Depictions of Greece's migration crisis

Erin Connie Templeton

University at Albany, State University of New York, erinctempleton@gmail.com

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DEPICTIONS OF GREECE’S MIGRATION CRISIS

By

Erin C. Templeton

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, Greece’s position as a center for migration and immigration has been prominent in the spotlight of the international news media. The mainland of Greece and its islands have played an important role in human migration throughout much of human history, with ancient Greece being one of the world’s most well-known early human civilizations. Though in humanity’s ancient past, Greece served as an economic and cultural center, there is an obvious shift in Greece’s place on the international stage. There is a modern perception of Greece as an entry point, a pass-through, and as a sort of gateway into the rest of the European Union. Various wars in the region of the Mediterranean Sea caused an immense mass movement of people to Greece, with hopes of seeking refugee status or asylum in various European Union member countries. Media coverage of the Greek migration crisis, more specifically, the migrants themselves, increased dramatically during the peak of the crisis. What are the media depictions of migrants, and what do they tell us about the crisis? Who are the migrants? What implications do media depictions have for the bigger picture: Migration in general?
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CHAPTER 1

If you ask someone who is not a geographer what geography is, they usually will craft a response around map-making and the studying of maps. This is not necessarily wrong, but as others of us know, maps can be, and are often designed to be, misleading. Maps are a part of the toolbox, and an important one. It is the borders on these maps that become very real and very consequential for the people who depend on crossing them. Of course some people just want to cross borders to start fresh in their lives. Maybe they have heard of some promising job opportunities in another country. Maybe they have friends or family who have moved elsewhere and have spread great news about an abundance of higher standards of living, attracting others to follow suit. But, there are people for whom the crossing of a border is a life or death situation. For some, there is a pressing need to escape a living situation because they are facing the violence of war, or possibly being targeted by extremist groups due to their religion or their race. These people end up crossing borders, simply with the hope of finding safety. The promise of travel and the hope for refugee status and the seeking of asylum are what drove the millions of people who will be discussed in this thesis.

Over the past decade, Greece’s position as a center for migration and immigration has been prominent in the spotlight of the international news media. In this thesis, migration shall be defined as the movement of people from one geographic location to another. Immigration shall refer to movement that crosses international borders. In this thesis, migration does not necessitate the crossing of a legal boundary. The mainland of Greece and its islands have played an important role in human migration throughout much of human history, with ancient Greece being one of the world’s most well-known early human civilizations. Though in humanity’s ancient past, Greece served as an economic and cultural center, there is an obvious shift in
Greece’s place on the international stage. There is a modern perception of Greece as an entry point, a pass-through, and as a sort of gateway into the rest of the European Union.

Within the past five years, wars have been breaking out in some of the countries that border Europe (Bosilkov & Drakaki, 2018, p. 26). This has made many European citizens wary of the number of incoming migrants in their respective countries. The mid-2010s saw the largest mass movement of humans since World War II (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018, p. 2). In 2017, the amount of globally displaced people reached 65 million – a record (Düvell in Allen et al., 2018, p. 227). February and March of 2016 saw a drastic increase in media reporting on migration throughout Europe (Bosilkov & Drakaki, 2018, p. 40). Similar concerns about immigration, oftentimes very hostile, can be seen in the context of the United States and many citizen qualms about migrants from south of the United States border. While some common depictions of migrants result from racism, religious bigotry, classism, and the omnipresent fear of the unknown, most ordinary people do not just come up with their biases on their own, or even from their families or communities. Much of what people believe can be attributed to migrant depictions in international media. Media outlets may have agendas, and in the case of the Greek migration crisis, some of the media outlets voicing their strong biases alongside their news are state-run media. In several cases state-run media have a lot to say about the Greek migration crisis, and they are making a lot of noise, and reaching many large audiences.

While there are many negative comments about migrants that can be seen in the media, or maybe sensationalized stories, there is also a faction of journalists in Europe who strive to facilitate diverse content in political, cultural, and social areas to increase public trust in the media and to create a media environment that seems balanced and less plagued by extreme displays of bias (Bosilkov & Drakaki, 2018, p. 29). It is important to note the imbalanced
ownership of Greece’s media. As of 2018, six publishers owned widely popular national newspapers, magazines, a few broadcast media channels, and agencies for press distribution (Bosilkov & Drakaki, 2018, p. 32). These six publishers are even sometimes offered deals with the Greek government, and often go out of their way to build relationships with politicians and secure government-media contracts (Bosilkov & Drakaki, 2018, p. 32). The marriage between government and media is made obvious in the context of Greece. This thesis’ goal is to delve into the media depictions surrounding the Greek migration crisis. What do media depictions of migrants tell us, and how can those depictions be categorized and explained? Before this analysis is possible, it is vital to cover the intricate and varied conditions that existed, and in some cases still exist in the country of Greece.

In this thesis, I intend to first detail the setting for the outbreak of crises in Greece itself. Then, I will describe who migrants are, how many migrants there are, and how they are arriving to Greece as their destination. In Chapter 2, I will delve into my methods for collecting and coding sources. In Chapter 3, I will describe various common media depictions of migrants and use my own methodology to group these depictions. In Chapter 4, I will analyze the coverage of migration-related events. Next, I will explain some of the conflicts and misunderstandings surrounding Islam to add context for some of the xenophobic sentiment relevant in Greece and the rest of the European Union at the time.

**Populist Greece**

It is important to start this analysis with the environment in which the Greek migration crisis began. It is critical to recognize the unstable political and economic conditions of Greece in 2014 as a means to help explain the implications of large migration flows in the country, and
why it is being described with a term so extreme as “crisis.” I also want to point out that in many news sources detailing this situation, the “European Immigration Crisis of 2014-2019” is referring to the same situation I am analyzing here when I use the term “Greek Migration Crisis.” However, the former is mostly used in describing the crisis in terms of immigration into countries in the interior of the European Union, especially wealthier member nations such as Germany and France. “European Immigration Crisis of 2014-2019” is usually not referring to the initial incoming of migrants to the countries that border the Mediterranean Sea or travel over land into the European Union, such as land travel through Turkey into the European Union (Carassava et al., 2016, p. 27). In this section we will also answer the question: Why Greece, as opposed to any other country in the European Union?

Firstly, underscoring Greece’s migration crisis are two other named crises: The Greek government crisis, and the Greek debt crisis. Oftentimes, these two phenomena are hyphenated as the Greek government-debt crisis, as both issues were deeply involved in each other. Greece has been dealing with serious debt since about 2009, when a new government administration realized that for years, previous administrations had been providing extremely low estimates of the national debt (Nelson et al., 2017, p. 1). Understandably, this deterred foreign investment, or any investment, really. Public trust in the government was dwindling. In 2017, Greece’s debt equaled 180 percent of Greece’s gross domestic product (Nelson et al., 2017, p. 1). This is an unmanageable amount of debt. In 2017, one fifth of Greece’s citizens were unemployed, and half of all youth were unemployed as well (Nelson et al., 2017, p. 1). Citizens did not trust Greece’s notoriously unstable banking system, and various agencies such as the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund needed to step in to assist with the crisis in various “rescue packages” (Nelson et al., 2017, p. 1). Even with assistance, all problems were not immediately
solved. Greek citizens, many jobless and with no hope of change in the traditional government, turned to fringe parties. In 2015, a far-left government was elected under Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras. This further raised concerns about the country getting out of debt, as the administration was openly against many of the austerity measures that the country had implemented during past administrations in attempts to reduce national debt. Greek citizens were right to not trust the banks. On June 28th, 2015, owing creditors and short on funds to repay agencies such as the International Monetary Fund, the Greek government closed all banks and limited ATM transactions (Nelson et al., 2017, p. 6). The election of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras is often associated with “Western” rises in nativist sentiments and what is being framed by some as being a modern populist movement. This is related to, but not to be confused with, the United States People’s party that rose to prevalence in the 1890s (Postel). Populism is a political concept that appeals to “normal” people who feel that established governmental powers do not recognize their struggles or care about their concerns. Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras’ administration actually responded to his failure to control or even maintain the same amount of debt by resigning and calling for another election (Nelson et al., 2017, p. 10). However, Tsipras proceeded to win this election as well. (Nelson et al., 2017, p. 10). He served out the remainder of his four-year term. In 2019, Tsipras was succeeded by Kyriakos Mitsotakis, a leader in the New Democracy party, which has been described as center to far-right on the political spectrum. This disorganization and chaos were further exacerbated by the wars and conflicts in various countries that resulted in higher rates of migration. Under international law, individuals have the right to seek asylum in any country they arrive to (Aitken, 2020). But, the Dublin III Law, which applies to the entire European Union, states that asylum seekers can be forced to transfer back to the first country they entered if rejected elsewhere (Aitken, 2020). For example, a family from
Syria, fleeing war violence, may have goals of seeking asylum in Germany, but must first physically migrate to a country in the European Union. The closest country that allows this is Greece (even though Cyprus is a geographically closer European Union member, Northern Cyprus is occupied by Turkey, and the European Union does not recognize the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus as a legal entity). One should note the total lack of fairness that exists in this structure. Greece, because of its physical proximity to the countries that migrants are leaving, is expected to house asylum-seekers. Greece is also expected to take back any migrants that are not granted asylum in their desired final destination country in the European Union. Before this crisis, Greece was already experiencing a notoriously unstable economy. Far richer countries exist in the European Union, but some, with the exception of Germany for a short period of time, initially took a “hands off” approach and were prepared to let Greece bear the brunt of this extreme influx of people that the government was now automatically responsible for. This statement is not being made to unassign blame for some of the horrendous incidents that have taken place in Greece’s migrant camps over the past few years, such as a fire at the Moria migrant camp at the island of Lesbos that occurred in September of 2020, and left an estimated 12,000 migrants without shelter (Sputnik, 2020). Rather, I am making this statement to reveal why the Greek migration crisis is an issue of geography. Besides the simple explanation of geography as relevant to border crossing, geography also served as a reason for Greece to be a default holding space for thousands, now millions, of migrants. It is imperative that geographers study this crisis to plan for and avoid future overcrowding and overwhelming of countries, like Greece, who are prone to becoming victims of their own physical geography. A country existing on the border of another should not necessarily require that it be the automatic entry point for refugees and/or people seeking asylum. With the persisting and devastating effects of climate
change, increased mass migration is bound to take place and geographers need to address this in conjunction with immigration implications. Next, it is now vital to explain who the migrants were and where they were coming from in order to contextualize the reactions of people in the European Union and subsequently in media depictions.

**Who Are the Migrants and Where Are They Coming From?**

2015 is considered to be the height of the migration crisis, and the span of the crisis is considered to reach from 2014 to 2019, when the number of migrants trying to enter the European Union decreased by hundreds of thousands. In 2015 alone, 1,000,573 people arrived to Europe by water in attempts to seek asylum (Clayton & Holland, 2015). 5,735 of these people went missing and are assumed to have drowned during their travel (Clayton & Holland, 2015). Half of the individuals who crossed the Mediterranean Sea into the European Union in 2015 were Syrians, escaping the multi-faction civil war (Clayton & Holland, 2015). 20 percent of these individuals were Afghans, and seven percent were Iraqis (Clayton & Holland, 2015). In addition to those who tried to enter the European Union by sea, another 34,000 crossed by land from Turkey to Bulgaria and Greece (Clayton & Holland, 2015). Unfortunately, due to the extremely tense financial situation in Greece at the time, with banks closings, ATM restrictions, and one fifth of the population jobless, many people were starting to embrace xenophobia, in the classic ‘the immigrants will steal our jobs’ mindset. The increase in migration over this one year was startling. In January of 2015, the number of people traveling over the Mediterranean Sea in hopes of a better life was about 5,500 people (Clayton & Holland, 2015). In October of the same year, that number rose to a monthly total of over 221,000 people. This is an increase of over 40 times the number of people traveling over the Mediterranean Sea in January. Initially, this
increase sparked confusion and large-scale disorganization. But, individual countries then began
to enact legislation to restrict or relax immigration policies. This did not change Greece’s
position, because even still, Greece was the first country migrants were physically able to arrive
to. Even if Greece was not their desired final destination, they needed to, in most cases, wait
there until their problems were addressed by the proper authorities. On a case by case basis,
migrants entering Greece could be medically screened, biometrically scanned, quarantined, and
vaccinated (Athanasopoulos, 2020, p. 117). Before we delve into the actual analysis of media
depictions in this thesis, I will take a step back to explain how I collected and analyzed sources,
primarily through the process of coding.
CHAPTER 2

To collect and analyze depictions of migrants in the context of the Greek migration crisis in the late 2010s, I used the research method of coding. The three main purposes of coding are the facilitation of data reduction to identify themes, organization, and data exploration and analysis (Cope, 2005, p. 377). (More specifically, I relied heavily on *in vivo* coding for this project. *In vivo* codes are a type of descriptive code that physically appear in sources, as opposed to categories one conjures up in their mind to make sense of data (Cope, 2005, p. 378). I also put some emphasis on analytical coding. Analytic coding is typically used to bring themes to the forefront that may have been of interest to a researcher since the very conception of the project in question, and may also include those themes that presented themselves later on with the acquisition of additional data or further analysis (Cope, 2005, p. 379). I physically printed each source, and read through each source once. Then on each subsequent read of each source, I went through with different marker colors, highlighting for different criteria. I used yellow to highlight depictions of suffering, neglect, etc. I used green to highlight statistics or startling facts from the duration of the crisis as depicted in media. I used orange to highlight dramatic or generally profound depictions of migrants and/or the crisis itself (i.e. Former Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras’ description of Greece in 2016 as a “warehouse of souls” (Faiola, 2016, p. IN4)). After the initial rounds of coding by highlighter, I also employed concept-mapping in this project, physically sifting through paper copies of my sources, and sorting them into piles based on the content within. Throughout this project, I have written various memos and reminders to myself to make connections between sources and concepts in the coding process. This has served as a vital tool in interpreting and reflecting upon data. One of the great things about coding is that it can continuously evolve as needed. It is, in itself, a process of analysis that
not only facilitates the examination of qualitative data, but also allows researchers to take a step back and evaluate their own processes.

I did find myself struggling quite a bit with code meanings overlapping. This was a struggle that existed in the use of both in vivo codes and analytical codes. There were many sources I analyzed throughout this process where people being interviewed would say things or make claims that were not exactly identical, but largely came across as having the same meanings. Similarly, many themes that I identified for the purposes of analytical coding had overlap. There are many instances in which “villain” and “victim” are used in ways that target the same individual. Sometimes, my self-identified themes melded together and the lines between them became blurry.

I highly considered the use of a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) for this project, as I have used R for qualitative data analysis before. But in the end, it did not feel like a suitable choice. The most basic reason I decided against employing the use of CAQDAS for this project include monetary constraints. Additionally, I was concerned that connections that I would tend to make in my own mind would not be detected by software. And, while I did a lot of research and reading for this project, the amount of data and themes did not feel overwhelming to the point that I could not keep them conceptualized and organized for myself. I opted to store all of my sources, in order by document type and country of origin (news articles by country of origin, then journal article by country of origin). I stored these documents, tucked in a 1-inch binder that I would take with me to read, code, analyze, and write about as inspiration struck.

I found these articles through various means. These include JSTOR database searches, and ProQuest searches for magazine and newspaper articles.
CHAPTER 3

This section will serve as a source material explanation, or a literature section, combined with the accompanying analysis of each depiction or characterization “type” that I developed during the coding process. Here we see the categorizations of “villain,” “victim,” and “satire.” Villain and victim are far-reaching depictions that can be widely found in written and visual media. Satire, on the other hand, is mostly discussed here in the format of visual and audible media in terms of a study done of various late night television shows in Germany (Nitsch & Lichtenstein, 2019). These shows are comparable to skit shows such as Saturday Night Live in the United States. While satire in terms of these late night shows is used to describe the genre of television, I am also using it as a characterization label for migrants themselves.

As Villains

If one has access to most forms of media, they have seen the depiction of the migrant as a villain. This characterization may come about in many ways, and is an element of media characterization of migrants in almost all migration/immigration stories. Without even needing to pull up an article or turn on the television, the stereotypes come into our minds: They are here to steal our jobs. They are here to take advantage of us. These depictions, even if we do not agree with them, have permeated our minds and, they stick with us. Many of these examples of strong villain descriptors exist in the context of the Greek migration crisis. Before even getting into the language used, part of the villain-creation and othering comes from who is being shown as a migrant in photo and video: How different are they from us, citizens?

A 1991 theory published by Teun A. Van Dijk in “Racism and the Press,” discusses the relationship between news production and human reception processes, where discourse in the media and the opinions of the greater public work as counterparts, creating meaning
(Tsitsanoudis-Malladis & Derveni, 2018, p. 11). This can culminate into the creation of some of the most pervasive negative stereotypes about migrants, including those of a racist nature. Van Dijk used a sociocognitive strategy to study racism in the British press, that would often reserve the most negative migrant headlines for those who appeared to be ethnic minorities (Tsitsanoudis-Malladis & Derveni, 2018, p. 12). This kind of negative overrepresentation sticks in citizens’ minds. Seeing a migrant of an ethnic minority gracing the front page of a magazine, or a television news headline, in relation to some perceived illegal or immoral activity, will strengthen and justify any racist views that a media consumer may already hold.

In addition to negative views of migrants based on racism alone, there is the widespread conception of migrants as invaders, and as threats to national security. This can in some cases be attributed to international coverage of terrorist attacks involving foreigners, such as the attacks on the Twin Towers on September 11th, 2001 in New York City. The loss of thousands of lives devastated the United States and much of the world. The situation evolved into a legacy of government officials mistaking the identities, affiliations, and nationalities of those involved in perpetrating the attacks. This resulted in leaving the people of the United States confused, scared, and in some cases, ready to blame whoever they imagined to fit the part of a terrorist.

Instances of terror attacks and fears of them increasing have also been notable in Europe in the past decade (Bosilkov & Drakaki, 2018, p. 27). My mind wanders back to a trip to France in 2015, and to a particular instance. Upon arriving to Paris’ Charles de Gaulle Airport, I spotted anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant stickers adorning bulletin boards and walls throughout the building. It was hardly welcoming, and I can imagine something like that being in plain sight may have very well frightened other foreigners visiting the country or any individuals who practice Islam. The sticker prominently featured a woman wearing hijab, and a universal
prohibition (red-circle-with-slash) sign across her face. These same messages are present throughout Europe, and a poignant reminder of tension between national and migrant.

Bosilkov and Drakaki’s 2018 study of Macedonian and Greek newspapers showed the use of depictions including “intruder,” “illegal,” “alien,” “social intruder,” “civic threat,” and “health threat” (Bosilkov & Drakaki, 2018, p. 36). For reference, Bosilkov and Drakaki studied 337 Greek newspapers and 313 Macedonian newspapers (Bosilkov & Drakaki, 2018, p. 35 & 36). Over the months of February and March of 2016, it was observed that the label “intruder” was used in Greek newspapers at least 191 times (Bosilkov & Drakaki, 2018, p. 36). In Macedonian newspapers, this same labeled was used at least 291 times (Bosilkov & Drakaki, 2018, p. 35). The term “illegal” was used in Greek newspapers 58 times over this time period, and in Macedonia, 164 times (Bosilkov & Drakaki, 2018, p. 35 & 36). The term “alien” was used in Greek newspapers 5 times, and in Macedonian newspapers, 14 times (Bosilkov & Drakaki, 2018, p. 35 & 36). The descriptor, “social intruder” was used 147 times in the Greek newspapers, and 88 times in the Macedonian newspapers (Bosilkov & Drakaki, 2018, p. 35 & 36). “Civic threat” was used 5 times in the Greek newspapers, and 13 times in the Macedonian newspapers (Bosilkov & Drakaki, 2018, p. 35 & 36). The final term, “health threat,” was seen 6 times in Greek newspapers and 12 times in Macedonian newspapers over February and March of 2016 (Bosilkov & Drakaki, 2018, p. 35 & 36).

In a span of just two months, Greek and Macedonian citizens were fed hundreds of headlines that fit into my “villain” characterization. I would like to note for transparency’s sake that North Macedonia, to this date, has not been admitted to the European Union, while Greece is a member of the European Union. This could result in some of the differences in numbers and
proportions of the depictions due to differences in loyalties and national priorities. Though, North Macedonia has been trying to gain membership to the European Union for many years.

As Victims

When migrants are not being framed as evil, there tends to be a narrative that characterizes migrants as victims. The victim narrative is often presented by entities that want to place blame on authorities that have had negative impacts on the lives of migrants (detention centers, security forces, border enforcement, etc.). This is often due to tensions that may exist between the entity presenting the victim narrative and the Greek government who is at the helm of many of these agencies displaying problematic behaviors. A group guilty of this phenomenon of victim-framing is the Sputnik news agency, a state-run platform created by the Russian government in 2014. This is not to say that the news being presented by Sputnik is not worthy of coverage. Many of the stories and accusations presented by this agency are more than worthy of investigation, especially considering that various people are interviewed and named in their articles.

In September of 2020, a fire burnt down an entire migrant camp in Greece: The largest migrant camp located on the island of Lesbos. This resulted in 12,000 migrants being left without a place to stay (“MSF Links Fire in Moria Camp to Years of EU, Greece ‘Orchestrating’ Migrant Sufferings”). While some sources placed blame on frustrated migrants alone with accusations of arson, Sputnik went further to blame the incident on Greece, and more largely on the inaction of the European Union (Sputnik, 2020). The Sputnik article used quotes from a Doctors Without Borders field coordinator, Marco Sandrone, who they interviewed. Sandrone,
Corroboration of accusations by Sputnik can be found in non-government-owned news agencies as well. This includes documentation of migrant men from Afghanistan and Syria getting involved in sex work in Athens to get by, at seriously low wages, some for a purported two Euros (roughly 2.43 USD) (Samuels). This accusation also claims that some of those involved in this work for so little money are teenagers – not adults (Samuels). If true, this accusation lends itself to the possibility of a literal crime, and even to human rights abuses. Not only are those participating in this work being paid reported starvation wages, but some cannot legally consent to these transactions. This is the perfect storm for a media outlet to use a victim characterization. In this specific case, the characterization is close to factual.

The image of victimhood tends to revolve around ideas such as hunger and poverty, and issues generally related to the poor. There is a tendency of a connection between migration and destitution. But what about a different kind of migrant victim? There is a rare victim of circumstance characterization: Someone who is/was otherwise well-off, but is now being catapulted into the realm of danger due to legal issues. This is someone who may be well-educated, perhaps even wealthy. Enter Mohammad Yousaf, a victim characterized to readers in a 2016 Toronto Star article: “Marooned migrants grieving in Greece.” This individual is an economics professor from Afghanistan, with claims of being targeted by the Taliban (Faiola). “I should not be in this camp. I don’t belong here. I was important. A VIP. I need help. Please. Can you ask someone to let me cross?” he is quoted as asking the reporters (Faiola). He also claims he was a candidate for the Parliament of Afghanistan (Faiola). Especially for people in academia, this characterization of victimhood is all too relatable. People who teach or research are often
targeted for spreading their views and varied information, especially when those views or information conflict with those of extremist groups. There is an interesting debate being presented here. The narrative has been pushed, whether on purpose or not, that some migrants are more deserving of asylum than others because of their status, skills, and level of notoriety. Is this really the narrative to be pushed if all in the victim group are being faced with the violence of war?

The article: “Marooned migrants grieving in Greece” also continuously comments on the ability of some of the migrants to speak English (Faiola). Obviously, this has no bearing on the intelligence, literacy, or other ability of the migrants in question: They are migrants, mostly from Syria and Afghanistan, migrating to or through Greece. This preoccupation with the migrant ability to speak English is, at best, an appeal to empathy and, at worst, propaganda to make English-speaking readers feel angry that the ‘smart’ migrants are not being allowed into the European Union. The educated, more privileged of the migrants entering or passing through Greece make up about thirty percent of those seeking asylum, and in 2016, about seventy percent of these individuals were granted refugee status (Faiola). A critical assessment needs to be participated in on the part of the English-speaking reader: Who is deserving of refugee status, and why do I think this way?

As Satire

When a migrant is not being characterized as a villain or a victim, they sometimes end up serving as the butt of a joke. This is not a case of hurting the feelings of migrants, but of further shaping public opinion (Dempsey & McDowell, 2019, p. 155). A study of a collection of late night satire shows in Germany found that satire tends to criticize and challenge how crises are
framed by providing counter-narratives that encourage critical thinking for the audience (Nitsch & Lichtenstein, 2019, p. 85). The study focuses specifically on three crises affecting Germany, including the migration crisis and large influx of migrants into the European Union. Germany is a special case here, because the Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, initially adopted a very relaxed border-crossing policy (Nitsch & Lichtenstein, 2019, p. 89). In September of 2015, Merkel actually announced that refugees would have free access to border crossing (Nitsch & Lichtenstein, 2019, p. 89). The unfortunate consequences of this decision included a public opinion divide to right-wing and populist groups in Germany (Nitsch & Lichtenstein, 2019, p. 90). There tends to be many similarities between media representations of topics and satirical representations. “Media logic” tends to be employed, even in the context of late-night satire (Nitsch & Lichtenstein, 2019, p. 90). It is important to note that unlike the other two crises analyzed in the research (political conflict with Ukraine and the Greek debt crisis), the migration crisis was particularly characterized by the concept of domestication (Nitsch & Lichtenstein, 2019, p. 93). Why is this? The issues of political conflict with a specific foreign entity, and a debt crisis that can be framed as a fault of another foreign entity, can be pushed out of the psyche. These issues are not perceived as invasions or direct threats. The migrant ‘problem,’ in contrast, is very threatening to people. It is not one foreign government to blame in this instance. The migrant ‘problem’ is coming right to one’s door. You cannot assign blame to the outside when your own government, and least in the short term, held the most relaxed of border policies. One cannot remove that from the actions of their own homeland.

One blatant issue described in the research of Nitsch and Lichtenstein is the tendency for satirical shows to increase the already-prevalent tendency of the news media to frame issues as “black-and-white” (Nitsch & Lichtenstein, 2019, p. 94). This is particularly troubling when one
is trying to assign blame for the migration crisis. Migrants are individuals, they cannot all be placed in a box together. Herein lies the connection between the villain, the victim, and satire. This brings again, to the front of the mind, Mohammad Yousaf’s story of desperation at the border. We are taught to box things up, neatly, to compartmentalize issues and store them away. That is impossible to do with individuals who are seeking asylum, refugee status, and humanitarian aid, unless a miraculous task force is delegated to background check and partake in intense interviews with thousands of people on an individual basis. The easiest thing to do is group migrants together as villains or victims, and store them away in our minds. While satire can sometimes offend, in the case of Nitsch and Lichtenstein’s study, it was found, in the context of German late-night shows, that there was an overall good being performed. Satire was causing people to think critically about what they were being told in the news reporting that occurred during the day. Satire did not typically create new topics for discussion, but built off of existing topics to criticize the actions of governments or organizations involved in the migration crisis (Nitsch & Lichtenstein, 2019, p. 98). It not only matters what content is being presented in media. It is also critically important to get into the discussion of the matter in which how that content is being presented (Nitsch & Lichtenstein, 2019, p. 94). These factors exemplify the very deliberate nature of the media depictions of migrants.
CHAPTER 4

A Natural Force

This chapter is designed to analyze a fourth observation I made during my research that does not completely work to serve as a characterization or label as laid out in Chapter 3. This section serves as a combination of literature, data, and analysis. The likening of migrants to the natural world necessitates a cohesive section to best explain the phenomenon. There have been many news stories about migration that focus on the “natural” elements of the incidents. For example, in the Mediterranean Sea, there are incidents where aggressive sea conditions cause boats to capsize, and cause injury or death of passengers. Interestingly, migrants themselves are often described using “natural” terminology. This seems to have implications, intentional or not, of dehumanization and that migrants are more closely aligned with nature or the wild environment than non-migrants. This is important because it reveals an additional layer of bias in media reporting.

There are stories and representations in media that may contain both the villain and victim characterizations. One such event occurred and was covered by the media in 2015, with the drowning of a young child who was a migrant. This horrific incident was caught on camera. Nilüfer Demir was the photographer of the bleak incident (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018, p. 3). Nilüfer Demir is a photographer who was working for Turkey’s Dogan News Agency (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018, p. 23). Nilüfer Demir was interviewed by the media, and revealed some of her reasoning for taking the photo and some of her other accompanying thoughts (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018, p. 23). She said, “I wanted to express his silent scream” (Demir quoted in Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018, p. 23). The image of a police officer, Mehmet Ciplak picking the boy’s body up made waves in the media,
specifically the Greek media. This story was published in over twenty pieces of written Greek media (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018, p. 1).

As mentioned earlier, was has been occurring. Many people left Syria due to the state of violence. They wanted to seek safety. Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old child, was part of one of many families trying to escape the tragedies of war. His body was found by a police officer, washed up from the Mediterranean Sea, on a Turkish beach. The officer, Mehmet Ciplak, did not know his photo was being taken at the time of the incident (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018, p. 26). His family had attempted to escape Syria by boat. The inflatable boat was faulty. It reportedly flipped and sank.

Maybe it is not surprising, but many people throughout Europe had great empathy for the situation. The death of Alan Kurdi, in some ways, served as a turning point in the media and hence, in the minds of many people throughout Europe who could not help but to intake media (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018, p. 4). Even if one does not have cable television, it is almost impossible to stay complete cut off from media intake. Many people highly rely on the internet for their careers. The internet is fraught with advertisements and news stories on webpage margins. Even in the off chance that someone rarely uses the internet, media is even present on billboards. Unless someone is in the relatively uncommon situation where they are housebound, with no access to internet or television services, they are bound to see some of these depictions. Additionally, internet and television access is notably higher in Europe than in other regions. Most European Union member countries have over populations with over 95 percent of individuals having internet access (International Telecommunication Union, 2020). People were generally touched by Alan Kurdi’s story. Evidence of the xenophobia and racism previously visible in sources detailing the refugee crisis was less potent in the case of Alan Kurdi’s death.
He was unanimously attributed with a victim label. Obviously, a three year-old cannot be blamed for any of the circumstances in their lives. They are at the will and mercy of their families, and the predicaments and struggles they live within. While much of this shift may have to do with the simple fact that Alan Kurdi was a young, innocent child, it may also be heavily related to the fact that an image of the incident was publicly available (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018, p. 4). In 2015, when the story of Alan Kurdi’s tragic death initially broke, the famous image captured by Nilüfer Demir was viewed by over 20 million people worldwide in a twelve hour period (Goriunova & Vis, 2015 cited in Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018, p. 5). The image was so powerful to people, that millions reposted and/or shared it on various forms of social media, heightening the photo’s spread and impact (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018, p. 5).

It is amazing to really conceptualize the impact of Nilüfer Demir’s photo. For years before this point, statistics about thousands of people being affected by war and requiring refuge were available in the media, but these did not nearly have the same impact as a single photo of a unanimously declared victim, a young child (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018, p. 5).

A poorly constructed boat, overcrowded and submerged, took Alan Kurdi’s life, and the lives of his brother, Galib and his mother, Rehana. But nature also took Alan’s life. The Mediterranean Sea rose above the boat and caused it to capsize. There is a theme that reoccurs throughout my research into this topic: The comparison of the migrant to the natural. This is a way to dehumanize migrants and separate them from us. In modern times, nature is often viewed as threatening and dangerous: A source of unpredictability. While racism and xenophobia do a good job of causing dehumanization too, the analogies of nature used in describing migrants in their movement also play an interesting role here. One notable term used by many media entities
is “stream” (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018, p. 2). One media headline from the time of the incident reads:

*Alan Kurdi was one of a million.* The three-year-old Syrian boy and his family fled the war engulfing their country, hoping to join relatives in the safety of Canada. *They were part of a historic flow of refugees from the Middle East to Europe this year,* and they followed the dangerous route taken by so many others. (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018, p. 17)

Here we see another word usually attributed to movement in nature, such as the *flow* of water. This may have been deliberate, as the story at hand is about a drowning death. However, this use of nature verbs to describe migrant movements exist in other media depictions too. Another headline, directly related to the drowning death of Alan Kurdi, read “*Humanity washed ashore”* (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018, p. 20). Another headline read “Image of Drowned Syrian Boy *Echoes* Around World (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018, p. 20). Another, “The picture that *moved a world*” (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018, p. 20). In another connection of migrant to nature, in the aftermath of Alan Kurdi’s tragic death forever preserved in photograph, it was reported that a sculpture of Alan Kurdi was constructed out of sand. The title of this article read: “*Tribute:* A giant sand sculpture of the little Aylan in Gaza” (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018, p. 21).

*Smuggling*
I find it pertinent to further explain the process of human smuggling that is often reported on in the media. Human smuggling stories are often reported when there is some sort of deadly incident involving migrants. I also find it important to delve into who smugglers are, and counteract some common assumptions about them. This adds further context to the tragedy involving the deaths of members of the Kurdi family, and also to the wider conversation about the lengths people will go to for the opportunity to migrate somewhere that they believe will be safer for themselves and/or their families.

When some people are unable to cross a border through legal means, such as when Germany changed its’ open border policy to adopt more stringent regulations, individuals and families turn to smuggling. People who claim to be experienced travelers who can traverse dangerous climates, offer up their purported expertise to people who are desperate to cross a border in search of a better life. This is not a process exclusive to the Greek migration crisis. While some may argue over the legality and/or morality of crossing borders, the smuggling of people is always dangerous. In 2019, in Eagle Pass, Texas, a white Ford F-250 crashed, and one man was immediately killed (Sacchetti, 2019). In the crash, one woman lost her arm, and several others were injured (Sacchetti, 2019). These were individuals who paid up thousands of dollars to United States citizen smugglers with the promise of being driven to San Antonio to fade into the backdrop of the city and live in anonymity (Sacchetti, 2019). Many of these smugglers are people who are otherwise respectable in society, and have simply fallen on hard times. More than sixty percent of those convicted of smuggling at United States federal courts were United States citizens (Sacchetti, 2019). Many of these smugglers are not career criminals. Many of them have a small criminal history, or no criminal activity in their past at all (Sacchetti, 2019). In the case of United States citizen smugglers transporting people over the Mexican border, many
of these smugglers are unknowingly part of a larger scheme. Some of the individuals that the
smugglers connect with over social media and eventually by speaking over the phone have
connections to Mexican drug cartels or large-scale smuggling systems (Sacchetti, 2019). These
are people who need quick cash.

I use this example to draw a parallel between the smuggling in boats over the
Mediterranean Sea with the smuggling by car or truck that occurs at the United States southern
border. More than 1.8 million migrants have passed over the Mediterranean Sea since 2014
(Camarena et al., 2018, p. 1). Just like in the example from the United States, people will pay up
a lot of money for the opportunity to cross an area in hopes of getting over a border, even if the
journey is known to be treacherous, and often deadly. As of 2016, the smuggling of humans into
the European Union was up to a six-billion-dollar industry (Europol cited in Camarena et al.,
2018, p. 1). Between 2014 and 2018, more than 15,000 people died attempting to cross the
Mediterranean Sea into Europe (UNHCR cited in Camarena et al., 2018, p. 1). Would people
really be putting their lives at such risk if they felt any sense of safety or security in their
respective home countries? Would someone who felt that even some of their human rights were
being protected bother to take this risk? Maybe individual adults would exercise that agency.
However, many people crossing borders, including the Mexican border as well as the
Mediterranean Sea, come in family groups. This was especially true at the Mexican border
during the strict immigration policies of the Trump Administration in the United States
(Sacchetti, 2019). People do not tend to make such dangerous decisions involving their families
unless they feel the benefits outweigh the possible losses. That being considered, smugglers
around the Mediterranean Sea do tend to take dangerous water conditions into consideration
(Camarena et al., 2018, p. 2). There is generally reluctance and reconsideration on the part of
smugglers to go through with plans to move migrants over the Mediterranean Sea when the weather and sea conditions appear to be prohibitive. One important distinction between human smuggling over the United States-Mexico border and human smuggling over the Mediterranean Sea into Europe is the instances of disappearance. The rough sea conditions that can occur in the Mediterranean Sea have a high correlation with death and the ultimate subsequent disappearance of the body after death (Camarena et al., 2018, p. 2). This is a distinction that can be seen in comparison to the deaths at the United States-Mexico border, where many smuggling deaths occur within vehicles that may crash, or where individuals being smuggled may die from conditions related to brutal heat conditions.

Herein lies another villain in the narrative. Before much of my research, I assumed that smugglers may have just been people with a lack of moral character with little to no care for human life, just desiring quick money. However, the situation is far more sophisticated than that (Achilli, 2016, p. 99). In the case of the United States-Mexico border, many of the individuals involved with smuggling were just normal people who needed money. In federal court hearings, some people even explained that they needed the smuggling money to buy basic necessities such as diapers for their children (Sacchetti, 2019). Let it be asserted that individuals facilitating the smuggling of people over the Mediterranean Sea also need money for the bare necessities. It is also important to note that in the case of many of the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, there is an element of political unrest along borders and coasts that is not present to the same degree that it is present at the United States-Mexico border. One smuggler from Sudan describes a conversation he had with another smuggler:
A Sudanese people smuggler asked a fellow people smuggler in Libya how many people on the boat were “his”. . . Exactly 109, came the answer—of which 58 did not survive. . . The Sudanese smuggler reproached his Libyan counterpart for his role in overcrowding the boat—and in the end, the Libyan smuggler took it upon himself to personally notify the families of the victims whose safe passage he had failed to deliver. He also shelled out $5,000 in compensation (Da Silva 2017). (Da Silva cited in Camarena et al., 2018, p. 4).

The loss of human life detailed in this passage is tragic. However, this is in stark contrast to what was chronicled in the media in the untimely death of young Alan Kurdi, his brother Galib, and his mother, Rehana, and other migrants, including children, on the capsized vessel. One media outlet released a statement by Abdullah Kurdi, the father of Alan and Galib Kurdi who survived the accident, who stated: “The Turk [smuggler] jumped into the sea, then a wave came and flipped us over. I grabbed my sons and wife and we held onto the boat” (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018, p. 25). While jumping from a boat to save your own life as a solitary incident would not usually be considered selfish or result in a public outcry, in this instance of media coverage, a message is spread that the smuggler is a villainous figure, prepared to jump ship and leave his customers to die. These narrative reveals to us that smuggling is not culturally specific. It will happen every time there is a market for it. In some cases, smugglers are living in the very same dangerous conditions that migrants trying to escape are. It is important to consider the humanity and experiences of every person depicted in the migration crisis.

Islamophobia
Earlier in this thesis I briefly discussed the implications of racism in the depictions of migrants in the media, and how citizens employ racism in amplifying their fears associated with immigration such as the population rising and the possibility of losing jobs, unwarranted fears of increased crime, and more. I want to make a distinction here between racism and Islamophobia, because they are not the same thing. Islam is a religion, not a race or an ethnicity. Particularly in the West, Islam is often conflated with particular races, ethnicities, and/or countries of origin. I present the following section to dispel any misinformation about who the migrants in the Greek migration crisis were in terms of their race, ethnicity, country or origin, or religion. I will also explain some of the common misconceptions about Islam and Muslim people and false associations made that only further allow citizens in the European Union to take in misinformation which results in unwarranted fears.

It is important to understand that in the context of this particular crisis of migration, most of the individuals seeking refugee status were Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi. Additionally, the majority of the refugees mentioned practice Islam. In 2017, a breakdown of 21.3 million people categorized as refugees moving into and around the European Union was calculated (Düvell in Allen et al., 2018, p. 227). This breakdown states that as those categorized as refugees, about 3 million were living in Turkey, 1.1 million were living in Lebanon, 980,000 were living in Iran, and around 660,000 people were living in Jordan (Düvell in Allen et al., 2018, p. 227).

Beginning in the spring of 2015, about a million of the above categorized individuals left Turkey, many of whom entered into Greece, then into various European Union member countries (Düvell in Allen et al., 2018, p. 227). The largest percentage of these refugees originated from Syria, where Islam is the religion practiced by the vast majority of residents. In 2015, 87 percent of Syrian people practiced Islam (Citizenship and Immigration Canada).
percent of Syrians were Sunni Muslims, and 13 percent were Alawi, Ismaili, and Shia Muslims (Citizenship and Immigration Canada). Just 10 percent of the population were practicing Christians, with some surveyed identifying as Orthodox, Uniate, and Nestorian Christians (Citizenship and Immigration Canada). The remaining 3 percent of the Syrian population were Druze (Citizenship and Immigration Canada). Earlier, I detailed a trip to France in 2015, where I saw anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant stickers in Paris’ Charles de Gaulle Airport. In addition to the concept of racism being at play here, this is more specifically, Islamophobia. A bias against Muslims also exists in Greece and Islam is highly associated with migration (Kirtsoglou & Tsimouris, 2018, p. 1875). While in Western Europe and North America there may be a tendency, or complete assertion by some, that people from the Middle East are automatically Muslims, and that Muslims are automatically people from the Middle East, the truth strays from this. While Islam is by far the most popular religion practiced in the Middle East, many other religions are also represented. The Middle East is a culturally and religiously diverse region. For example, in Egypt exists Coptic Christianity, practiced by about ten percent of the Egyptian people (Weitz, 2015). Many Armenian Christians live in cities within Lebanon and Syria (Weitz, 2015). Yezidis are a small ethnic and religious group that live in northeastern Iraq (Weitz, 2015). Yezidi religious practices blend parts of ancient Iranian religion with Islam (Weitz, 2015). Small indigenous Jewish communities exist in Turkey, Iraq, and Morocco, though many Jewish people migrated to Israel, Europe, and the United States after Israel’s founding in 1948 (Weitz, 2015). Some of this movement was peaceful and due to personal choice and desire for protected religious freedom, but some of this movement was forced as many countries in the Middle East highly disagreed with the creation of Israel as a religiously-Jewish country and government. A few Zoroastrians also live in the region (Weitz, 2015).
Additionally, many countries that are not in the Middle East region have high Muslim populations. More than 87 percent of people living in Indonesia are Muslims (Diamant, 2019). More than 14 percent of India’s population are Muslims (Diamant, 2019). More than 90 percent of people living in Bangladesh are also Muslim (Diamant, 2019). Other Muslim communities can be found in countries around the world. There is a painfully obvious lack of knowledge that exists surrounding the connections and disconnects between Islam and ethnicity. A concerted effort seems necessary to mitigate the conflations of religion and race. While many people very well may continue to hold their racist and/or Islamophobic views after being educated about the differences between someone being Middle Eastern and someone practicing the Muslim faith, maybe it will change some peoples’ minds. In many instances, it is fear for one’s own circumstances that influences people to lash out against groups they do not know or understand (Poulakidakos 2018, p. 111). Here we can reiterate the job-stealing narrative that is often expressed. And while, yes, the perpetrators of the September 11th attacks on the Twin Towers were Muslims, they belonged to an extremist, militarized group. Extreme indoctrination and commitment to any faith is detrimental and can lead to unmatched violence. It may take years and years of education and re-education to undo the narratives tied to the term “Muslim.”

It is necessary to delve into the identities of the migrants within this crisis through many of their religions and cultural backgrounds to further understand why many have been unfairly depicted in the media. Much of the media cited in this thesis has been created in Europe and the Americas, where Islam is viewed less favorably than in other parts of the world where it is the most prominent religion. It is important to view migrants as entire people, not the segments of their identities that outsiders would like to dissect.
CONCLUSION

Migration is a geographical issue in the sense that geographers should definitely be addressing it. As a study of space and place, migration covers all of the bases, and indeed touches all of the subfields of geography. Mapping, studies of borders, and studies of climate change all have applications in studying the Greek migration. I bring this up because, unfortunately, this will not be the last time something like this happens. With sea levels rising, with the impending threat of countries going to war over natural resources, with the threat of religious and nativist extremism existing on every populated continent on planet Earth, complicated issues of migration will happen again.

Because of these foresights, it is vital that all people, especially geographers, are armed with the knowledge of media depictions of migrants as anything other than people attempting to escape something harmful, whether it be war or a natural disaster, may be twisted to create a kind of manipulation, or even outright propaganda. It is the duty of geography to keep track of the intricacies of movement across borders and preserve the rights of those attempting to seek refugee status and asylum in various countries.

The Greek migration crisis is often described as starting in the year 2014. At this time, the perfect storm for a crisis was brewing in Greece. There existed a completely unstable financial structure, and a government that could also be described as unstable. Overwhelming debt was essentially running Greece into the ground. Greece’s proximity to war-torn countries was just one more thing going against it. With migrants desperate to enter Europe, more specifically European Union members countries, Greece was the most convenient landing place for those crossing by sea, and even by land for some entering through Turkey. While Greece was not the ideal final destination for many migrants, it became the default migrant stop. With richer
European Union countries beginning to reject refugee and asylum requests from certain countries, migrants were essentially left stranded in Greece, many in migrant housing or detention facilities. This is a stressful scenario for migrants, as well as for citizens of Greece. Having stressed political and financial systems definitely set the stage for why the large influx of migrants resulted in a scenario deemed severe enough to be a “crisis.”

The story of the Greek migration crisis teaches us that it is dangerous to rely on a default entry point for a mass migration event. Expecting one country that is already struggling financially and politically to bear the brunt of a great influx of people is not only unfair, but dangerous, as was made evident by the 2020 fire at the Moria migrant camp (Borbon, 2020). Countries with more financial strength should step up to take in some migrants on requests of refugee status and asylum, especially in situations where countries are in alliances with each other and have made agreements to aid each other, such as in the case of the European Union. Germany did this by temporarily opening its borders, but that was short-lived. A more comprehensive plan should be developed to ensure that one or two countries do not take on thousands of people that they cannot reasonably support in terms of health and safety (Mezzofiore, 2016). The only way to avoid recklessness and tragedy in the future is to learn from the past, and create plans based off of this knowledge.

Further Discussion and Future Research

Upon reading this thesis, it should be noted that all sources quoted and cited were written in English. Clearly, not all of these sources were written by individuals who speak English as their primary or first language, such as various newspaper and journal articles cited from Russia, Germany, and Greece. However, I want to acknowledge the breadth of knowledge that could
have been added to this dialogue, had I had access to sources available in other languages. I have covered a lot of important perspectives in this project, but a larger universe of data exists that could have made this analysis even more fruitful. It may be surprising to some, but this lack of access is not simply due to a blanket American ignorance or unwillingness to learn other languages. Much of this issue of access has to do with a number of top publishers not being proficient in multiple languages (Williams, 2010). If unwilling to publish something in its original written language, instead translating sources is an effort for these publishers that costs time and money (Williams, 2010). In addition to this, there is a problem of linguistic privilege (Müller, 2021, p. 2). There exists an overarching idea that English should be the universal language in publications, from academic journal articles to novels. There is an assumption that English is the most “accessible” of the modern written languages (Müller, 2021, p. 2). But what are we missing? To start with, there are hundreds, maybe thousands, of words in existence that have no English equivalents. Additionally, we may inadvertently remove some of the value from literature when we ask someone to alter their work by translating it. If there is an outside translator going over written work to translate it into English, can we really feel assured that the original intent and message of the author is going to shine through? It is highly unlikely that one can guarantee this. Accessibility of source material of different languages should be more readily available, especially to internet users. If I am researching something to specific keywords, unless I myself add to my search criteria that I only want results that are available in English, why would I want to exclude relative information that happens to be in another language? Even if I cannot understand all of the content, there is still something to gain. Imagery, citations, and word choice are important and could have influenced my research. Not to mention, I could have used online translator tools on my own to decipher those things that I did not happen to understand. I
know that more work needs to be done on the Greek migration crisis. That does not necessitate that this work needs to be written in English.

In this thesis, I sought to ask what media depictions of migrants in the context of the Greek migration crisis were, what they meant, and how to categorize them. What I found were the categorical umbrellas of villain, victim, satire, and natural force. These tools and media depictions are those of language, but, at the end of the day, this language is being used to manipulate our perceptions of migrants, their movements, and their humanity. In geography we study the uses of space. In this crisis, migrants were in need of safe spaces, and European Union citizens and governments felt the need to protect their spaces from the perceived threats related to migration. Media coverage of the crisis facilitated the formation of various public opinions, including fears. It is necessary to unravel the language used here because it directly affects how we view and choose to use the spaces around us. Geographers should use this opportunity of learning from the past to inform the future: When natural disasters and conflicts happen, we must remember the events of the Greek migration crisis and use them to promote better and more equitable processes for the future.

Media coverage itself may not seem like a life or death topic, but media shapes thoughts and policies, therefore shaping migrants’ lives. Migrants are human beings, many in dire need of escaping their living situations because they may be facing the violence of war. They may be targeted by the violence of extremist groups due to their religion or their race. These people end up crossing borders with the hope of securing safety. They are not hoping to ‘steal’ wealth from the European Union countries. As discussed, many of the migrants in the crisis already had lucrative careers in the countries they left. The promise of protection through refugee status and the seeking of asylum are what drove millions of people to rush to Greece. All people are
complex, including migrants. We all have reasons for why we do what we do. Migrants are no different, yet they are depicted in the media as being an external force. A migrant is neither a categorical villain nor victim. They are a complex individual trying to secure their peace and their freedom.
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