

Article

MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF MIGRANT AND REFUGEE POPULATIONS AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE DURING TWO CRISES IN GREECE BETWEEN 2020-2022: MIGRATORY MOVEMENTS AT THE GREEK-TURKISH LAND BORDERS IN EVROS AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Representación mediática de las poblaciones migrantes y refugiadas y discurso público durante dos crisis en Grecia entre 2020-2022: los movimientos migratorios en las fronteras terrestres greco-turcas en Evros y la pandemia de covid-19

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Abstract: Introduction: Public discourse, whether it concerns the dominant political discourse or the media of mass opinion formation, can become the determinants of positive or negative impressions, while it is observed that in recent years their role regarding refugees and migrants has been mainly negative. In February 2020, the flow crisis at the Greek-Turkish border (Evros) began when refugees and migrants attempted to cross the Greek border in their effort to enter Europe. The migratory movement crisis at the Evros border point of entry was followed by a second crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic. The article aims to examine the representation of migrant and refugee populations in public discourse in Greece between 2020-2022 during the two crises, those of the migratory movements at the Greek-Turkish land borders in Evros and the health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. Methodology: Systematic literature review of the research carried out in studies that have taken place regarding the representation of refugees and immigrants in public discourse during two crises, for the period 2020-2022. This work takes into account all the studies, in English and Greek, that have been carried out with the specific keywords, for the aforementioned period. Results: It emerges from the literature review that in public discourse, both in political discourse and in the mass media and social media, in newspapers and in social networks, that refugees and migrants are mainly portrayed negatively regarding a) the migratory movement crisis at the border entry point of Evros in February-March 2020 and b) during the public health crisis. Discussion: Refugees and migrants are depicted/represented as “invaders”, as “dangerous” and the “harmful elements”, as an asymmetric threat to national security, the socio-political community and public health.

Keywords: Reception crisis, Evros, COVID-19, Public discourse, Media, Press, Social media, Migrants, Refugees.

Resumen: Introducción: El discurso público, ya se trate del discurso político dominante o de los medios de formación de la opinión de masas, puede convertirse en determinante de impresiones positivas o negativas, mientras que se observa que en los últimos años su papel en relación con los refugiados y los migrantes ha sido principalmente negativo. En febrero de 2020, comenzó la crisis de flujos en la frontera greco-turca (Evros) cuando refugiados y migrantes intentaron cruzar la frontera

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griega en su esfuerzo por entrar en Europa. A la crisis de flujo migratorio en el punto de entrada de la frontera de Evros le siguió una segunda crisis, la pandemia de COVID-19. El artículo pretende examinar la representación de las poblaciones migrantes y refugiadas en el discurso público en Grecia entre 2020-2022 durante las dos crisis, las de los movimientos migratorios en las fronteras terrestres greco-turcas en Evros y la crisis sanitaria de la pandemia COVID-19. Metodología: Revisión bibliográfica sistemática de las investigaciones realizadas en estudios que han tenido lugar sobre la representación de refugiados e inmigrantes en el discurso público durante dos crisis, para el periodo 2020-2022. Este trabajo tiene en cuenta todos los estudios, en inglés y griego, que se han realizado con las palabras clave específicas, para el periodo mencionado. Resultados: De la revisión de la literatura se desprende que en el discurso público, tanto en el discurso político como en los medios de comunicación de masas y los medios sociales, en los periódicos y en las redes sociales, que los refugiados y los migrantes son retratados principalmente de forma negativa en relación con a) la crisis de los movimientos migratorios en el punto de entrada fronteriza de Evros en febrero-marzo de 2020 y b) durante la crisis de salud pública. Debate: Los refugiados y los migrantes son descritos/representados como «invasores», como “peligrosos” y los «elementos nocivos», como una amenaza asimétrica para la seguridad nacional, la comunidad socio-política y la salud pública.

Palabras clave: Crisis de acogida, Evros, COVID-19, Discurso público, Medios de comunicación, Prensa, Medios sociales, Migrantes, Refugiados.

1. Introduction.

Migration is among the top issues of the political agenda of the states (Koser, 2016, p. 11). However, what happens with the dominant public discourse: is it appeasing or aggressive regarding the refugee and migratory flows? Public and political discussions are often shaped by the fear of large numbers of migrants, including refugees, asylum seekers, and irregular migrants (Balajaran et al., 2011, p. 261). In recent years, the European Union (EU) has placed a greater emphasis on border security. There is a clear focus on securitization to manage the influx of refugees and migrants (Vasilaki, 2022, p. 79). This shift has become especially evident following the reception crisis of 2015 in both the EU and Greece (Fouskas, 2019; Christopoulos and Spyropoulou, 2016, , pp. 23-27). In public discourse, migration is often referred as a threat to the state sovereignty with the emphasis given to the border controls to impede the entry of refugees and migrants (Koser, 2016, pp. 77-78).

In the early months of 2020, a crisis was intensifying at the Greek-Turkish border, leading to a significant humanitarian crisis. On the Turkish side, authorities employed a strategy of directing refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers toward the Greek border. In response, Greek authorities adopted a tactic of pushing these individuals back to the Turkish side (Oztig, 2020, pp. 78-80). A few weeks later, the aforementioned are followed by another crisis of unprecedented scale and intensity for the modern world, shifting the public attention to the issue of public health. The management of the COVID-19 pandemic has created new

constraints on the mobility of migration across closed borders as well as on the treatment of refugee and migrant populations (European Parliament, 2022 and UNCHR reporting, 2020).

The aim of this chapter is to contribute to the upgrading of the existing knowledge resulting from the relevant research regarding the use of the refugee and migrant figure in the public discourse, considering the latter as an outgrowth and/or as a shaper of migration policy. It is necessary to clarify at this point that this paper discusses the concept of public discourse. This includes the mainstream political and journalistic discourse that is publicly expressed. It encompasses both traditional media and social media. Additionally, it covers the public discourse of influential groups and citizens. This refers to discussions and hashtags on social networks about refugee and migrant populations. The focus is on the crises in Greece during the two-year period from 2020 to 2022.

2. The construction of the «Other» and the dominant public discourse.

According to Carl Schmitt (1888-1985), the exception constitutes the very essence of sovereignty as the Sovereign is the one who decides both on the imposition as well as on the content that will be given to the state of exception (Schmitt, 1922, pp. 28-29). In Schmitt's argument, the most indisputable political determination is the special distinction that takes place on the thread of Enemy/Friend (Schmitt, 1922, p. 61) in which the Enemy is the public and existential threat to our way of life. He is the Public Enemy as he was pointed out as a threat by the Sovereign who decides unaffected by the general rule for whom he designates as the dangerous Other to the purity of homogeneity (Schmitt, 1922, p. 28).

On the other hand, in Foucauldian thought (Michel Foucault 1926-1984) racism is instrumentalized in order to achieve the separation of the good and bad population; racism is 'mobilized' by biopower in order to achieve the racial/biological distinction of Enemy and Friend in order to eliminate -directly or indirectly, by physical killing or by removal- the threat to the population in the context of the exercise of biopolitics/biopower (Foucault, 1976, pp. 311-316). Racism is not only used for the racial separation of the good population from the bad per se but is enlisted as a weapon for the survival of the good population and ultimately for the *homeostasis* (Foucault, 1976, pp. 311-316) of the social-political body of a community's population by eliminating the threat by any means. For Foucault, the biopolitical system of power and knowledge, biopower and power relations, operate beyond the institutions themselves through the role of the Discourse (Lyrintzis, 1995, pp. 7-8). A political regime imposes itself through discourse by constructing new normalities, new knowledge, new truths, desires and needs. Therefore, the language and the choice of discourse shape the social consciousnesses.

The dominant public discourse can acquire a propagandistic form through the mass media by using emotional representations with evaluative and generalized dimensions; in other words, it seeks to form images (e.g. refugee 'flows', 'waves') with universal significance (Pleios, 2001, pp. 89-101). Subsequently, the recipients of the public discourse are led into a "safe" knowledge (Pleios, 2001, pp. 99-100) and internalize a given situation as reality. The media with their special role as expressers and shapers of public discourse could not be bypassed with regards to the creation of perceptions, ideas, stereotypes and myths formed around the presence of migrants, applicants for international protection and refugees.

The opinion forming mass media can become the "multipliers" of positive or negative impressions in public discourse, while it is observed that in recent years their role has been mainly negative for refugees and migrants (Amitsis et al., 2015, pp. 73-74). Refugee and migrant flows are usually represented in the host countries as another "crisis" (Kounalaki, 2019) or as cataclysmic (Koser, 2016, pp. 78-79) and a possible threat for disrupting the imagined dominant human-political community based on the national myth (Christopoulos, 2002, pp. 141-142, Anderson, 1997, pp. 26-28). The media and the social networks have the power to become determinants of the formation of the public opinion concerning who belongs or not to the mythical community as well as to the maintenance and/or creation of negative stereotypes, social racism and cultural racism/xenophobia (Amitsis et al, 2015, pp. 59-73) towards the different, towards the Other.

In the Greek case, the public opinion becomes the recipient of views usually expressed in public discourse according to which the mass immigration is represented as an invasion, as a threat to the social cohesion but also as the culprit of diseases, unemployment and crime (Fouskas & Koulirakis, 2022, pp. 19-20). The instrumentalization of the migrant/refugee figure as a threat continues to exist even after the legalization of their status in the country. The collective fear of the refugee and migrant figure does not cease as the latter threatens to alter the constructed ethno-cultural myth (Amitsis et al., 2015, pp. 70). These populations are too often conceived as *bare life* (Agamben, 1995, pp. 41, 136-137) subjected to harassment and violence without a public voice to co-shape the dominant public discourse regarding them and not against them.

In conclusion, according to public discourse, the migrant, the asylum seeker, the refugee is the threat of the existence and continuity of the political community in terms of sovereignty and the racial enemy of the population in terms of biopolitics: in any case, as the danger that must remain external. The Other is depicted as inferior and dangerous for the homeostasis, homogeneity, security, stability and continuity of the community, both in

existential/political terms and in racial/biological terms and the 'threat' shouldn't be internalized.

2.1. The refugee/migration flow crisis at the Greek-Turkish land border in Evros.

The fence in Evros was constructed exclusively with national funding in 2013 to prevent the arrivals in the area, a move which caused the majority of flows to arrive through the sea entry points in the following years (Christopoulos, and Spyropoulou 2016, pp. 100-105). In 2015, an unprecedented number of more than 850,000 migrants entered mainly by sea from the Greek/European Union borders (IOM, 2015, UNHCR 2024) and in 2016 there were more than 173,000 arrivals (UNHCR 2024): neither Greece nor the European Union wished to relive the reception crisis of 2015-2016 (Christopoulos, 2020, p. 17). Following these years, the number of arrivals were sharply decreased.

The new refugee/migrant flow crisis started on 27 February 2020 at the Greek-Turkish border, at Kastanies-Pazarkule crossing. In 'retaliation' for the loss of 33 Turkish soldiers on the Syrian front in Idlib, the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned the European Union that he would leave the Turkish border open so that waves of refugees, including Syrian refugees, could flow unhindered from Turkey to the European Union (Evans and Coskun, 2020; Rose, 2020). It is necessary to underline that this meant from the Turkish side the non-observance of the EU-Turkey Joint Declaration,³ an agreement of 2016 under which it was foreseen, inter alia, the prevention of the opening of "*new sea or land routes of illegal migration from Turkey to the EU and will cooperate in this regard with the neighboring countries as well as with the EU.*" (European Council, 2016). Following President Erdogan'

³ Note: EU-Turkey Statement, 18 March 2016: "[...]Turkey and the European Union reaffirmed their commitment to implement their joint action plan[...]In order to break the business model of the smugglers and to offer migrants an alternative to putting their lives at risk, the EU and Turkey today decided to end the irregular migration from Turkey to the EU. In order to achieve this goal, they agreed on the following additional action points: 1) All new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Greek islands as from 20 March 2016 will be returned to Turkey. This will take place in full accordance with EU and international law, thus excluding any kind of collective expulsion. All migrants will be protected in accordance with the relevant international standards and in respect of the principle of non-refoulement. It will be a temporary and extraordinary measure which is necessary to end the human suffering and restore public order. Migrants arriving in the Greek islands will be duly registered and any application for asylum will be processed individually by the Greek authorities in accordance with the Asylum Procedures Directive, in cooperation with UNHCR. Migrants not applying for asylum or whose application has been found unfounded or inadmissible in accordance with the said directive will be returned to Turkey. Turkey and Greece, assisted by EU institutions and agencies, will take the necessary steps and agree any necessary bilateral arrangements, 2) For every Syrian returning to Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian will be resettled from Turkey to the EU, taking into account the UN vulnerability criteria.[...] 3) Turkey will take any necessary measures to prevent new sea or land routes for illegal migration opening from Turkey to the EU, and will cooperate with neighbouring states as well as the EU to this effect. [...]6) The EU, in close cooperation with Turkey, will further speed up the disbursement of the initially allocated 3 billion euros under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey and ensure funding of further projects for persons under temporary protection identified with swift input from Turkey before the end of March."

announcements for the opening of the borders, thousands of displaced people mobilized and headed towards the land border in Evros.

The Greek side responded by reinforcing security forces along the border area and the next day the Greek Prime Minister declared that "*no illegal entries into Greece will be tolerated*"⁴. Subsequently, European leaders were briefed on the situation at the Greek border (Athens Macedonian News Agency, 2020). On the 1st of March, the Government's National Security Council decided, inter alia, the suspension of asylum applications for one month for the "illegal entrants" and the immediate return of asylum seekers to their country of origin, without registration of the asylum seekers due to "*the extremely urgent and unforeseeable need to address an asymmetric threat to the security of the country that exceeds the justificatory basis of international and EU law for the asylum procedure [...]*" (Government Gazette of the Hellenic Republic, 2020). However, a state can neither suspend the internationally recognized right of individuals to seek asylum in a country nor override the principle of non-refoulement as emphasized in EU law and cannot apply punitive policies to individuals who enter its territory irregularly, especially when they apply for international protection (UNHCR, 2020). Thousands of people found themselves trapped for days between the Greek-Turkish border, without access to the relevant services to apply for international protection, without access to health care (Council of Europe, 2020).

Refugees and migrants were once again in the middle of a deep-rooted political conflict between the two states. On the one hand, the Turkish President was announcing the open borders misleading purposefully and urging the displaced to move to the Greek-Turkish borders, by even providing them with buses by the Turkish state (Smith & Busby, 2020) taking them from Istanbul to Evros; on the other hand, the Greek authorities were responding with the use of extensive violence, focusing exclusively on securing the land borders in the region.

In the following days of March 2020, tens of thousands of refugees and migrants attempted to cross the border (Athens Macedonian News Agency, 2020). There were numerous complaints coming from refugees and migrants about refoulement, violence, inhuman and degrading behavior against them by the Greek forces (Karadsheh, 2020). In the war climate in Evros apart from fights, tear gases and water cannons which were used for the violent pushbacks (Konstantinidis & Papadimas, 2020) there were also claims about deaths (Amnesty International, 2020, Christides et al, 2020). During the crisis of the Greek-

⁴ Prime Minister GR, X Post, «Significant numbers of migrants and refugees have gathered in large groups at the Greek-Turkish land border and have attempted to enter the country illegally. I want to be clear: no illegal entries into Greece will be tolerated. We are increasing our border security»

Turkish land border flows, the EU side and in particular the President of the European Commission thanked Greece *"for being our European shield"*, (European Commission, 2020).

However, the most characteristic was the lightning shift -in within just a few days- of the domestic media' attention from the crisis in Evros to the health crisis (Polymeneas & Serafis, 2020).

2.2. The health crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The crisis in Evros was followed by another, global and completely unexpected, crisis. At the end of January 2020, in a climate of unprecedented horror, the World Health Organization declared a public health emergency worldwide and a few weeks later, on 11th of March, declared the COVID-19 a pandemic (World Health Organization, 2023). The French President Emmanuel Macron declared in a televised speech that "we are at war" against the pandemic (Momtaz, 2020) and at the same time, he announced the closure of European borders to non-EU citizens (Januzi 2020), in agreement with the European leaders. Greece, like most EU countries, announced restrictive measures as well as lockdowns to limit the spread of the pandemic (Ertnews, 2022; Hirsch, 2020; Fouskas, 2020). The Greek Asylum Service was decided to remain closed to the public by suspending all activities including registration, asylum interviews, requests for legal documents for applicants of international protection and beneficiaries, appeals in cases of rejection decisions, etc. (FRA, 2020).

Thousands of vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers were living during the winter of 2020 under inhumane and degrading conditions in overcrowded reception facilities in the mainland and on the Aegean islands, without heating, access to adequate health care, in conditions of violence and insecurity (Fouskas, et al, 2021, p. 803). Under the weight of the pandemic threat and the incidents in Evros, the LIBE committee called in March and April 2020 for the urgent decongestion of Greek reception centers and the removal of all vulnerable people from them (European Parliament, Briefing, 2020, p. 9).

What happened in practice is the policy of restricting refugees and asylum seekers and asylum seekers who were residing in the camps as the public infrastructure was unable to meet their needs (Dimitriadi, 2020, p. 4). In this generalized climate of insecurity, local communities developed feelings of mistrust and fear towards migrant populations, seeing them as a potential 'health bomb' (Fouskas, 2020, p. 51). During the quarantine period, asylum applicants and refugees experienced the confinement in the shelters around the country in conditions of inadequate protection in terms of access to health care (International Rescue Committee, 2020). Furthermore, the populations residing in the refugee camps felt 'imprisoned' and 'further psychologically burdened' under the fear of the pandemic and under

the pressure of confinement within the facilities (Fouskas, 2023, p. 14). Thereafter, their exclusion continued despite the lifting of measures which were gradually taking place for other population groups (Human Rights Watch, 2020; Kondilis et al., 2021).

Undisputably, the pandemic exposed severe socio-economic inequalities worldwide. In addition, in many cases under the pandemic, harsh deterrent policies against migrant individuals and populations were conceived as legitimized including push-backs, detention, border closures, etc. (Barnes & Makinda, 2021, p. 1688). Moreover, the health crisis and the implementation of restrictive measures had additional negative consequences on the survival efforts of refugees and migrants in Greece: deterioration of their mental health due to the generalized fear generated by the pandemic, their isolation in the camps, the delays in asylum procedures, the restrictions on their few daily activities, (Fouskas, 2023, p. 15), etc.

3. Methodology.

Literature review is a comprehensive evaluation of all available bibliography on a particular research topic. The primary objective of a bibliographic review is to identify, evaluate and synthesize all the relevant studies on a particular research and draw meaningful conclusions based on the collected evidence (Galanis, 2017; Booth & Grant, 2009, p. 102). The purpose of the review is, "[...] to gather all empirical evidence that fits the predefined eligibility criteria in order to answer a specific research question" (Lasserson et al., 2022).

In the present study the bibliographic review -non-systematic- was conducted and a secondary analysis of research was implemented on the representation of refugee and migrant populations in public discourse during two crises in Greece between 2020-2022, namely the flow crisis at the Greek-Turkish border in Evros and the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.1. Search Strategy.

The bibliographic review took place by using the PRISMA methodology. For this study, keywords were used in two languages, namely English and Greek, combined with logical operators (AND, OR). The digital platforms for searching and collecting the data were Google Scholar and Scopus, the latter exclusively in English (see Table 1 Search algorithm). The research was conducted for studies by using several variations of keywords combined with logical operators for achieving accurate results. The description of the preceding research strategies is summarized in the following Tables (2-4):

Table 1.*Search algorithm*

“Evros” AND “COVID-19” AND “crisis” AND “public discourse” OR “press” OR “social media” AND “in Greece” AND “migrant*” OR “refugee*”
(TITLE-ABS-KEY (migrant) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (refugee) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (evros) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (covid-19) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (crisis) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (in AND greece) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (public AND discourse) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (press) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (social AND media))

Table 2.*Google Scholar (English)*

	Terms	Search	Studies
Population	“migrant*” OR “refugee*”	#1	2.720.000
Intervention	“Evros” AND “COVID-19” AND “crisis”	#2	597
Exposure	“in Greece”	#3	2.650.000
Outcome	“public discourse” OR “press” OR “social media”	#4	6.930.000
	#1 AND #2 AND #3 AND #4	#5	262
	#6		
	Filters: Publication date from 2020/01/01 to 2022/12/31; English	#7	232

Table 3.*Scopus*

	Terms	Search	Studies
Population	“migrant*” OR “refugee*”	#1	168,132
Intervention	“Evros” AND “COVID-19” AND “crisis”	#2	1
Exposure	“in Greece”	#3	28,020
Outcome	“public discourse” OR “press” OR “social media”	#4	1,381,380
	#1 AND #2 AND #3 AND #4	#5	1
	#6		
	Filters: Publication date from 2020/01/01 to 2022/12/31; English	#7	1

Table 4.*Google Scholar (Greek)*

	Terms	Search	Studies
Population	“migrant*” OR “refugee*”	#1	35.300
Intervention	“Evros” AND “COVID-19” AND “crisis”	#2	263
Exposure	“in Greece”	#3	629.000
Outcome	“public discourse” OR “press” OR “social media”	#4	1.490.000
	#1 AND #2 AND #3 AND #4	#5	262
	#6		
	Filters: Publication date from 2020/01/01 to 2022/12/31; English	#7	203

3.2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

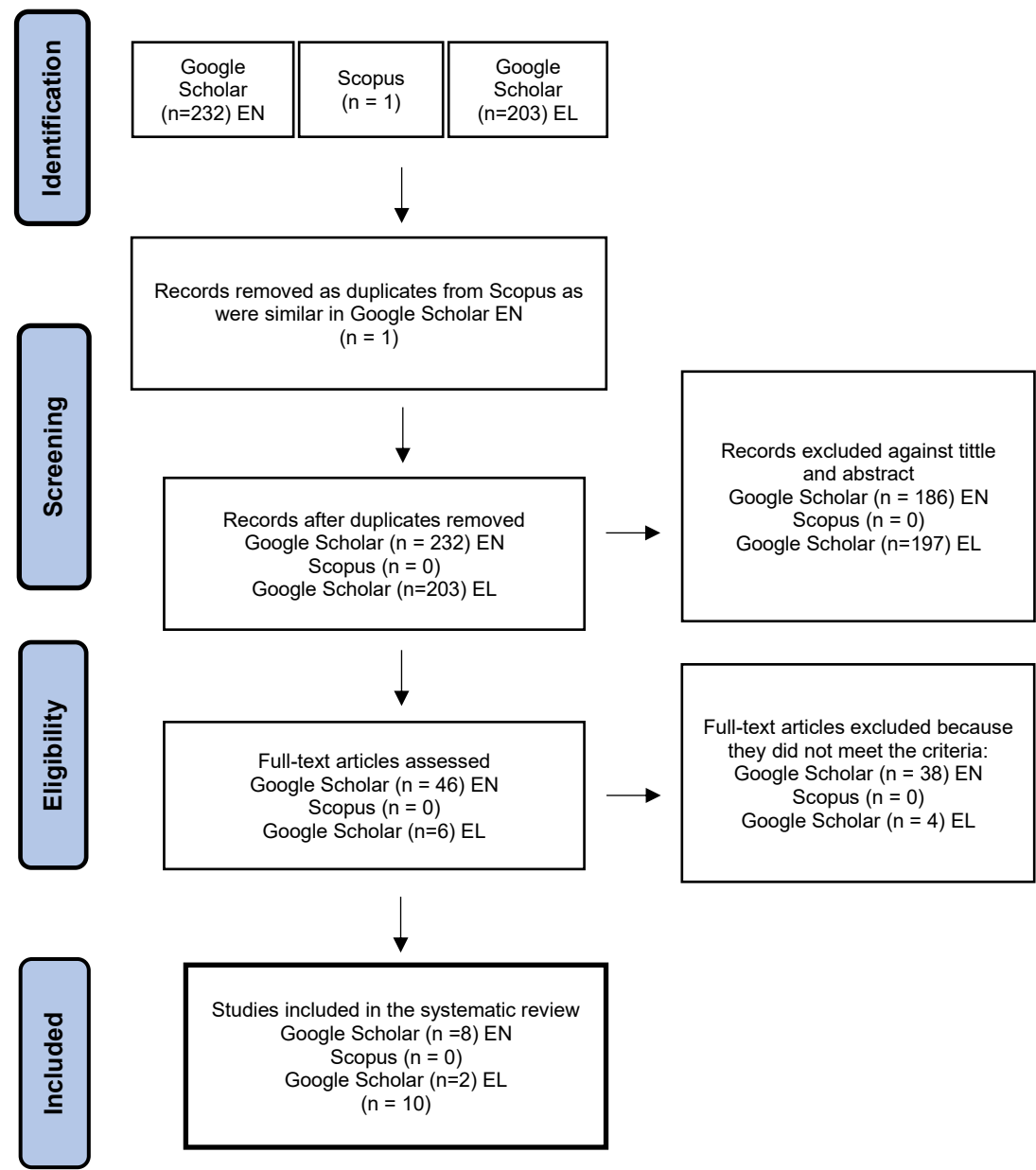
The review included results of research related to the representation of refugees and migrants in public discourse (especially political discourse, media and social networks) during the period of the border crisis in Evros as well as the pandemic crisis, for the period of 01 January 2020-31 December 2022 in the country. The results which were excluded were: a) non research studies, b) research studies irrelevant to Greece and/or irrelevant to the Evros border crisis and the pandemic of COVID-19, c) studies irrelevant specifically to the refugee and migration phenomenon in the two crises under research (border and health crises), d) studies irrelevant to the portrayal of refugees and migrants in public discourse and e) studies irrelevant within the above-mentioned period between 01 January 2020-31 December 2022.

3.3. Final selection of the studies.

Initially, the search conducted in English language resulted in 233 studies in total, in particular 232 from Google Scholar and 1 from Scopus. Then, one study was removed due to duplication, leaving 232 studies. Subsequently, the title and abstract for each of the studies were examined and those studies which did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded (186 studies). Following the above procedure, 8 studies remained. The search conducted in Greek language resulted in 203 studies, in Google Scholar. Subsequently, the title and abstract for each of the studies were examined and similarly to the above, those studies which did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded (197 studies). Finally, 2 studies remained. Following this process, 10 studies remained. A flow chart of the search results is provided below.

The methodological quality of the studies deemed appropriate for inclusion was evaluated using the CASP Qualitative Checklist scales (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme, 2018) (see Table 5).

Table 5.
Flow diagram



Source: Moher *et al.* (2009).

4. Results.

4.1. Description of the main characteristics of the selected studies.

This section of the paper attempts to describe the main characteristics of the studies and summarizes the main findings that emerged from their analysis. The results of the review are presented below, in Table 6.

4.1.1. Country of conduct.

Five (5) studies (Boukala, 2021, Dimari, 2021, Kostopoulos & Mylonas 2022, Iliadou, 2021, Kotrogi, 2020) out of the final ten (n=10) included in the review were conducted in Greece while the rest were conducted in Greece and other countries.

4.1.2. Methodologies of studies.

In all of the included studies, qualitative research and even more specifically content analysis/discourse analysis has been carried out: a) content analysis of social media content/analysis of hashtags and “X’s”(tweets) in four (n=4) studies (Avraamidou et al 2021, Avraamidou & Eftychiou 2022, Chrysou, 2021, Stratoudaki, 2022), b) discourse analysis of either political figures' announcements or content of newspaper articles in five (n=5) studies (Boukala, 2021, Kostopoulos & Mylonas, 2022, Kostopoulou & Paksoy 2021, Iliadou, 2021, Dimari, 2021) and c) content analysis of satirical newspaper cartoons in one (n=1) study (Kotrogi, 2020).

4.1.3. Setting.

All of the studies were conducted in an online environment (n=10).

4.1.4. Population/participants in the studies.

“X’s” (Tweets) (Avraamidou et al 2021, Avraamidou & Eftychiou 2022, Chrysou, 2021, Stratoudaki, 2022), newspaper articles (Kostopoulos & Mylonas, 2022, Kostopoulou & Paksoy 2021, Iliadou, 2021), announcements of political figures (Boukala, 2021, Dimari, 2021), satirical newspaper cartoons (Kotrogi, 2020).

4.1.5. Main findings of studies.

In political discourse, and specifically in public statements and in the official governmental discourse, refugees and migrants were depicted as an "asymmetric threat" to both public health and national security during the "double crisis", the border and the pandemic (Dimari, 2021, p. 350, Iliadou, 2021 , pp. 51-61). Refugees and migrants were identified as dangerous invaders posing a threat to the community, public health and security

while the exclusion of foreign populations is legitimized as necessary (Boukala, 2021, pp. 334-339).

With regards to the representation of refugees and migrants in the Greek press, the following can be found: in the newspapers of the progressive and leftist ideological sphere, the migrants were characterized as 'games' or 'pawns' in the geopolitical chessboard between Greece and Turkey (Kostopoulos & Mylonas, 2022, pp. 6-9). Moreover, the displaced were also represented as trapped victims both by a) the Turkish propaganda, the general policies of Europe and countries towards them, and by b) the far-right groups who acted as militias in the Evros region at the time, engaging in violent attacks against the arrivals (Kostopoulos & Mylonas, 2022, pp. 6-9). On the contrary, center-right, right-wing, and far-right newspapers denied the existence of refugees in Evros, describing them as exclusively migrants who were not displaced by wars (Kostopoulos & Mylonas, 2022, pp. 4-5, 9-16). In addition, the arrivals in Evros were depicted as the asymmetrical threat to national security and sovereignty, as Turkey's battering ram in a hybrid war against the country, as the existential threat to national unity, as the directed violent hordes against Greece and Evros which were under siege and likened to the ancient Thermopylae (Kostopoulos & Mylonas, 2022, pp. 4-5, 9-16). In general, it is verified by the research that refugees and migrants were represented differently by the media depending on the ideological and political space to which the latter belong, without a uniform representation: in the published articles of newspapers belonging to the right-wing and conservative sphere, the displaced persons were characterized as illegal, while the newspapers belonging to the progressive sphere focus on the human dimension concerning the refugees and migrants (Kostopoulou & Paksoy, 2021, pp. 58-62, 68).

Following the public discourse depicted on the Greek press, it is found that in satirical sketches/cartoons published on newspapers concerning the period of the border and health crisis, the refugee and the migrant were also portrayed in the majority of them as dangerous for national and individual integrity (Kotroglia, 2020, pp. 78-81). With the exception of the more moderate sketches in progressive newspapers where the displaced were represented as the victims of political maneuvering and violence, in the rest of the sketches they were depicted as insidious invaders, terrorists, culturally inferior perpetrators, stereotypical criminals, a threat to public health and harmful to the Greeks who on the one hand faced their brutal attack from the East and on the other handled the deadly virus which must equally not be internalized, likewise the dangerous "Others" (Kotroglia, 2020, pp. 56-76, 78-81).

In the cases of the negative representations of displaced people on social media, in line with the Greek Prime Minister's X's/tweet in those days about not tolerating illegal entries into Evros (Stratoudaki, 2022, pp. 10) we similarly observe the publicly expressed discourse of citizens and/or popular individuals with political and social media influence as well as politicians from the Greek government who also represented the arrivals as illegals and aggressive invaders. In particular, influential groups from the right as well as the far-right created hashtags of popular discussions and posts, #IstandwithGreece, #Greece_under_attack, with anti-immigrant content where they represented refugees and migrants as a threat, as unwanted animals or insects, fully dehumanized (Avraamidou et al, 2021, pp. 2855, 2857-2858, Chrysou, 2021, p. 56). At the same time in the comments of these hashtags, an arbitrary distinction of the arrivals in Evros was attempted by questioning whether these arrivals were genuine refugees in any need of protection (Stratoudaki, 2022, p. 10, Avraamidou & Eftychiou, 2022, p. 244, Avraamidou et al 2021, p. 2857). Additionally, on the following days the border crisis fed and was fed by the health crisis on social media hashtags as the arriving populations in Evros were arbitrarily portrayed by X's/Twitter users as disease carriers and threat to the public health (Avraamidou & Eftychiou, 2022, pp. 241). As the health crisis continued to spread, "Evros crisis" was met with the pandemic on social media: one crisis embodied the other and the popular hashtag transformed into "#IStandWithGreece#Greece_under_attack#covid_19" (Chrysou, 2021, pp. 50). From that point and on, the nationalist discourse prevailed with strong anti-immigrant posts in alignment with the dominant political discourse that represented a climate of war which, in turn, legitimizes violence (Chrysou, 2021, pp. 66).

Table 6.*Characteristics of the studies included*

	Author, year	Methods	Country	Setting	Sample/ participants	Results
1	Avraamidou, Eftychiou, Ioannou, 2021	Social Networks and Discourse Analysis on the Hashtag #IStandWithGreece, Twitter Search, Greek-Turkish Border Crisis	Greece (and other countries)	Online	Tweets in the Context of the Indicated Hashtag, #IStandWithGreece.	Utilization of Hashtags with Anti-Immigrant Narratives, Framed in the Social Media Context, During the Greek-Turkish Border Crisis.
2	Avraamidou & Eftychiou, 2022	Social Networks and Hashtag Analysis (co-hashtag network analysis), Content Analysis, Evros Crisis, COVID-19.	Greece (and other countries)	Online	Positive and Negative Hashtags and Tweets Developed in Support of or Against Migrants in the Dual Border Crisis and COVID-19.	Use of Positive and Negative Hashtags About Migrants During the Greek-Turkish Border Crisis at the Start of the Pandemic.
3	Boukala, 2021	Analysis of Political and Governmental Discourse.	Greece	Online	Political discourse encompasses government announcements from Presidents, the Press Secretary, Ministers, and	The incorporation of far-right discourse and xenophobic language into official government communication: portraying migration as a significant threat to national security and public health.

					Members of Parliament from the ruling party.	
4	Chrysou, 2021	Critical analysis of discourse on the Hashtag #IStandWithGreece/during the crisis on the Greek-Turkish borders and COVID-19.	Greece (and other countries)	Online	Publications from 27 main tweets and 642 replies to the hashtag #IStandWithGreece (28/2/20 - 27/3/20).	Refugees are often depicted as threats, enemies, and criminals, as well as potential carriers of disease.
5	Dimari, 2021	Critical analysis of the discourse in public announcements by government officials and scientists during the initial phase of COVID-19 in Greece (February 26, 2020 - June 15, 2020).	Greece	Online	72 announcements in texts/messages by the Prime Minister, government staff, and scientific community figures, engaging in public discourse.	The government characterized the arrival of refugees and migrants in Evros, alongside the onset of the pandemic, as a double crisis. During the pandemic, refugees and migrants were perceived as an additional threat to public health.
6	Kostopoulos, Mylonas, 2022	Qualitative text analysis in articles from five (5) daily newspapers, internet (online newspapers).	Greece	Online	5 articles	In centrist and conservative newspapers, refugees and migrants are often described as an invasion and viewed as a threat to national unity

						and sovereignty in what is depicted as a "war" that Greece is facing from Turkey. In contrast, left-leaning and progressive newspapers tend to emphasize the humanitarian aspects of the crisis.
7	Kostopoulou Paksoy, 2021	Empirical research was conducted through discourse analysis of articles from Greek and Turkish newspapers covering the period from February 28 to March 11, 2020.	Greece and Turkey	Online	Newspaper articles	The articles discussed the events in Evros/Meric based on their political stance: right-wing newspapers opposed "illegal entries," while left-wing newspapers highlighted the emerging "humanitarian crisis."
8	Stratoudaki, 2022	Social Network Analysis: Data collection from Twitter, focusing on tweets from the period of February 28 to March 8, 2020, along with discourse analysis.	Greece (and other countries)	Online	Thousands of tweets.	One of the main conclusions from the research on the Evros crisis is the depiction of immigrants as "invaders."

9	Iliadou, 2021	Critical discourse analysis in texts, online posts, and sketches.	Greece	Online	Political Statement of the Minister of Citizen Protection.	Reproducing xenophobic and racist stereotypes portrays immigrants as a threat, presenting them as a menacing Other. This links refugees and immigrants to the pandemic, framing refugees as threats to security and associating the coronavirus with health risks.
10	Kotrogia, 2020	Analysis of content and semiotics in sketches from Greek newspapers.	Greece	Online	17 newspaper sketches from the first fifteen days of March 2020, during the crises of borders and the pandemic.	The Greek media reinforce xenophobic stereotypes and promote negativity towards immigrants by fostering divisive rhetoric through cartoons.

Table 7.
Qualitative studies

		Section A: Are the results valid?															Section B: What are the results?									Section C: Will the results help locally?					
	Μελέτη	1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?			2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?			3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?			4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?			5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?			6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?			7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?			8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?			9. Is there a clear statement of findings?			10. How valuable is the research?		
		Y	N	CT	Y	N	CT	Y	N	CT	Y	N	CT	Y	N	CT	Y	N	CT	Y	N	CT	Y	N	CT	Y	N	CT	Y	N	CT
1.	Avraamidou, Eftychiou, Ioannou, 2021	X			X			X					X	X			X					X	X			X			X		
2.	Avraamidou, Eftychiou, 2022	X			X			X					X	X			X					X	X			X			X		
3.	Boukala, 2021	X			X			X					X	X			X					X	X			X			X		
4.	Chrysou, 2021	X			X			X					X	X			X					X	X			X			X		
5.	Dimari, 2021	X			X			X					X	X			X					X	X			X			X		
6.	Kostopoulos, Mylonas, 2022	X			X			X					X	X			X					X	X			X			X		
7.	Kostopoulou, Paksoy, 2021	X			X			X					X	X			X					X	X			X			X		
8.	Stratoudaki, 2022	X			X			X					X	X			X					X	X			X			X		
9.	Iliadou, 2021	X			X			X					X	X			X					X	X			X			X		
10.	Kotroglia, 2020	X			X			X					X	X			X					X	X			X			X		

Yes: Y, No: N, Can't tell: CT Source: Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (2018). CASP Checklist: CASP Qualitative Studies Checklist. <https://tinyurl.com/4k93f2kf>

5. Discussion.

In Evros, at Kastanies-Pazarkule border, the territorial boundaries of two coinciding imaginary communities become visible: the community of Greek nation and the supranational community of the European Union (Stratoudaki, 2022, p. 4). In other words, the borders of Western civilisation are located there. In late February 2020, it was reflected by the mainstream discourse that the West, Europe and Greece, were invaded by thousands of displaced people. And as invaders these people were treated.

The humanitarian crisis in Evros was reflected in the public debate mainly as a border issue (Dimitriadi, 2020, p. 6) with the emphasis given on security to defend from the Enemy at the gates. The focus on border security in a one-dimensional way does not constitute a comprehensive management of the refugee and migration issue, but rather an attempt to push it back from the public discourse. The right of states to control their borders and manage the movements across them remains unquestioned, nevertheless they must refrain from the use of disproportionate or excessive force and be able to manage in an orderly manner the process of asylum claims (UNHCR, 2020). However, the suspension and violation of the rights of displaced people emerged during the aforementioned crisis.

In the present study it was ascertained that the Foreigner who threatens to alienate the cohesion of the homogeneous socio-political community and the Dangerous Other for Public Health, became one threatening Other. According to the data analyzed in the previous chapter, a divisive public discourse is identified, with emotionally charged words for Us as worthy of life, and the Others. The specific form of public discourse results not from linguistic accidents or verbal slips, but rather from an arbitrary decision that Others pose a threat to us (the dominant group or reception society). Thus, under the manufactured threat and based on the mutually exclusive patterns of Life/Death, Us/Others where there can be only one winner, violence against the displaced could be considered tolerable or acceptable or necessary to protect the community. Therefore, violence for self-preservation could be legitimized in the context of survival strategies in which the community is obliged to repel the Other, likewise in Hobbesian antagonistic, conflictual, pre-political/pre-social, natural state between savages (Hobbes, [1651] 1989, p. 194).

At the same time, as noted in the previous chapter, the refugee status was usually questioned in public discourse, as if the migrant is non-vulnerable, inferior, cunning or evil as if the term migrant was almost “attached” as an accusation. Thus, it is likely to be assumed that a state expects to be released from the responsibility of granting protection by depicting the displaced populations in heaps as migrants (Christopoulos, 2021, p. 33) and by extension,

it may be misunderstood that a state also expects to be released from the obligation of legitimacy, in its practices.

6. Conclusions.

The constant movement of living beings, whether voluntary or not, is a certainty. However, the future of a dynamic and multifactorial issue such as migration (Koser, 2016, p. 133) remains uncertain. In almost every corner of the globe, people are persecuted for their political or religious beliefs, for their gender or race, for their ethnicity or membership in a particular social group, or they are found at risk due to generalized violence or armed conflict (UNHCR, Convention and Protocol, 1951). Additionally, reasons such as the climate crisis and the accompanying environmental changes, demographic issues and/or overpopulation, low living standards in the home country, unemployment, and many more could be among the various causes of displacement.

The public discourse could be appeasing, moderate, mild or distanced towards the refugee and migrant populations. On the contrary, the dominant discourse was “normalized” as aggressive and demonized the displaced populations both in Evros crisis and during the pandemic. The attempted dehumanization in public discourse shapes realities within which refugees and migrants cannot claim legal protection or rights since they are illegal, cunning invaders, unwanted, dangerous to social cohesion, national homogeneity and public health.

In general, the political/governmental discourse, the social networks, the domestic newspapers, they all instrumentalized the figure of the migrants and/or refugees during the two crises, during these two exceptional conditions and the asymmetry of Us/of the Others was reestablished in the public discourse (Polymeneas & Serafis, 2020). However, Xenophobia combined with the lack of integration policies regarding the migrants and refugees in the country, continue to fuel nationalist manifestations (Fouskas & Koulierakis, 2022, p. 20). The role of public discourse is catalytic not only in the process of curing our societies from xenophobia but also in including in public conversation the positive aspects of our coexistence with refugees and migrants, for instance the latter's contribution to public life (see economy, multiculturalism, (Balajaran et al., 2011, pp. 327-335, 547-550).

Otherwise, we will live in states where necropolitics prevail and Sovereignty in all its visible or invisible forms dictates the life or death of the mythologized Enemy (Mbembe, 2003, pp. 10-13) while discourse normalizes heinous acts. Such as in the case of the tragic shipwreck in Pylos, when on 14 June 2023 over 600 people were lost in the darkest depth of the Mediterranean Sea (UNHCR and IOM, 2024).

6.1. Limitations.

The limitations of this systematic review include the following: i) The research scope covers the period from January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2022. Extending this scope to December 31, 2024, could allow for the inclusion of more recent studies. ii) It may also be beneficial to incorporate relevant events from other Member-States of the European Union.

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