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## Diversity in the media

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## **Diversity in the media: The case of the refugees' representation in the Greek newspapers at a time of crisis**

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### **Abstract**

In recent years, there has been a sharply distorted perception of the refugee and migration phenomenon. Due to the media's often skewed presentation of the separate issues of immigration and refugee, many have difficulty even understanding the definitions of these two situations. Citizens cannot perceive the difference between immigration as a choice and being refugee as a one-way street and coercion. As a result, citizens consider the boundaries of the two situations indistinguishable. The present study investigates the way in which refugees and immigrants are represented in the Greek press, in times of crisis. Through a comparative study on the front pages of Greek political newspapers, we seek to analyze how this news is covered and mainly how refugees and immigrants are portrayed by Greek journalists. The research question is whether a newspaper's political positions influence the way it portrays refugees. Methodologically, the study is based on the framing theory, which has become a dominant tool for describing, understanding and evaluating media content. The idea of the research is partly based on Hall's positions (1981: 64, 87) that the media "not only distort reality, but also define it".

**Keywords:** immigration, crisis, refugees' representation, newspapers, Greece.

### **Immigration and diversity**

Among other things, diversity has an etymological interpretation related to the "adoption of an alternative way of life, perception, mentality and thinking" but also to the "respect for each person's perception and mentality standards, having in mind that any different aspect and perspective is accepted as something equal and not superior or inferior" (Papataxiarchis, 2006). At the same time, diversity is associated with "respect for other cultures and in particular for the elements that make up each different culture" (Markou, 1998). Having these concepts in mind, cultural diversity refers to the concept of different cultures, in contrast to the homogeneity of cultures (Spanos & Haidogiannou, 2013). In simpler terms, while diversity is valuable and necessary for humanity, it is important to emphasize that diversity can also be defined as the internal process of accepting the other, which means that it is a situation that requires effort (Papataxiarchis, 2006).

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Diversity and heterogeneity have become much-discussed concepts, mainly due to the intense social phenomena that plague European citizens. The refugee and immigrant issues belong to these phenomena. However, it is necessary to clarify the definitions of "refugee" and "immigrants", as this understanding could allow us to have an accurate view of the differences between these two groups characteristics and needs. As Bernard (1976) notices, "A basic and age-old characteristic of man is that he often moves from one place to another. Generally, because he wants to. Sometimes because he has to. These two conditioning factors mark the fundamental difference between immigrants and refugees. The former are predominantly voluntary migrants. The latter are involuntary ones". In addition, the social base of the European countries has changed rapidly due to the mass entering flows, while attention has not been given to the proper education of the citizens and the proper preparation, for a smooth reception, integration or assimilation of immigrants. Alongside, the information that the citizens of the host countries have about the definition of the terms "refugee", "immigrant" and "asylum seeker" is quite incomplete, resulting in misunderstandings and misinterpretations regarding the rights of each group.

The lack of accurate knowledge about European and international hospitality, but also about reception programs for refugees and immigrants intensifies feelings of fear, insecurity, threat and hostility, which often outweigh the inherent hospitality of peoples such as the Greeks. Because both kinds of migration have profound effects upon everyone involved - the country of origin, the host country, and the migrants themselves - it is important to know the similarities and the differences, of immigrants and refugees (Bernard, 1976). Adding to it, we have to take into consideration the dissatisfactory immigration policies of European countries, the serious inability to process asylum seekers and the prolonged economic crisis that has hit Greece and has financially weakened Greek citizens, making it impossible for them to manage the new reality, as they might have found easier to do under different circumstances (Kalfeli, 2020).

### **Immigration and diversity in the media**

Amid all this fluid new situation that the citizens of the host countries are called upon to experience, migration has become one of the top issues on the global media agenda, taking on the crucial role of transmitting information, as well as interpreting complex and sensitive issues. In addition, the media have the power to offer their own version of a reality that can eventually be transformed. The perception of social reality is increasingly shaped by an interplay of representations in the media. Media representations also influence the public perception of immigrants and refugees as well as immigration policies. Thus, the way in which migration, immigrants, refugees, or ethnic and religious minorities are represented across different types of media is certainly one of the most prominent themes in European media and communication studies (Smets and Bozdağ, 2018). Reality can become a product of fiction through the pen of the journalist. Even a few words of a title or a photo can promote views and tendencies about refugees who in most cases are unjust for them. Especially in the case of

photographs which are usually used as "evidence" of verbal claims or even explanatory aids, reading them indiscriminately can lead to distortion of the truth. In any case, the media can portray the phenomenon of immigration, immigrants, and refugees in a completely stereotypical term (Van Gorp, 2005).

Additionally, media have, by definition, the power to shape perceptions and tendencies, influencing not only citizens' thoughts, but also their actions. Recent, extensive academic research has shown that the media cover the phenomenon of migration in a variety of and often contradictory ways, greatly differentiating issues of refugee diversity. For example, they approach and describe immigration as a phenomenon that poses a threat to public order and a risk to public health, as a phenomenon that creates constant conflict, but also as a phenomenon in which migrants are portrayed as victims of war, inequality and in need of compassion and help (Benson, 2013; Van Gorp, 2005; Kalfeli, 2020). In addition, there are cases in which immigrants are framed by the media with a narrative of "illegality" which, as expected, is perceived as a threat by the inhabitants of each host country (Kim et al., 2011; Benson, 2013).

Ultimately, the media play a central and powerful role in contemporary experiences by shaping attitudes and opinions and at the same time, providing a point of contact between different groups. The media can contribute to quality public debate as well as to defining perceptions of minorities and intergroup relations (Spoonley and Trlin, 2004). Also, although media coverage can help in shaping public opinion, there is a potential reciprocal effect on policymakers, as the media themselves can be an essential element of policymaking (Hodgetts and Chamberlain, 2006). More specifically, in addition to creating stereotypes among citizens about issues of diversity, a misconception of the collective view stemming from biased media coverage could also prove particularly detrimental to public policymaking (Thompsett et al., 2003; Hodgetts, Chamberlain, 2006). In line with the dominant strand in the literature, several studies point at the overall negative stereotyping of migration and immigrants in the media and its potential menace for constructive public debate. In fact, as much as the media create stereotypical or even obscure thoughts and tendencies that are sometimes adopted by the citizens, they essentially create the conditions for nationalist and outdated policies that have a purely national perspective, ignoring the globalized version of the phenomenon and moving away from humanitarian logic (Smets and Bozdag, 2018). Therefore, the role of the media in shaping the view of otherness in relation to refugees and migrants is extremely important.

### **The framing role in the Mass Media**

As Gamson and Modigliani (1989:157) argue, events make sense when incorporated into a framework that organizes them and gives them coherence, illuminating some aspects and ignoring others. Realizing that every piece of journalistic material is essentially a story/narration, we understand that the media must be selective in what they present to their audience, how they present it, and whether they ultimately tell a story that contains actual/accurate facts (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). According to Entman (1993), selection

and localization are two key features of framing. In addition, the role of the media in the way in which reality is perceived by the public is proving crucial. Especially in conditions of insecurity and uncertainty, the media find the opportunity to express but also to inflate fears and insecurities to attract the attention of the public. (Gale, 2004:325, 335). In this case, their role becomes strongly mediating, while the way in which the news is selected and presented becomes of major importance.

As Iyengar and Kinder (1987) claim, frameworks are always consistent, because they lead the public to interpret issues in different ways, that is, frames can make an event remarkable or not, as they can also shape public opinion or change the attitude of citizens. The deliberate misuse of a photograph or the deliberate misuse of specific words in an article title can create conditions of hatred, enmity, racism, nationalism, but also fear, insecurity and a false sense of threat (Zaller, 1992). For all these reasons, the framing theory is considered extremely useful in order to study the front pages of political newspapers, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The positions of Fiske and Taylor (1991) partly explain why the application of framing theory in this study was considered valuable. As they mentioned, frames are consequential, because they lead the audience to interpret issues in various ways. When elevated in salience, a piece of information is more likely to be "noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences". In the case of news related to scientific and medical data, this element is of particular interest to the dissertation. Indeed, the framing process is an influential way through which the media may shape public opinion or alter citizens' attitudes (Fiske and Taylor, 1991).

## **Methodology**

The main research question of the study is whether the political positions of a newspaper influence the way they portray refugees, while the main working hypothesis is that the political orientation of a specific media can distort the vision and presentation to such an extent that even a humanitarian issue can be projected as purely political, completely removing from it any humanistic tone.

The paper attempts a comparative study of four political newspapers, limited to observing and processing data extracted from their front pages. The selection of newspapers was mainly based on their circulation data, as they are published by the Argos Distribution Network and by the Association of Daily Newspaper Owners of Athens.

In addition, the selection was based on the newspapers' political orientation, in order for the political trends to be prevailed, as to ensure the partial representativeness and objectivity of the research results. Newspapers were not selected from all political areas in Greece, since the purpose of the study is to investigate the political attitude of a newspaper in relation to government positions, and not for a thorough political representation to take place. Thus, newspapers that are characterized as pro-governmental, as well as newspapers that are in favor of the opposition side are chosen. The government-affiliated newspapers selected are

"Kathimerini" and "Ta Nea", while the opposition newspapers are "Efimerida ton Syntakton" and "I Avgi".

The duration of the sampling is from 29/2/2020 until 10/3/2020 and the choice for the beginning of the study was based on the day when the Kastaneon Customs in Evros closed (28/2/2020) and thousands of refugees were crowded at the border. On the same day, the Athenian-Macedonian Agency published for the first-time information and photos from the gathering of immigrants and refugees at the border crossing point, while Turkish media, foreign media and international agencies began to report extensively on this major political, diplomatic and above all humanitarian issue. At the same time and on the same day, representatives of the Greek political and military leadership went to the spot, in order to propagate the political and military positions of Greece. From that day on, this issue settled in the Greek journalistic agenda.

This research is based on both quantitative (frequency and number of publications) and qualitative data (image analysis, title content analysis). Methodologically, the work is based on the framing theory, which is described as the way in which a specific "reading" of the message presented by the media is proposed (Zaller, 1992). The first part of the research is based on quantitative data which is collected with strict numerical criteria, such as the number of published articles on the refugee issue that refer to the front pages, in the limited time frame. The second part of the research is based on qualitative criteria. Initially, the method of content analysis is applied to the titles of the articles. In this context, we investigate whether the newspapers focus on "border security" or "human security", but also whether the headlines "use" refugees to cultivate political aggravation at the level of internal or external relations.

## **Quantitative and qualitative research results**

Out of the total of 244 articles that appear on the front pages of the newspapers under study during the limited period, only 25 relate to the issue of the crisis in Evros. It is clear that the volume of published articles on such an important issue, both in terms of its political dimension and in terms of its humanitarian dimension is relatively limited. This can be partly explained by the fact that at the time of the study, worldwide, the Covid-19 pandemic had already begun to spread, and for this reason several of the headline articles refer to information on the Covid-19 pandemic. In any case, however, the media have the potential to build social consensus on issues that they present as important. So, they can turn public opinion on the major humanitarian issue that has emerged (Chong and Druckman, 2007: 104).

The data related to the issues published by the newspapers of different political orientation are of major interest. The pro-governmental newspapers, "Kathimerini" and "Ta Nea", published a total of 13 relevant articles, while the opposition newspapers published a total of 12 relevant articles. A first conclusion that we can draw, is that the opposition newspapers did not choose to downgrade the issue to a major one, while they could do so, either in order to promote an

important humanitarian issue, or even as a political tool of pressure on the Greek government or political upheaval to Turkey. Eventually, the governmental newspapers rushed to cover the crisis in Evros to the same extent and slightly more intensely, leaving the newspapers of the Left behind.

In the second level of research, the method of qualitative content analysis is applied to the headlines of the research articles. In this case, among other things, we investigate whether the newspapers focus on "border security" or "human security", but also whether the headlines show that the media "use" the refugees to cultivate political escalation. The data we come to are:

Out of the 25 articles in total, the topic under consideration appears as main / central only on 11 front pages. Out of these, 7 are front-page newspapers affiliated with the government, while 4 are those of newspapers that support the opposition. As observed, the opposition forces of Greece did not focus on the major political / humanitarian issue as much as they could, since most of the references, are made with small texts, often single-column and even without photos, which are "hidden" under the central issues. According to the data, the newspapers which are close to the Government did not cover the issue in a satisfactory way quantitatively speaking.

Out of the 25 articles in total, 18 have titles which refer to "border security" and 7 have titles which refer to "human security". For example, we notice titles as: "Mr. Mitsotakis, here is your national guard" (Efimerida ton Syntakton, 7/3/2020) "Increased vigilance on Aegean islands, for fear of Turkish provocation under the pretext of rescuing immigrants" (Kathimerini, 5/3/2020) and "Asymmetric threat of duration at the border" (Kathimerini, 3/3/2020) These titles make a very clear reference to the security of the borders. On the other hand, there are titles such as "Warehouse of souls with the backs of Brussels" (Efimerida ton Syntakton, 4/3/2020), and "New facts about the dead refugee in Evros" (Efimerida ton Syntakton, 4/3/2020) which mainly emphasize on the security of the people and not of the borders. Government-affiliated newspapers use headlines that refer only to "border security". Not a single article in "Kathimerini" and "Ta Nea" has a title that emphasizes the security of people, whether if they are Greek citizens, or refugees and immigrants. On the other hand, 7 of the 12 pro-oppositional newspaper headlines refer to "border security", while the remaining 5 emphasize the importance of human life and the need to protect trapped refugees and migrants.

Out of the 25 articles in total, 15 are identified to refer mainly to the interior of Greece and the political aspects generated by the crisis in Evros, while the remaining 10 mainly emphasize the problems caused by both Greece's relations with Turkey, as well as the relations of Greece and Turkey with the European Union. It is noteworthy that the humanitarian crisis comes second to politics and diplomacy. Refugees and migrants are presented as the cause of the problem or as the problem itself. The instrumentalization of refugees and migrants is clear. Diversity is presented here as a "problem" that must be solved, without any thought of even conditionally opening borders or sending humanitarian aid. The findings confirm the thematically broader

but relevant research of Zillmann, Knobloch and Yu, (2001: 306) which shows that it is common for the media to focus on presenting crises, negative news and problematic situations.

### **Analysis of the images on the front pages**

The next part of the research focuses on the application of the framing theory to the images presented in newspaper articles. The study of photographs can provide valuable material, according to their own socio-economic context (Becker, 1998: 89). The frameworks set from the beginning are four: 1) The presentation of the issue from a political point of view, 2) The presentation of the issue from a humanitarian point of view, 3) The representation of refugees as "people in need of help" which is part of the humanitarian frame and 4) The representation of refugees as a "threat" which is part of the political frame. The total number of photographs found in the articles under study is 19. The following are typical examples of photographs classified in the above contexts:

Out of the total of 19 photos, 16 seem to have a political connotation. The humanitarian issue in Evros is represented through the faces of politicians, creating a parallel universe of action, two different worlds, a chaotic gap between the reality that people experience at the border and the reality that politicians perceive in their local official meetings. This comes in line with what Poulakidakos (2018) is highlighted when he mentions that "Although a tragedy is taking place in the European land and sea borders, the politicians favor a managerial approach to the crisis, by supporting the division between refugees and immigrants and the subsequent conditional provision of either humanitarian aid or asylum, in terms of the people eligible for it". This is actually noticed in frontpages as *Kathimerini* (10/3/2020) and *Ta Nea* (10/3/2020) (Images 1-5).

It is of high importance that whether we refer to newspapers that support the Government or to those that do not support it, the choice of smiling politicians shifts the readers' attention from the refugee-immigrants. In this way, the choice of the isolated, secure political environment has the power to create illusions of total and universal security for Greece.





Image 1: Avgi, 29/2/2020 (source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/avgi29\\_2\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/avgi29_2_20))



Image 2: Efimerida ton Syntakton, 4/3/2020 (source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/20200304/72/efimeridatonsyntakton4\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/20200304/72/efimeridatonsyntakton4_3_20))



Image 3: Kathimerini, 10/3/2020 (source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/20200310/1/kathimerini10\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/20200310/1/kathimerini10_3_20))



Image 4: Ta Nea, 10/3/2020 (source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/20200310/2/tanea10\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/20200310/2/tanea10_3_20))



Image 5: Avgi, 7/3/2020 (source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/20200307/13/avgi7\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/20200307/13/avgi7_3_20))

The second framework set by the present study refers to the crisis of Evros mainly as a humanitarian problem. From these photos, the "close up" portraits which mainly create a feeling of intimacy are absent too, while cultivating positive feelings of connection with the depicted person. It is noticeable that close-up photos often create "bridges" of identification with persons who would otherwise seem "foreign" and "distant" (Image 6). As Hall (1973) states, proximity to the object or person being depicted, or the close-up of the lens (zoom), is considered an attempt to cover the distance in an interpersonal relationship, as well as intimacy. The proximity of a photo can arouse emotions and make an issue more personal and motivating. Especially in the case of humanitarian crises, choosing close-up photos could create a close

social relationship. However, on none of the front pages we studied did we find close-up photos of refugees and immigrants that could give another, more emotional meaning to diversity.



Image 6: Kathimerini, 8/3/2020 (source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/kathimerin8\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/kathimerin8_3_20))

In the third context, refugees are represented as "people in need of help". Out of the 19 total headlines, only 4 present the refugees with these characteristics. Newspapers mainly choose animation photos, avoiding showing the faces of refugees. This choice on the one hand can be considered to protect the personal data of the refugees, but on the other hand, it creates an emotional distance between the face of the photo and the reader, since the real face of a trapped refugee, especially a child or a woman, could highlight the humanitarian side of the issue and evoke emotional attachment, compassion and empathy for the people portrayed (Images 7 & 8). This could also be approached as a humanitarian subframe.



Image 7: Avgi, 6/3/2020 (source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/avgig\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/avgig_3_20))



Image 8: Avgi, 4/3/2020 (source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/avgig4\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/avgig4_3_20))

The last frame represents refugees as a "threat". There is an impressive media preference here, since out of a total of 19 newspaper photos, 15 present refugees as a threat. In these photos the refugees are mainly presented as masses of diverse people gathered one next to the other, often in large groups. In addition, photographs depicting refugees as a "threat", usually include borders or military installations. Of high interest is the front page of the newspaper

"Kathimerini" (29/2/2020) which emphasizes the red sign that reads "Turkey" in the Turkish language, thus showing the responsible one, but at the same time clarifying where the refugees and immigrants belong. The presence of soldiers in the same photos in which immigrants appear, intensifies the view that they are a "threat" to our country, with the, at the same time, reassuring view, that Greece "is not in danger".

The notion of a possible "invasion" reinforces the idea that refugees are a problem that needs to be removed from Greece (Images 9-15). This element is in line with the positions of Moschopoulou (2005: 183-184), who describes the threat felt by the citizens of the host country regarding the degradation of the cultural and educational level of their country, the falsification of national homogeneity, but also deprivation of jobs due to the integration of refugees into the workforce. As regards an aspect of the political frame/approach to the refugees the result of a "threatening" representation of refugees could lead to the development of a hostile attitude of the inhabitants of the host country towards the immigrants, since these can be considered responsible for a possible state of social decline or even a "threat" to national sovereignty and border integrity (Tsoukala, 2001: 80).



Image 9: Kathimerini, 29/2/2020  
(source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/kathimerini29\\_2\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/kathimerini29_2_20))



Image 10: Kathimerini, 3/3/2020  
(source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/kathimerini3\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/kathimerini3_3_20))



Image 11: Ta Nea, 3/3/2020  
(source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/tanea3\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/tanea3_3_20))



**Image 12:** Kathimerini, 5/3/2020 (source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/kathimerini5\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/kathimerini5_3_20))



**Image 13:** Ta Nea, 5/3/2020 (source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/tanea5\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/tanea5_3_20))



**Image 14:** Ta Nea, 6/3/2020 (source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/tanea6\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/tanea6_3_20))



**Image 15:** Efimerida ton Syntakton, 3/3/2020 (source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/efimeridatonsyntakton3\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/efimeridatonsyntakton3_3_20))

## Discussion

The present research partly confirms Hall's position (1981: 64, 87) that the media not only distort reality, but also define it, although in order to have absolute confirmation, additional audience research would be needed. Especially when the defined reality does not contradict an established social perception, the influence of the media can be maximized. As seen in the analysis of the content of the headlines but also of the images on the front pages of the Greek political newspapers, the media promote aspects and project trends that do not adhere to the principles of diversity.

According to the framework we have set in order to study more closely the published journalistic material, the refugees are mainly represented as a "threat", with a special emphasis

given mainly by the newspapers that support the Greek government. In addition, there are few cases in which refugees are portrayed as "people in need of help", and these are found exclusively in pro-opposition newspapers.

Another aspect we examined in this research relates to the reduction of the crisis in Evros to a major political problem, at a time when the humanitarian dimension has been largely sidelined by opposition newspapers, and to a greater extent by pro-government newspapers. The instrumentalization of the refugees is clear. In part, it conveys the message that diversity not only does not provide enrichment of the society, but on the contrary, it is responsible for the sufferings that will potentially come to the Greek society.

The answer to the original research question, that is, whether and to what extent a newspaper's political positions influence the way they portray refugees, is obvious. The political positions of the newspapers strongly influence the way they describe and present major issues of diversity such as the representation of refugees in crisis situations. The basic journalistic principles of reaching as much as possible independence and objectivity are sinking into the sea of property and political ideology, with the danger of destroying the freedom of the press, which is necessary for the smooth functioning of any society. Further comparative studies that will focus on how the Greek press covers issues of diversity, could be particularly useful in order to investigate the current state of journalistic political independence in Greece.

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