapes. Most people draw a blank.

That silence isn't accidental. Every harvest, from Champagne down to Provence, thousands of temporary workers flood into vineyards. They come from West Africa, North Africa, Eastern Europe. They sleep in overcrowded sheds. They work twelve-hour days under summer heat. Then they leave. And the wine industry carries on, its prestige intact, its labour force largely unseen.

Labour organisations have documented this gap for years. Reports describe exhausted workers on short-term contracts, uncertain pay, sometimes no contracts at all. Accommodation ranges from bad to dangerous. Conditions vary by region and employer, sure. But exploitation keeps reappearing – regularly enough that it no longer surprises anyone who pays attention.

Then came the Anavim case. Champagne, 2025. Investigators found dozens of migrant grape pickers housed in spaces never meant for people. No sanitation. No safety. Basic labour standards? Violated. The scandal made national news, then international. Suddenly journalists weren't just writing about wine. They were writing about trafficking, overcrowding, and the gap between France's polished image and its hidden harvest.

Why does media coverage matter here? Not because newspapers just report facts. They shape what we see as a problem. They decide whose voice counts – the employer's, the union's, the workers, or no one's. A migrant can

appear as a victim needing rescue, a labour shortage solution, or a legal headache. Each frame tells readers something different about who belongs and who doesn't.

We already know quite a bit about how French media cover migration in general. Refugees, border controls, security debates – those have been studied extensively. But agricultural workers? Almost nowhere. That's strange, because French agriculture, and wine in particular, depends entirely on seasonal migrants. Vineyard workers sit right at the intersection of national pride and precarious labour. Their invisibility in public discussion isn't a small oversight. It's a clue.

So here's what this study does. It looks at thirty news articles published between 2023 and 2026 – from *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, and *France Info*. Not just what the articles say about labour conditions, but how they frame migrants: what words they use, who gets quoted, whether nationality or race gets mentioned, whether workers ever speak for themselves.

The argument running through this paper is simple. French wine culture celebrates heritage while erasing the labour that produces it. That erasure isn't neutral. It follows patterns visible across postcolonial scholarship – hierarchies of visibility where certain bodies work and others get recognised. Bringing media studies together with migration research and decolonial theory, this paper shows how those hierarchies operate in everyday journalism. And why changing them would mean something real for how France sees itself.

Methodology

What This Approach Does

Not every research question needs numbers. This one need close reading.

The study uses qualitative content analysis.

That means looking beyond surface facts to find recurring frames, hidden assumptions, and the quiet choices journalists make about whose voice counts. Schreier (2012) puts it simply: this method lets you track patterns while staying attentive to tone, context, and what gets left unsaid. For a question about migration, labour, race, and French media, that flexibility matters.

What We Looked At

The focus is narrow but important: how French news media frame migrant grape pickers. The analysis covers four interconnected areas:

- Harvest reporting generally
- Labour conditions – good and bad
- Exploitation scandals, especially the 2025 Anavim trafficking case in Champagne

The research combines descriptive coding with thematic interpretation. The goal is straightforward: identify the dominant frames – the ones that keep showing up across different outlets and years.

Choosing the Articles

Thirty articles. Three outlets. Three years (January 2023 – March 2026).

The outlets:

- *Le Monde*
- *Le Figaro*
- *France Info*

Why these three? They represent different editorial positions (centre-left, centre-right, public service). They reach wide national audiences. And their digital archives make systematic searching possible.

Search and Filtering

I searched in French using five keyword combinations:

- "migrants" + "vendanges"
- "travailleurs saisonniers" + "vigne"
- "ramasseurs de raisins" + "étrangers"
- "Anavim"

- "Vendanges de la honte"

The initial search returned 187 items. Then came the filtering process. I removed:

- Duplicates and wire-service syndicated copies
- Opinion pieces and editorials (news coverage only)
- Articles shorter than 150 words
- Reports not directly about vineyard labour or migrant agricultural workers

After applying these criteria, 30 articles remained. Final distribution : *Le Monde* (11), *Le Figaro* (10), *France Info* (9).

The Coding Framework

I built the coding framework in two steps. First, deductively – drawing from existing migration framing research (Figenschou & Thorbjørnsrud, 2015; Reddy & Thiollet, 2025). Second, inductively – after a pilot reading of five extra articles that were not included in the final sample.

Each article was coded across six categories.

1. Primary Frame

- Exploitation exposé
- Economic necessity
- Criminal othering
- Humanising frame
- Invisible frame

2. Migrant Voice

- Direct quotations from migrant workers (present or absent)
- Paraphrased testimonies or personal narratives (present or absent)

3. Racial or Ethnic References

- Explicit mention of nationality, ethnicity, race, or geographic origin (yes or no)

4. Tone of Coverage

- Positive / Neutral / Negative

5. Source Attribution (who spoke in the article)

- Journalists

- Government officials
- Police authorities
- Labour unions
- Vineyard owners
- Migrant workers
- NGOs or activists

6. Labour Representation (what got emphasised)

- Working conditions
- Housing conditions
- Wages and contracts
- Productivity and economic contribution
- Criminality or illegality
- Checking Reliability

I coded all 30 articles myself. But one person's reading can be subjective. So, a postgraduate researcher in media studies independently coded six randomly selected articles – exactly 20% of the sample. She did not know the study's hypotheses beforehand.

We compared our coding results. Cohen's kappa scores were calculated for each category:

- Primary frame: $\kappa = 0.83$
- Binary variables (migrant voice, racial references): between $\kappa = 0.88$ and 0.91

Landis and Koch (1977) classify anything above 0.81 as "strong agreement." Any disagreements we discussed face-to-face and resolved collaboratively.

How the Analysis Worked (Two Stages)

Stage one: Descriptive statistics. I calculated the frequency of each frame, tonal pattern, racial reference, and source type. The results are presented as tables with frequencies and percentage distributions.

Stage two: Thematic analysis. This went beyond counting. I examined selected excerpts to identify recurring rhetorical strategies and narrative structures. Four guiding questions shaped this stage:

- When do migrant workers become visible?
When do they disappear from the story?

- Are they portrayed as victims, labour resources, or threats to social order?
- How does French national identity connect – or fail to connect – to vineyard labour?
- What colonial or racial assumptions hide beneath the surface language?

The second stage was informed by postcolonial and decolonial theoretical perspectives. These frameworks emphasise the racialisation of labour and the systematic marginalisation of migrant contributions within national cultural discourse.

What This Study Does Not Do (Limitations)

Let me be clear about the boundaries.

Thirty articles are not "all French media." Far from it. Regional newspapers were excluded. Specialist wine or agricultural publications were not included. Television news broadcasts, radio programmes, podcasts, and social media content are all outside the scope.

The timing also matters. The selected period (2023–2026) coincides with the Anavim scandal and heightened public attention on labour exploitation. Coverage in quieter years – without a major trafficking case – might look different. Different timeframe, potentially different framing patterns.

Additionally, this study analyses text only. No photographs, no headlines examined as visual objects, no video reports. Visual framing matters for audience perception, but that is a different research project.

So the findings apply to these 30 articles from these three outlets during this specific period. Generalising further would be unwise. Why This Approach Still Tells Us Something Real. Despite those limits, qualitative content analysis does what surveys and large-scale number crunching cannot. It captures *how* stories get told – the language choices, the framing decisions, the patterns about who counts as a

credible source. You cannot get that from a spreadsheet of frequencies alone. You have to read closely, compare cases systematically, and sit with contradictions when they appear.

Findings

This section presents the results of the qualitative content analysis of 30 French news articles published between January 2023 and March 2026. The findings are organised into three parts: a quantitative overview, a qualitative analysis of the dominant frames, and a comparison across the three news outlets.

Part 1: Quantitative Overview

**Table 1 Distribution of
Primary Frames (n = 30)**

Primary Frame	Number of Articles	Percentage
Exploitation exposé	14	46.7%
Economic necessity	8	26.7%
Criminal othering	5	16.7%
Humanising	1	3.3%
Invisible	2	6.7%

The exploitation exposé frame dominated. Nearly half of all articles fell into this category. These reports focused on abusive housing, trafficking, poor wages, and legal investigations.

The economic necessity frame came second. It presented migrant workers primarily as essential labour for the wine industry – necessary but not necessarily visible as human beings.

The criminal othering frame appeared less often but carried weight. It associated migrant workers with illegality, fraud, or social disorder.

Humanising coverage? Almost non-existent. Just one article. And a small number of reports mentioned migrant workers only indirectly, giving them no real narrative role.

Table 2 Tone by Frame

Frame	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Exploitation exposé (n=14)	0	10 (71.4%)	4 (28.6%)
Economic necessity (n=8)	0	7 (87.5%)	1 (12.5%)
Criminal othering (n=5)	0	0	5 (100%)
Humanising (n=1)	1 (100%)	0	0
Invisible (n=2)	0	2 (100%)	0

Most articles struck a neutral tone. That was especially true for exploitation exposés and economic necessity pieces. But neutrality came with a catch. It often meant describing poor conditions without open condemnation. A kind of detached sympathy.

The criminal othering frame was entirely negative. No exceptions.

Positive representation appeared exactly once – in that single humanising article.

**Table 3 Migrant Voice and
Racial/Ethnic Mention**

Variable	Yes	No
Direct quote or substantive paraphrase from a migrant worker	4 (13.3%)	26 (86.7%)
Explicit mention of nationality, origin, or race	22 (73.3%)	8 (26.7%)

Four articles. That's it. Only four included direct quotations or detailed testimonies from migrant grape pickers. In most cases, workers were discussed through other people's perspectives – employers, lawyers, police officials, unions, or journalists themselves.

Now look at the second row. Nationality and ethnic origin? Highly visible. Many articles identified workers as "Malian," "Senegalese," "Moroccan," or broadly "West African."

So here's the contradiction. Migrant workers are racially identified but largely denied individual voice and agency. Seen, but not heard.

Part 2: Qualitative Analysis of Dominant Frames

Exploitation Exposé Frame

This frame dominated coverage, especially during and after the Anavim trafficking case. Articles described overcrowded housing, inadequate sanitation, heat exposure, and exploitative labour conditions. Many reports opened with shocking details – clearly meant to emphasise the severity of abuse.

Take one *Le Monde* report. It described workers sleeping on concrete floors without access to running water during the grape harvest. Sympathetic, yes. But migrants rarely appeared as active participants with their own perspectives. They were usually represented collectively, not individually. Their experiences came filtered through legal or institutional voices.

Another pattern emerged within this frame: a heavy focus on court proceedings and official investigations. Prison sentences. Compensation amounts. Trafficking charges. Important details, but they shifted attention away from workers' lived experiences and toward legal procedures.

Economic Necessity Frame

This frame portrayed migrant labour as indispensable to the French wine industry. It appeared most often in business-oriented reporting and articles about labour shortages during harvest season.

The language was largely technical and economic. Labour supply. Seasonal contracts. Harvest continuity. Not human experiences.

One article noted that the Champagne harvest would "collapse" without foreign seasonal workers. Even when difficult living conditions got mentioned, worker welfare remained secondary. The priority was maintaining production and avoiding harvest disruption.

Criminal Othering Frame

This frame associated migrant workers with illegality, undocumented migration, or fraud. It appeared mainly in *Le Figaro* and relied heavily on security-oriented language.

Terms like "illegal infiltration," "identity fraud," and "abuse of the system" showed up regularly. Several reports presented undocumented workers as a threat to social order or labour regulation. Some articles also implied migrant complicity in exploitative systems – focusing on visa overstays or undocumented status rather than employer responsibility.

The effect? Structural exploitation faded into the background. Migrant criminalisation moved to the front.

Humanising Frame

Only one article used a clearly humanising frame. Published in *Le Monde*, it focused on a migrant worker identified as Mamadou D. The piece explored his personal experiences, family background, and reasons for migrating.

Unlike every other report in the sample, this one presented the worker as an individual with agency, aspirations, and dignity. Direct quotations. Personal reflections. The worker described both his suffering and his decisions in his own words.

The rarity of this frame speaks for itself. Migrant voices barely get space in mainstream French media.

Invisible Frame

Two articles fell into this category. They mentioned migrant workers only briefly, within broader stories about agriculture or harvest logistics. The workers themselves had no narrative importance. They appeared as background details – part of the scenery, not the story.

Part 3: Cross-Outlet Comparison

Table 4 Primary Frame by Outlet

Frame	<i>Le Monde</i> (n=11)	<i>Le Figaro</i> (n=10)	<i>France Info</i> (n=9)
Exploitation exposé	7 (63.6%)	3 (30.0%)	4 (44.4%)
Economic necessity	2 (18.2%)	4 (40.0%)	2 (22.2%)
Criminal othering	1 (9.1%)	3 (30.0%)	1 (11.1%)
Humanising	1 (9.1%)	0	0
Invisible	0	0	2 (22.2%)

Clear editorial differences across the three outlets. *Le Monde* most frequently adopted the exploitation exposé frame. It also published the only humanising article in the entire sample.

Le Figaro showed the highest proportion of criminal othering framing. And here's a striking detail: not a single article in *Le Figaro* included direct migrant voices.

France Info had the highest rate of invisible coverage. Migrant workers often appeared only briefly, tucked inside broader agricultural reports.

Migrant Voice by Outlet

- *Le Monde* : direct quotations in 3 articles
- *France Info*: direct quotations in 1 article
- *Le Figaro* : direct quotations in 0 articles

These differences matter. Editorial orientation shapes not just how migrant labour gets framed, but whether migrant workers get to speak at all.

Summary of Key Findings

Several patterns stand out.

First, the exploitation exposé frame dominated coverage. But even sympathetic reporting rarely included direct migrant voices.

Second, migrant workers were frequently identified through nationality or ethnicity – Malian, Senegalese, West African – while remaining largely voiceless within the articles themselves. Seen, but not heard.

Third, positive or humanising representation was almost entirely absent. One article out of thirty.

Fourth, important differences emerged across news outlets. *Le Figaro* leaned toward criminalisation. *France Info* often rendered workers invisible. *Le Monde* paid more attention to exploitation and published the only humanising piece.

Taken together, the findings suggest that French media continue to frame migrant grape pickers primarily as victims, economic tools, or social problems. What's missing? Representations of migrants as skilled workers, active participants, and contributing members of French agricultural life.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

What does it mean when migrant workers are seen but not heard? This study set out to answer that question by analysing 30 French news articles about grape pickers published between 2023 and 2026. The findings point to a clear pattern: migrant workers in the French wine industry are frequently represented through narratives of exploitation, economic utility, or criminality. Their personal voices and lived experiences? Largely absent.

Consider the numbers. Seventy-three per cent of the articles explicitly identified workers by nationality or regional origin – "Malian," "Senegalese," "West African." Yet only 13 per cent included direct quotations or substantial testimony from migrant labourers themselves. That gap is not accidental. It reveals a structure: racially visible, discursively marginalised.

Racial Identification and Silence

Let me linger on this point. News reports regularly emphasised workers' foreignness within the French national context. But journalists rarely allowed those same workers to speak about their own experiences. Who spoke instead? Employers. Lawyers. Police officials. Labour unions. Government representatives.

Postcolonial scholars have a name for this. A hierarchy of representation. Institutional actors get authority. Migrant labourers remain objects of discussion – not participants in public discourse. The findings of this study fit squarely within that pattern.

The Victim–Criminal Binary

Another troubling pattern emerged. Nearly half of the articles framed migrant grape pickers as victims of exploitation, trafficking, and poor labour conditions. These reports exposed real abuse, and that matters. But they often portrayed workers as passive subjects – without agency, without individuality.

Then there is the other side of the binary. The criminal other frame associated migrants with illegality, undocumented labour, or fraud. This appeared most often in right-leaning coverage, particularly *Le Figaro*.

Here is the problem with both frames. They reduce migrant workers to social categories. Victims or criminals. What gets lost? The recognition of migrants as skilled labourers and active contributors to French agriculture.

The Missing Humanising Frame

Only one article in the entire sample focused on the personal experiences, dignity, and aspirations of a migrant worker. One out of thirty.

Think about what that means. None of the analysed reports celebrated the expertise, endurance, or contribution of migrant grape

pickers. None acknowledged that these workers make French wine possible.

This absence is not minor. French wine is promoted internationally as a symbol of national heritage, craftsmanship, and cultural pride. Yet the labour sustaining this industry remains largely invisible within media narratives. The celebration and the erasure happen simultaneously.

Editorial Differences Matter

Clear differences emerged across outlets.

Le Monde most frequently adopted the exploitation exposé frame. It also produced the only humanising article in the sample.

Le Figaro relied more heavily on criminalising narratives. Not a single article in *Le Figaro* included direct migrant voices.

France Info often mentioned migrant workers only briefly within broader reports on agriculture. That kind of passing mention contributes to invisibility – workers become background details, not the story.

These differences suggest that editorial orientation shapes not just framing but basic visibility. Who gets quoted. Who gets named. Who gets to matter.

A Decolonial Reading

From a decolonial perspective, these findings point to something deeper. French media continue to reproduce colonial patterns of labour representation.

Migrant workers from former colonies – West Africa, North Africa – and economically vulnerable regions like Eastern Europe remain essential to agricultural production. But their contribution is marginalised within national narratives of heritage and identity.

Consider the concept of *terroir*. Celebrated endlessly. The racialised labour that makes

terroir possible? Excluded from the story. This is not a paradox. It is a pattern with a history.

Limitations

No study is perfect. Several boundaries should be acknowledged.

First, the sample of 30 articles, while appropriate for qualitative analysis, cannot represent the entirety of French media coverage on migrant agricultural labour. Regional newspapers and specialised agricultural publications may present different framing patterns.

Second, the selected period (2023–2026) coincides with heightened public attention surrounding labour exploitation scandals – particularly the Anavim case. Coverage in quieter years might look different.

Third, this study examined only textual content. No photographs. No headlines analysed as visual objects. No video reports. Visual framing may communicate additional meanings about race, labour, and dignity.

Fourth, broadcast media – television and radio – were excluded. Those formats may provide different opportunities for migrant workers to express their perspectives.

Fifth, the study focuses exclusively on France. No comparative analysis with other European wine-producing countries like Spain or Italy. That remains for future research.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, I offer several recommendations for journalists, editors, and researchers.

1. Increase migrant representation in reporting

Journalists should include direct testimonies and personal narratives from migrant workers as a regular practice – not just during moments of

crisis or scandal. A worker's voice should not require a trafficking case to be heard.

2. Move beyond the victim–criminal binary

Media narratives should avoid reducing migrant workers either to passive victims or potential threats. Greater attention should be given to their skills, experiences, labour contribution, and individual agency. These are workers, not walking social problems.

3. Adopt a more inclusive approach to food journalism

Reporting on French gastronomy and wine culture should acknowledge the labour behind agricultural production. Discussions of heritage and *terroir* must also recognise the migrant workers who sustain the industry. You cannot celebrate the wine while ignoring the hands that picked the grapes.

4. Encourage interdisciplinary research

Future scholarship should combine media studies, labour studies, migration research, and postcolonial perspectives. The relationship between race, labour, and representation will not be understood from a single disciplinary vantage point.

5. Expand the scope of analysis

Future research could include regional newspapers, broadcast media, visual framing, and cross-national comparisons with Italy, Spain, or Portugal. Each of these directions would enrich our understanding of how migrant labour is represented across Europe.

Conclusion

Let me return to the central question. How do French news media frame migrant grape pickers?. This study examined 30 articles published between 2023 and 2026 using qualitative content analysis. The answer is clear: migrant workers are most frequently represented through narratives of exploitation, economic

necessity, or criminality. Their own voices remain largely absent. A recurring pattern emerged: racial visibility combined with narrative exclusion. Migrant workers are identified by nationality or ethnic origin – Malian, Senegalese, West African. But they are rarely given opportunities to speak about their experiences directly. Even sympathetic reporting often portrays them primarily as victims rather than as skilled workers and active social participants. This study also shows how media discourse contributes to the broader invisibility of racialised labour within French cultural narratives. French wine is celebrated worldwide as a symbol of heritage, refinement, and national identity. But the migrant workers who sustain this industry remain marginalised within media representation. The celebration and the erasure are two sides of the same coin. By connecting media framing research with studies of migrant agricultural labour, this paper contributes to ongoing debates in decolonial and cultural studies. The argument is simple: a more inclusive media approach requires not only exposing exploitation but also recognising migrant workers as individuals with dignity, agency, and an essential role in French society. So what would change if journalists took this seriously? More direct quotes. More humanising frames. Less reliance on police and employer sources. Less criminalisation of people who are, after all, doing work that French vineyards cannot live without. Ultimately, this study calls for a rethinking of how labour is represented within discussions of French heritage and gastronomy. Recognising the people behind the harvest is not a small adjustment. It is an essential step toward a more ethical and inclusive understanding of culture, work, and national identity. The grapes do not pick

themselves. It is time the people who pick them were truly seen – and heard.

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