Article

Victims of a Human Tragedy or "Objects" of Migrant Smuggling? Media Framing of Greece's Deadliest Migrant Shipwreck in Pylos' Dark Waters

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Abstract: Refugee and migration crises has been an integral part of the continuous and successive crises that the world has been experiencing. Media has played a crucial role in shaping public opinion over migration and asylum-seeking. Within this context, this paper aims to discuss Greek media coverage of the migrant shipwreck off the Greek coast of Pylos, in June 2023, in which more than 600 people mostly from Syria, Egypt, and Pakistan are thought to have drowned. Based on data from a quantitative content analysis and a sample of news stories stemming from the online version of five Greek news media outlets, representing diverse political spaces, a broader set of criteria for content analysis, including the absence of refugee and migrant voice in media content, dehumanization, absence of solutions and context, among many others, was used in order to explore how the Greek media framed what has been labeled as one of the deadliest migrant shipwrecks in the Mediterranean. Results revealed (i) frames of dehumanization, (ii) insufficient reporting of injustice and discrimination stemming from (state) structures and practices, and an (iii) overemphasis on migrant smuggling.

Keywords: media; framing; peace journalism; refugees; migrants; shipwreck; Pylos; Greece

1. Introduction

Early on 14 June 2023, a "rusted" fishing trawler, named Adriana, en route from Libya to Italy, carrying hundreds of struggling migrants and asylum-seekers, mainly from Pakistan, Syria, and Egypt, capsized off the coast of Greece. It is estimated that 750 people were aboard the vessel before it sank. During the rescue operation that followed, 104 of those on board were rescued alive, while 82 were recovered dead. Hundreds of others went missing. Among them were many women and children, who were being kept below deck, with very few options for survival.

Migration and border security have been, for long, key issues in the Greek and European political landscape. Following the Pylos wreck, they have risen to the top of the political agenda. Europe's Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson, called the migrant boat disaster off the coast of Greece the "worst tragedy ever" in the Mediterranean Sea. The Greek government declared three days of national mourning in honor of the victims. That being said, the Hellenic Coast Guard faced pressing questions over its response to the fishing boat. Critics said that the Greek authorities should have acted faster to keep the vessel from capsizing. In response, Greek officials alleged that they were informed of the boat's existence, but the people on board consistently turned down offers of assistance. Human rights organizations claimed that the tragedy was a direct result of a new pattern of illegal pushbacks of migrant boats into other countries' waters, with fatal results. Overall, the Pylos shipwreck sparked outrage all over Greece and the EU.

At the same time, the Pylos migrant boat disaster brought back memories of the Lampedusa wreck, which happened exactly 10 years ago. On the early morning of 3 October 2013,

a vessel carrying approximately 500 individuals from Eritrea, Somalia, and Ghana sank a few hundred meters off the coast of Lampedusa, a small island in southern Italy, leading to the death of 366 people. At the time, it was characterized as "the worst maritime disaster in the Mediterranean Sea since the Second World War" (Dines et al. 2015). In fact, the Lampedusa shipwreck symbolized one of the most shocking and dramatic incidents involving thousands of people traveling across the Mediterranean Sea in search of a better life (Mancini et al. 2021). As is often the case after incidents of this nature, much of the blame was attributed to the trafficking organizations for taking advantage of the desperate attempts of individuals to reach Europe (Dines et al. 2015).

As it happened in the past with the Lambedusa wreck (Dines et al. 2015), the scale of the disaster temporarily propelled the Pylos' tragedy to the center of European political debate and global media attention. News media are crucial during times of crisis, since they capture public attention and have an impact on attitudes and public opinion (Yücel 2021). Disadvantaged groups, such as refugees and migrants, are easily stigmatized, because they are frequently portrayed in stereotypical terms through victim and threat frames (Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017; Innes 2010; Kalfeli et al. 2022; Kim et al. 2011; Thorbjornsrud 2015; Van Gorp 2005). This has a significant impact on the perceptions and attitudes of the social majority members toward these groups (Esses et al. 2013; Parrott et al. 2019).

Having stated that, the question that needs to be addressed is, *how are refugees and migrants depicted in the media during a humanitarian crisis, such as a fatal migrant shipwreck?* What are the theoretical tools that can be employed in order to understand these representations? In that direction, this paper uses framing and peace journalism through a quantitative content analysis of 447 news stories published in June 2023 in five online Greek media outlets. In this article, framing refers to the method by which the Greek media outlets that are the subject of the investigation have employed a specific interpretative lens—that of peace or conflict journalism—in their reporting. Moreover, by examining underrepresented news story elements like the voice of vulnerable groups and non-elite discourses, peace journalism theory (Galtung 2006) and the corresponding peace journalism model for the analysis of mediated representations of migration (Kalfeli et al. 2022) offer a broader research perspective. In light of this, this article's goal is to add to the body of research on media coverage of migration by examining how refugees and migrants are framed in the context of the deadliest migrant shipwreck in recent memory.

In the following sections, this paper initially examines the most representative research that looked into how the media has portrayed migration and asylum-seeking so far, with an emphasis on maritime disasters. This article then sketches out the core ideas and recent advancements in the field of peace journalism while outlining and discussing its essential components. Subsequently, the methodology of this study is presented, and its findings are discussed, highlighting the new challenges in reporting on the diversity issue, with a focus on refugees and migrants.

2. Literature

Media, for many people around the globe, serves as the sole window to the world of minorities and in particular refugees and migrants, with whom they have either no interaction at all or only a superficial one (Youngblood 2017). Indeed, a significant portion of our knowledge regarding refugees and migrants derives from news stories and media analyses (Kalfeli et al. 2022; Youngblood 2017). Yet, the question is as follows: does the media address migration issues in a holistic and coherent manner?

Migration issues are not covered by the media in a continuous news flow, but in a fragmented way (Youngblood 2017, p. 159). Moreover, media portrayals of refugees and migrants do not have an expanded agenda but are mostly associated with news which bear a negative connotation; that is, news lights briefly turn on when refugees and migrants commit a criminal offence, enter the country irregularly, or when a migrant boat capsizes in the sea, but this interest disappears when the circumstances are "normal". In this way, however, the audience learns to associate migration with conflict, threat, and difficulty.

In fact, numerous studies across the world (including in the US, France, Norway, and Belgium, among others) on how migration and asylum-seeking are represented by the media, as well as on social media (Aldamen 2023), have shown some common motifs. Most importantly, migration has generally been portrayed as a threat to public health and security, and refugees and migrants have been portrayed as "enemies at the gate", trying to infiltrate Western nations (Esses et al. 2013; Kalfeli et al. 2023; Kim et al. 2011; Thorbjornsrud 2015; Van Gorp 2005). Overall, through the years, the media has frequently depicted migration through a narrative of "illegality" and "control", by adopting the agenda, discourse, and the arguments made by governments, politicians, military personnel, and law enforcement officers (Kim et al. 2011; Thorbjornsrud 2015). As a result, media has framed migration mainly negatively and as a source of conflict, portraying it as a problem that constantly stirs up conflict between various social groups, political parties, or even states (Eberl et al. 2018; Kalfeli et al. 2022).

Less frequently, and especially during the 2015 European "refugee crisis", as the drama of thousands of people unfolded on Mediterranean coasts and in contrast to previous years, refugees were more often portrayed as innocent victims of war and persecution who were fleeing for their lives (Franquet Dos Santos Silva et al. 2018) and as those in need and in danger (Kalfeli 2020). In the end, however, even if waves of sympathy and compassion were common in media discourse throughout this era (Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017), the media continued to portray refugees stereotypically as either victims or threats—never as fellow humans, to quote Chouliaraki and Zaborowski 2017, p. 4).

Not surprisingly, a significant part of the media narrative about arrivals on European shores revolves around news about migrant shipwrecks and death. On behalf of research, however, little has been done in this area. The few studies that have actually focused on this issue reveal ambivalence in media representation of migrant shipwrecks (Benert and Beier 2016; Mancini et al. 2021; Zerback et al. 2020). Within this context, Mediterranean crossers are viewed as both threats and victims who need to be "saved", with crossing becoming a matter of life and death. In this process, refugees and migrants suffer twice; first, as the target of smugglers, and second, as shipwrecked victims. This condition consequently permits the double reification mentioned previously, as subjects of trafficking and smuggling and as dangers to border security (Moreno-Lax 2018). In the case of Lampedusa, for instance, which is a benchmark for media portrayals of migrant shipwrecks (Giubilaro 2018), refugees and migrants were defined, represented, or framed, either as victims or as intruders, that is, either as displaced persons (persons in need of help) or as migrants (people to be protected from) (Durán 2016).

Moreover, and in addition to threat and victim frames (Moreno-Lax 2018), media coverage of migrant boat disasters has some specific characteristics. For example, the media often first mentions the number of victims and then that these people are dead, sometimes in a sensational way. Similarly, visual framing processes, such as pictures taken from above, presumably from a helicopter, yielding a birds-eye view perspective, depicting dead bodies floating on the surface of the blue sea, act to reinforce the dehumanizing narrative (Giubilaro 2018). Many media sources use object metaphors and describe smuggling as "business" or "commerce", using language that makes the trafficked seem as "currency", "shipments", or "cargo", "objects to manipulate" (Montagut and Moragas-Fernández 2020), while smugglers are portrayed as "machines" (Gregoriou et al. 2022). Many media outlets quickly classify these individuals as migrants even though they are not really aware of their nationality. The word "migrant" implies, in all languages, that the person making the move chose to move abroad with the goal of improving his or her economic circumstance (Benert and Beier 2016), which creates a victim-blaming effect (Gregoriou et al. 2022). In conclusion, media outlets often suggest that these people caused their own misfortune, largely ignoring the systemic factors that drive migration and the risk of victimization associated with migration, even though there is some acknowledgement that these people may be "legitimate" victims (Gregoriou et al. 2022).

Bearing that in mind, this study uses peace journalism and framing theory to investigate how the Pylos' boat disaster, one of the deadliest migrant shipwrecks in the Mediterranean in recent years, was portrayed in Greek media outlets, moving beyond the traditional "threat and victim" dichotomy often applied in the literature. More precisely, a frame is defined in this work as the fundamental organizational principle that offers methods for defining, clarifying, and comprehending a particular issue—in this case, the migrant shipwreck—while also pointing out links with other situations (Gamson and Modigliani 1987). In other words, a frame gives the receiver instructions or suggestions on how to interpret the message according to the idea expressed within it (Van Gorp 2005). It is therefore the framing of events that dictates their meaning, promoting a particular evaluation and interpretation. Within this context, and by relying on Entman (1993) understanding of framing, Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) confirmed that peace journalism is, in fact, a "frame" suggesting definition of a problem, diagnosis of causes, moral judgment, and prescription for its resolution. In this article, framing refers to how the five Greek media outlets under study highlighted some aspects of the migrant boat disaster while omitting others, employed specific language, made contextual references, cited specific sources, and so on. This allowed the audience to read about the Pylos' wreck but also to approach it from a particular angle, through a peace or conflict journalism lens.

Peace journalism was born in the 1960s, as a critique towards war and conflict reporting. In their work, Galtung and Ruge (1965) suggested that traditional reporting on wars and crises adheres to certain patterns that are hardly ever questioned. For instance, under a typical conflict journalism approach, the media frequently highlights official sources—politicians, armed forces, and law enforcement representatives—but what about the voices of everyday people and marginalized communities? Conflict journalism tends to highlight the visible aspects of wars and crises, but what about its origins, the circumstances surrounding it, its effects on individuals and communities, and potential solutions? Conflict journalism emphasizes the elements that separate us from them, but what about narratives that show that there are points of agreement as well between different parties (Galtung 1998, 2006)? Galtung suggested peace journalism as a substitute for traditional war reporting.

Over the course of several decades, studies of peace journalism focused on how the media covered war and acts of open violence (Lee and Maslog 2005). However, more recent research has extended the study of peace journalism to non-war contexts, investigating its relevance in the areas of human rights, migration, gender, and religion (Anderson 2015; Chow-White and McMahon 2011; Tivona 2011; Shaw et al. 2011). Kalfeli et al. (2022) have expanded the purview of peace journalism to include diversity and migration in particular.

Concisely, Kalfeli et al. (2022) created a new peace journalism model for the investigation of media portrayals of migration, which was based on Galtung's original classification of war and peace journalism (Galtung 1998). The theory of peace journalism was applied in a non-war context because of the proactive nature of Galtung and Ruge (1965) definition of "positive peace", which is the absence of both direct and indirect violence or, alternatively, the absence of social injustice and inequality (Kalfeli et al. 2022). The new model is believed to provide researchers with a useful analytical tool for the examination of a multilayered representation of migration because it also aims to explore the less studied—both positive and negative—aspects of news coverage, such as voice (of refugees/migrants), focus on human stories, benefits of migration, political conflict or solutions, and human stories.

Since it employs the majority (12 out of 16) of the original schema's peace and conflict indicators, this study is mostly dependent on the model developed by Kalfeli et al. (2022) in order to meet its current goals. Simultaneously, a few indicators of the original model are expanded or modified to fit the current framework of the migrant shipwreck in Pylos, based on a comprehensive pilot content analysis of a representative sample of news reports, or some of them are not used at all. In this regard, the present investigation aims to address the following principal research questions:

RQ1: By employing a peace and conflict journalism theoretical perspective, how is migration portrayed in the Greek media outlets under study, within the context of the boat

disaster in Pylos, that is, one of the deadliest migrant disasters in the Mediterranean in recent years?

RQ2: In terms of frequency, which are the most prominent indicators of a conflict or a peace frame, among the various media outlets?

3. Method

This study's foundation is a content analysis of 447 news articles, about the migrant shipwreck that occurred off the coast of Pylos, southern Greece, early on 14 June 2023, stemming from the online editions of five Greek news media outlets. Specifically, news articles were collected from the online versions of five newspapers: EfSyn (progressive, left-wing), Ta Nea (center), I Kathimerini (center-right), Proto Thema (right-wing, populist), and Eleftheros Typos (right-wing). The media outlets were chosen based on two criteria: first, their ranking rates, with some of them (Ta Nea, Kathimerini, Proto Thema) being among the most popular, according to SCImago Media Rankings (SMRs), when the study started (in June 2023) and second, their ideological inclinations in a way that would reflect the political climate in Greece today, which is characterized by a conservative right-wing government and a variety of divided and fragmented extreme right-wing, center-left, and left political spaces. The unit of analysis was the individual story, which included opinion articles, news reports, and feature stories. News articles were coded between 14 and 20 June 2023.

Based on the theory of peace journalism, the corresponding model developed by Kalfeli et al. (2022) on media framing of migration, and a comprehensive pilot content analysis of a representative sample of news stories, a codebook consisting of twelve (12) indicators for content analysis was created (Table 1). The 12 indicators—six for a conflict frame and six for a peace frame—are used to investigate various facets of how the Pylos' wreck was portrayed in the media. To put it succinctly, the indicators cover the following topics: approach, problem definition, threat/victim stereotypical framing, solutions, human stories, language, official sources, international organizations and NGOs, refugee, and migrant voice (Kalfeli et al. 2022). We will define these indicators and explain their inclusion in the study's codebook in the ensuing paragraphs.

Table 1. Indicators of a conflict and a peace frame.

Conflict Frame	Peace Frame
1.Official sources	7. Multi-party orientation
2. Refugees and migrants as a threat or as a victim	8. Focus on human stories
3. Refugees and migrants as numbers and as statistics	9. Refugee/migrant voice
4. Emotive language	10. Non-emotive language
5. Smugglers as the sole problem	11. Structural violence as a problem
6. Political solutions	12. Human rights solutions

Within a conflict frame, the first coding category examines how frequently official voices—politicians, police, and military officers—dominate news articles as a source of information (Galtung 1998; Lee and Maslog 2005). The second indicator is used to track stereotypes and specifically how frequently stereotypical frames of threat and victimization are used to depict migration. Concisely put, the second coding category draws from peace journalism theory (Kalfeli et al. 2022) and the corresponding literature on media representations of migration (Benson 2013; Kim et al. 2011; Thorbjornsrud 2015; Youngblood 2017). It aims to investigate the frequency with which refugees and migrants are portrayed as a threat to public health and security and as invaders (Dimitriadi 2020; Esses et al. 2013; Léonard and Kaunert 2020) or as suffering victims of war and persecution. Put another way, it seeks to explore how frequently refugees and migrants are portrayed as either sufferers or threats, but never as human beings (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski 2017). The third category

of content analysis looks at whether refugees and migrants are dehumanized or if they are portrayed as a group of people without names, voices, or emotions (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski 2017). The fourth indicator examines the language and whether it is emotive, in terms of demonizing (migrants described as "terrorists" and "invaders"), victimizing (the shipwreck as a "tragedy", "shame", and "hell" and the Aegean Sea as a "wet grave" for refugees and migrants), and divisive (migration in war terms, e.g., "health bomb", "battle", or "invasion", or as natural disasters, e.g., "waves" or "tsunamis") (Kalfeli et al. 2022). Our fifth indicator looks at how often migration is portrayed as a problem per se and smuggling is represented as the primary source of all the pain experienced by migrants and refugees. Finally, the sixth indicator evaluates how frequently news reports highlight enforcement and preventive measures (which also include border control and prevention) as ways to address migration (Benson 2013; Kalfeli et al. 2022; Suarez-Orozco et al. 2011).

Within a peace frame, the next three coding categories aim to track a multi-party approach in news articles. More specifically, our seventh indicator, which comes directly from the theory of peace journalism (Galtung 1998; Kalfeli et al. 2022), measures the frequency with which news reports supplement official sources with a variety of other sources of information, such as the opinions of NGOs and international organizations. In a similar vein, the eighth indicator seeks for news items that focus on human stories and represent migrants and refugees as distinct people with names, distinct traits, feelings, aspirations, and objectives (Chouliaraki 2006; Kalfeli et al. 2022). The ninth coding category draws from the literature on media framing of migration as well as Galtung's category of "voice to the voiceless" (Kalfeli et al. 2022; Thorbjornsrud and Figenschou 2016). It looks for news stories in which there are direct quotes from refugees and migrants, either as an individual's voice or as a collective voice conveyed by their official representatives. According to Verleyen and Beckers (2023), refugees and migrants are more likely to be portrayed positively when they have a voice. The tenth indicator examines the frequency with which news reports use neutral language (Galtung 1998; Kalfeli et al. 2022). The eleventh coding category looks at how news reports portray structural violence as the main problem, related to injustices and inequalities resulting from institutions, laws, and structures, such as illegal pushbacks in the sea as a state practice (Galtung 1998; Kalfeli et al. 2022). Lastly, the twelfth coding category examines whether news reports are human security-oriented (Acharya 2001) and concentrate on solutions grounded on human rights law.

The signs of a conflict or peace frame that predominated the coverage of migration to Greece were identified using the twelve coding categories mentioned above. Each news story was evaluated, in this context, based on factors like the inclusion of refugee and migrant voices, the use of several parties, and other factors. Each time an indicator was found, a score of one was noted.

Regarding inter-coder reliability, two independent coders with the necessary training completed a coding of 45 news items (10% from each media outlet) out of a total of 447 news items. Reliability was calculated by a percentage agreement method. This measurement shows that the average percentage agreement across coders was 87.7%, with a range of 84% to 92%. This is higher than conventional reliability criteria (Neuendorf 2002).

4. Results

This study's key findings are outlined in the section that follows. Within this context, the most notable indicators of a conflict and a peace frame as well as the differences and resemblances among the various media sources are also highlighted.

4.1. Most Frequent Indicators of Conflict and Peace Frames

In contrast to the past when refugees and migrants were often portrayed as a threat to the host society—for example, as invaders and as a threat to public safety and health (Kalfeli et al. 2022; Kalfeli et al. 2023)—in the case under examination, refugees and migrants are presented, in the vast majority of publications, that is, in 386 (86.4%) of news stories, as *victims* of the shipwreck, as *bodies at* risk (Giuliani 2016). This shift in the frame

is partly explained by the size of the tragedy and by the fact that among the potentially hundreds of people who drowned off southern Greece were many women and children; further, the Pylos' wreck was described as the worst maritime disaster in the Mediterranean Sea since the Second World War. At the same time, it may also be due to the fact that Greek authorities and the Hellenic Coast Guard were largely accused of having failed to protect the lives of those on the boat that capsized in June 2023.

The victim framing approach is enhanced by the language used, as a large percentage of news stories uses emotive vocabulary and the terms "tragedy", "hell", "wet grave", "floating graveyard", among others, to describe the sea in which the wreck took place, as evidenced by the following extracts from Kathimerini, Proto Thema, Eleftheros Typos, and Ta Nea:

> *Shipwreck in Pylos: "We have never before experienced such a tragedy in our country".* (Kathimerini 2023b)

> *Shipwreck in Pylos: The Mediterranean Sea is a "watery grave"—Around 600 migrants on board the boat that sank in international waters off Pylos.* (Proto Thema 2023d)

> *Shipwreck in Pylos: Journey to hell with the "Mother of Martyrs"—The tragic irony of the fishing boat's name.* (Eleftheros Typos 2023b)

> *"The ship is a floating graveyard".* (Politi 2023)

Despite the fact that refugees and migrants are described as victims and not as perpetrators, at the same time, they are dehumanized, as they are very often portrayed as numbers or statistics, as a mass of people without voice, name, and emotions, in 380 out of 447 news stories (85%). Only 15% of the news stories emphasized the individuality of the victims or survivors by highlighting their personal human story, that is, presenting them as individuals with feelings, dreams, and hopes.

> *Unspeakable tragedy with the shipwreck in Pylos: 78 dead, 104 rescued, and fears of dozens of missing persons.* (Ta Nea 2023)

> *Pylos: Major migrant rescue operation—79 dead, 104 rescued.* (Proto Thema 2023b)

Official sources (political elites, the Hellenic Coastguard), as shown in Table 2, were used in 351 (78.5%) news stories. As a result, and as official sources dominated media discourse, criticism towards Greek authorities for not acting earlier to rescue the migrants was overshadowed. Instead, as customarily occurs in the wake of such events (Mancini et al. 2021), much of the blame for the wreck was placed on the smugglers that were seen to have refused help and exploited the desperation of the people seeking to enter Europe and portrayed them as the main cause of the shipwreck, in nearly half of the news stories (48.80%). Among them, few news stories implied that the migrants and refugees on board chose to move abroad and hence contributed to their own misfortune, creating a victim-blaming effect, also identified in the past by Gregoriou et al. (2022).

> *Shipwreck in Pylos: The minute-by-minute chronicle of the tragedy—The smugglers repeatedly refused help.* (Proto Thema 2023e)

> *Shipwreck in Pylos: The Mediterranean at the mercy of smugglers—"Turnover" of millions, a hundred deaths.* (Sadana 2023)

> *The trade of hope and the routes of death.* (Athinakis 2023)

> *Migration: Death slavers, the Libya-Italy routes, and the billion-dollar dance.* (Vamvaka 2023)

Table 2. Indicators of conflict and peace frames (in order of frequency of appearance).

Conflict Frame Indicators	Frequency of Appearance (% of Appearance in the News Stories)
1. Refugees and migrants as numbers and statistics	380 (85%)
2. Refugees and migrants as a threat or as a victim As a threat As a victim	393 (88%) 7 (1.6%) 386 (86.4%)
3. Official Sources	351 (78.5%)
4. Emotional language	342 (76.5%)
5. Political solutions	274 (61.3%)
6. Smugglers as the sole problem	218 (48.8%)
Peace Frame Indicators	
1. Structural violence as a problem	154 (34.5%)
2. Non-emotional language	105 (23.5%)
3. Multi-party orientation	103 (23%)
4. Refugee/migrant voice	79 (17.7%)
5. Focus on human stories	67 (15%)
6. Human rights solutions	65 (14.5%)

At the same time, it is also important to stress that these examples allow us to see how the identification of a problem in one way or another also indicates the solutions adopted to solve the problem. For example, when the main problem identified is that of migrant smuggling, the main solution is to dismantle the trafficking networks and to limit and prevent migrant departures. These solutions were mainly highlighted through the discourse of official sources. In contrast, solutions based on human rights law, for example, the need to chart safe routes for refugees and migrants, were rarely portrayed (detected in only 14.50% of the news stories). Moreover, the rescue operation executed by the Hellenic Coast Guard after the boat capsized and the transfer of survivors to a camp outside Athens were overemphasized as evidence of care, support, and treatment provided to them. This is in accordance with what Giubilaro (2018) found about visual frames of search and rescue operations across the Mediterranean Sea, that they reinforce and reproduce the related narratives of humanitarianism and securitarianism, an approach which is further discussed below [in the Discussion section].

Shipwreck in Pylos—Messages from Europeans: "We must put an end to the ruthless operation of smugglers". (Proto Thema 2023c)

"The shipwreck brings to the fore once again, in the most tragic way, the need to dismantle the global human trafficking networks which place migrants' lives in danger", [the Migration Ministry] said. (Kathimerini 2023a)

Coast Guard: Rescued 80 migrants off Pylos, in international waters. (Proto Thema 2023a)

Migration Ministry: those rescued from the shipwreck of Pylos will be transferred to Malakasa camp [. . .] The transport will be done under the responsibility of the ministry with hired buses. In Malakasa, preparations have already been made for their reception

since yesterday as this structure had been chosen from the very beginning. (Eleftheros Typos 2023a)

However, as the Hellenic Coast Guard is highly criticized by international organizations for failing to act soon, structural violence, that is, violence caused by the structures of the state (e.g., bad practices or delays of the coast guard) is portrayed, in 34.50% (around one third) of the publications, as the main cause of the boat disaster. However, it was much more evident in the left-wing Efsyn (in 76.8% of its news stories), as we will see in the next section.

The Coast Guard knew hours before that the fishing boat was rocking dangerously. (Angelidis and Papastathopoulou 2023)

4.2. Differences and Similarities between Different Media Outlets

The selected media outlets' portrayals of refugees and migrants varied significantly, while research results also highlight important similarities in the way that the migrant shipwreck was portrayed, chief among them being the absence of refugee and migrant voice and the predominance of political elites as sources in all media.

Content analysis showed that political affiliation (left or right) affects the frequency with which conflict or peace indicators emerge. The largest differences were registered among media outlets with varying political viewpoints. More specifically, notable distinctions were found between media outlets with opposing political views in categories that expressed a more salient pro- or anti-migrant load. For example, while smuggling of refugees and migrants was portrayed as the main or the sole problem and as the principal reason behind the shipwreck in Pylos in most media outlets (e.g., in 67.5% of the news stories of Eleftheros Typos), this percentage was much lower in the case of the left-wing EfSyn (19.5%) (Figure 1). At the same time, although political solutions of dismantling the trafficking networks and preventing migrant departures are mainly highlighted through the discourse of official sources in most media outlets (e.g., in 78.2% of the news stories of Eleftheros Typos), this percentage was again much lower in the case of the left-wing EfSyn (34.1%) (Figure 2).
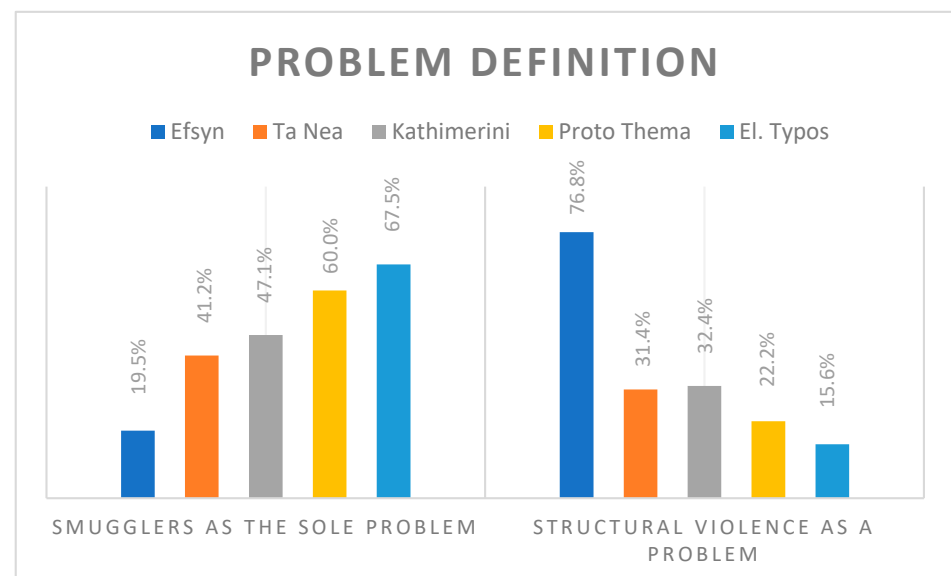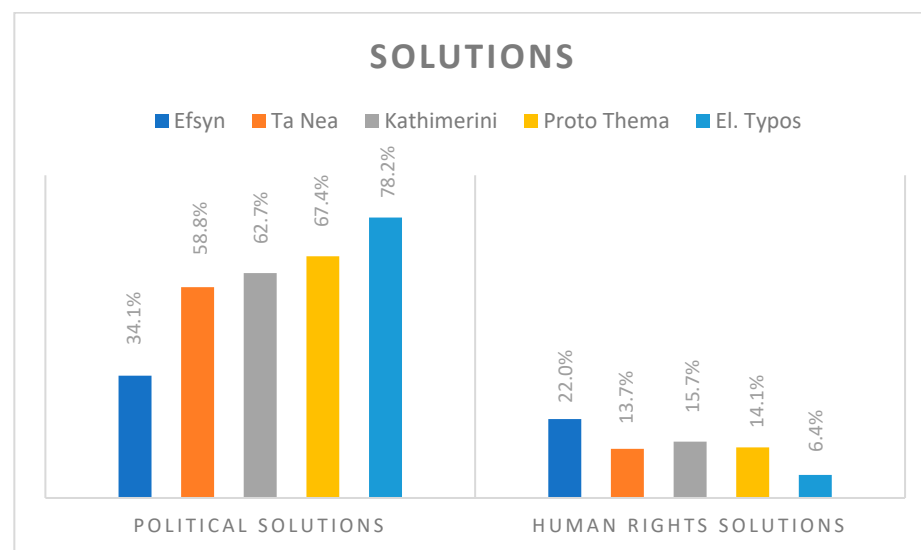

Figure 1. What is defined as a problem?

Figure 2. What is defined as a solution?

Inequalities, injustice, and violation of international human rights law stemming from state structures and practices, such as the responsibility and shortcomings of the Hellenic Coast Guard, were much more evident in the left-wing Efsyn than in the rest of the newspapers, appearing in 76.8% of Efsyn's news stories instead of an average of 34.5% across all media outlets. Leaning toward the opposition, this is also Efsyn's way of targeting the New Democracy's conservative government.

The aforementioned study results highlight the significance of political affiliation—left or right—in relation to the frequency of conflict or peace indicators. However, similar to our previous findings (Kalfeli et al. 2022; Kalfeli et al. 2023), our latest analysis uncovered significant overlaps in the news coverage provided by various media outlets. Notably, official sources predominate in all media channels, accounting for an average of 78.5% of news items (compared to 76.8% in Efsyn and 82.4% in Kathimerini). This is mainly because politicians and coast guard officers are frequently the only sources of information included in the news story.

In keeping, also, with our previous study on voice, there is a significant absence of refugee and migrant voice in all media outlets (Kalfeli et al. 2022; Kalfeli et al. 2023), in 82.3% of all news stories on average, including the left-leaning EfSyn (in which refugee and migrant voice appeared in 18.3% of the news stories). Similar to this, while refugees and migrants are very often depicted as a mass, the human narrative is rarely portrayed (only in 15% of all news items). The Greek media's underrepresentation of the individuality of refugees and migrants, even in a situation in which they are the main protagonists of the story, victims, survivors, and witnesses of a tragedy that struck hundreds of people, the lack of agency and voice show how little value they have in society and ultimately result in their symbolic obliteration (Yücel 2021).

Moreover, only an average of 14.5% of news stories mention human rights-based solutions, such as safe pathways for refugees and migrants (more specifically, 22% of news stories in Efsyn, 15.7 in Kathimerini, and only 6.4% in Eleftheros Typos). This indicates that there are certain topics that, independent of the political stance of the media outlet, are hardly ever covered in the media, leading to an inadequate and oversimplified portrayal of migration in the Greek media.

5. Discussion

This study looked at how the Pylos boat disaster, one of the deadliest migrant ship-wrecks in the Mediterranean Sea, was covered by five Greek media outlets. This article contributes to the previous literature by offering insights on the less frequently covered news topic of migrant shipwrecks (despite thousands of migrant deaths via shipwrecks in

the last few years). Moreover, it provides a more nuanced and multilayered analysis, touching on the less explored, positive and negative, aspects of media portrayals of refugees and migrants in Greece by selecting a peace journalism theoretical approach (Galtung 1998, 2006) and the corresponding model for the analysis of mediated representations of migration (Kalfeli et al. 2022).

The characteristics of the media portrayal of the Pylos wreck are partially different from those in the past; if we contrast these results, for instance, with the portrayal that predominated in March 2020, during the cross-border crisis in Evros, when migrants and refugees were portrayed as invaders (Kalfeli et al. 2023), we find that in the case under review and in the great majority of publications, migrants and refugees are portrayed as victims, people at risk, victims of exploitation, and objects of smugglers' crimes. The magnitude of the migrant boat disaster and the fact that many women and children were among the hundreds of people who perished off the coast of southern Greece help to explain this partial change in perspective. It might also be because the Hellenic Coast Guard and Greek authorities were heavily criticized for not doing enough to save the lives of the people aboard the boat that capsized in June 2023.

Despite the fact that migrants and refugees are seen as victims rather than offenders, they are nonetheless dehumanized, since they are frequently represented as anonymous groups of people without names, voices, or feelings. Very few of the news reports highlighted the victims' or survivors' unique human tales, portraying them as real individuals with feelings, aspirations, and goals.

Most importantly, as is often the case after similar incidents (Mancini et al. 2021), smugglers were held solely responsible for the wreck, having been accused of taking advantage of the desperate attempts of individuals trying to reach Europe. Moreover, some news reports suggested that the migrants and refugees on board themselves made the decision to relocate overseas, which led to their own hardship and fostered victimization, an aspect also noted by Gregoriou et al. (2022). Anchored in the discourse and the agenda of official sources, the media under investigation was unable to draw attention to the range of issues surrounding migration at this time. During a period when Greece was being accused of unlawful pushbacks by a number of NGOs and international organizations (ECRE; Amnesty International), just one-third of news reports mentioned discrimination and inequality resulting from state structures and practices (such as illegal pushbacks at sea). Instead, as the sole blame was placed on migrant smuggling, the major answer depicted was to dismantle the trafficking networks and limit and prohibit migrant departures. The official sources' discourse mostly highlighted these solutions. Conversely, human rights law-based solutions, such as the necessity of creating safe pathways for migrants and refugee, were hardly represented.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing findings of this study was what has been labeled as "humanitarian securitization", focusing on dynamics between humanitarian and security-oriented rhetoric and policy actions embedded in the EU policy frames (Stepka 2018) and presenting people as "objects' of the smugglers" crime (whose networks must be broken), rather than victims of humanitarian emergencies brought on—in part—by inadequate migration policies. This discourse, which is primarily used by official sources, has also been seen in earlier works (Aradau 2004; Cusumano and Bell 2021; Moreno-Lax 2018; Parker et al. 2022; Watson 2011). It adopts a humanitarian "coat" to argue for the need to protect populations on the move from unscrupulous smugglers, while on the other hand, using this rhetoric of compassion to encourage stricter measures to curb migration. This is particularly important, because it reveals a more subtle and difficult to detect anti-migration narrative; at the first level, this rhetoric seems to care about refugees and migrants and thus shifts all responsibility on illicit, inhumane smuggling networks, but instead of suggesting safe pathways to Europe, it emphasizes the need for more stringent regulations with the aim to discourage migration.

At the same time, the content analysis revealed some interesting similarities in representation. As noted in the past (Kalfeli et al. 2022; Kalfeli et al. 2023), certain elements of the

representation are repeated regardless of the political orientation of the media outlet. For example, the voice of migrants and refugees is absent, to a high degree, even from media that adopt a more pro-migrant approach. Similarly, (non-official) sources, i.e., international organizations, NGOs, and experts, are less often given a voice, which would discuss the causes or possible solutions, not only in favor of highlighting border security but also human security. At the same time, although migrants and refugees are often portrayed as a mass and as numbers, in a few cases, the journalists' lens would focus on the individuality of the migrant, on the human story, the experience, the trauma, the emotion.

As noted, we are now increasingly confronted with a more elusive anti-migration discourse, which is placing sole blame on illegal smuggling rings and highlighting, as the only solutions, stricter measures and deterrence of migration via illegal practices, such as pushbacks, that violate the country's treaty obligations. It is crucial to emphasize, nonetheless, that Greece's policy on irregular migration and its discourse surrounding it are closely linked to the EU institutions' heavy securitization, which serves to justify drastic measures taken to curb the flow of migrants and refugees. In practical terms, the widespread use of military tactics in migration-related processes has supported the securitization of policy through militarization practices of external border controls (by endorsing the support of NATO fleets for border protection in southern Europe and using institutional tools of the EU CSDP). This minimizes the consideration of humanitarian factors that accelerate irregular migration.

6. Conclusions

In this study, we examined media coverage of the migrant shipwreck off the Greek coast of Pylos, in June 2023, in which more than 600 people mostly from Syria, Egypt, and Pakistan are thought to have drowned. Following an analysis of 447 news stories from the online platforms of five Greek media outlets that represent a range of political perspectives, we discovered that, although there appears to be a shift toward a victim framing approach, which is explained by the size and severity of the migrant shipwreck, a more nuanced and subtle anti-migration narrative has been revealed in media discourse. Initially, this discourse appears to be concerned with refugees and migrants, placing all the blame on illegal and cruel smuggling networks. However, rather than discussing inadequate migration policies in Europe, it highlights the necessity of stricter laws intended to discourage migration.

In the years to come, conflicts, warfare, poverty, and climate change will all persist and probably get worse (Dimitriadi 2020). As of 20 April 2024, the war in Gaza persists, with more than a million displaced people. Greece, Europe, and the developed world will continue to face challenges related to migration. The media will remain crucial in this environment for timely preparation of the ground for societal discourse on migration. To enhance inclusive media coverage of refugees and migrants, media professionals should strive to improve their comprehension and training in diversity-related matters, expand their journalistic practices to incorporate non-elite sources, and hone their techniques in order to be able to detect the more subtle, elusive anti-migration narratives of our changing times.

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