

# Crisis as Emotional Labour in the News. Assessing the *Trauma Frame* During the Economic and the Pandemic Crisis

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## Abstract

This study focuses on the way(s) that the economic and the pandemic crisis were covered by media outlets and aims to research whether journalists' own feelings and experiences of covering both these traumatic events were depicted in their news articles. Drawing on Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) set of five generic frames this study focuses on Greece, a country that has been severely hit by both these crises and brings together theories about journalism as emotional labour that defy the prevailing notion of the distant and neutral observers. Moving one step further, this study argues that journalists convey their source's emotions, but in some cases, they also reveal their own feelings through their news articles. Findings suggest that apart from the already documented frames, (i.e., attribution of responsibility, conflict, human interest, economic consequences, and morality), journalists used the *trauma frame*, a notion we use to refer to news articles that essentially reflect and reveal journalists' own emotions. This finding refutes the traditional understanding of quality journalistic discourse as one stripped of emotional expression and opens new pathways for research.

**Keywords:** emotional labour, journalists, trauma, economic crisis, pandemic crisis, media, Greece

## 1. Introduction

Journalism was never considered to be an easygoing and stress-free profession as covering catastrophes and tragedies was essentially part of the job description. However, the continuous, intense and explicitly traumatic events that have taken place worldwide during the last decade, i.e. the economic, the refugee and the pandemic crisis, seem to have made covering death and tragedy an everyday routine for many journalists. The impact of their exposure to these kinds of events has been recently moved to the center of interest for many media scholars who recorded the various effects of crisis covering to media professionals' mental health. According to these studies, journalists may suffer from various mental health problems such as PTSD symptoms, depression, and moral injury (Dworznic, 2011; Feinstein, Pavisian & Storm, 2018; Papadopoulou, Maniou & Pandia, 2022). Notwithstanding the importance of these findings, we still lack a systematic analysis of the way(s) that journalists deal with the emotions and trauma that stem from their work and the impact that these feelings and experiences may have on their news articles.

In this respect, this study researches whether journalists' own feelings and experiences of covering the economic and the pandemic crisis were depicted in their news articles. We specifically investigate the frames that journalists employed to cover the news regarding the two major crises of the last decade. By shedding a light on this under researched issue this study will allow us to better understand the way journalists navigate their own emotions.

As a case study we use Greece, a country that has been severely hit by the economic as well as the pandemic crisis, which also severely affected news media (Leandros & Papadopoulou, 2020; Papadopoulou, 2020).

This article is structured as follows. The literature review addresses the new understanding of journalists as professionals who bear an affective and psychological relation to the scenes and people they cover and can be traumatised by their experiences. We move on to discuss another recent approach that reconfigures journalistic texts as emotional and affective refuting the prevalent notion which stated that emotional expressions are mostly related with tabloid news tactics. Notwithstanding their important contribution to the field, we argue that most of these approaches are looking for signs of trauma by focusing specifically on journalists themselves. As a result, there is a significant gap that needs to be addressed as this approach essentially excludes the possibility that journalists may also use their own texts to manifest their feelings and possible trauma.

On this basis, we develop our research question and discuss the method we used in this study. We then present our findings in detail and conclude by discussing the limitations of our approach and by providing suggestions for future research.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 *Distant Observers and Emotionless Articles*

Traditionally, quality journalism was characterized by objectivity and journalists were required to be disciplined, objective and not express their own feelings when covering everyday events or even large-scale catastrophes (Martin & White, 2005; Stenvall, 2014; Connell, 1998). The *strategic ritual of objectivity*, a term coined by Gaye Tuchman (1972), referred to a key set of professional practices such as focusing on facts and presenting them in a detached, unbiased, impersonal manner and was deemed essential for journalists who wanted to be considered professionals and well respected among their colleagues. In the same context, the widespread use of emotions in various articles was dismissed as it had been attributed to tabloid news tactics that intended to provoke emotional reactions in the public (Connell, 1998; Franklin, 1997).

Today, however, a substantial body of literature shows that journalism can be an emotional labour and that journalists can be affected emotionally by their work (e.g. Feinstein et al., 2018). This is also reflected in the emergence of the new specialized field of *Trauma Journalism* (Smith, Drevo & Newman, 2018; Papadopoulou & Maniou, 2020; Papadopoulou et al., 2022) that reconceptualizes journalism as a primary affective vocation and seeks to detect the impact that covering traumatic stories may have on media professionals.

Indeed, concerns about physical and emotional harm to news workers have increased recently as journalists have encountered death and tragedy worldwide (Beam and Spratt, 2009). Moreover, as journalists are often first responders to a trauma scene, they are sometimes called to take on various different roles. For instance, when covering war, they may need to help civilians (Himmelstein & Faithorn, 2002) or when covering an accident that resulted in the death of a family member, they may be required to provide emotional and psychological support to the rest of the family (Dworznic, 2006). Early studies found significant correlations between work-related exposure to death and injury and PTSD symptoms among journalists, especially in the case of war covering (Pyeovich, Newman & Daleiden, 2003; Newman, Simpson & Handschuh, 2003; Dworznic, 2011). Focusing on the migration crisis, Feinstein, Pavisian and Storm (2018) showed that journalists suffered from moral injury. Papadopoulou, Maniou and Pandia (2022) pointed out however that traumatic stress symptoms are not limited to reporters who cover war and other large-scale disasters but can also be present in those that cover austerity's everyday manifestations.

Today the professional ideologies of detachment and distanced observation have given way to a new understanding which defies the prevailing notion that journalists can cover any type of story without being affected (Backholm, 2016) and admits that that journalists bear an affective and psychological relation to the scenes and people they cover (Rentschler, 2010). For instance, Papadopoulou and Maniou (2020), focusing on the economic crisis, made the argument of a *double trauma* imposed on journalists, referring to the fact that the events they covered as professionals (such as wage cuts, dismissals etc), concerned and impacted them on a personal level as well. Indeed, journalism is produced by humans with emotions, and despite their efforts to ignore them in favor of framing themselves as rational beings able to objectively document the world they cannot detach themselves from the overwhelming emotions that can stem from the traumatic stories they cover and their encounters with survivors or relatives of victims (Schudson, 2001).

### 2.2 *Reading Beyond the Lines: When Words Speak Louder*

The traditional understanding of quality journalistic discourse as one stripped of emotional expressions has only recently given way to a reconfiguration of journalistic texts as emotional and affective (Pantti & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011). White (1998) argues that although the so-called hard news code proposes an "interpersonal neutral" writing style, at the same time journalistic texts are increasingly characterized by tension, which presupposes emotionally charged writing style. Traumatic and tragic events shatter our sense of security and belonging. The news coverage of national disasters is embedded with emotion, whether it focuses on the emotions of individuals directly affected by a tragedy, or the collective emotions of the larger community (Pantti & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011). Journalism is practised in conditions of profound uncertainty, both for the profession and for society more broadly, where multiple crises have created a volatile and unpredictable setting. In this context, emotions in journalistic storytelling can be seen as mobilised to address and manage this profound uncertainty (Siapera and Papadopoulou, 2021).

Wahl-Jorgensen (2013) was among the first researchers to suggest that there is a systematic practice in modern journalism to include emotions in news articles. Picking up on Tuchman's notion of the *strategic ritual of objectivity* (1972), she suggests that there is also what might be referred to as a *strategic ritual of emotionality*, namely, the institutionalized and systematic practice of journalists narrating and infusing their reporting with emotion, which means

that journalistic storytelling, despite its allegiance to the ideal of objectivity, is also profoundly emotional. Wahl-Jorgensen (2013) further points out that journalists do not express their own emotions in their texts. They rather outsource their emotional labor to non-journalists – the story protagonists and other sources, who are (a) authorized to express emotions in public, and (b) whose emotions journalists can authoritatively describe without implicating themselves. Previous research has shown that in particular situations, events or specific time periods, an increase in the expression of emotion by members of the social collective involved is expected (Tudor, 2003). The phenomenon is described more vividly by Berezin (2002) who speaks about common emotional energy, referring to the spontaneous reactions of people after some dramatic events, typically referring to the death of Princess Diana.

This understanding of journalistic storytelling as emotional is indeed a step forward, however, these studies exclude journalists' own emotion and tend to focus on the public's emotions taking as granted that the expression of feelings by journalists is independent from their personal emotional state. Barbalet (2002) on the other hand, suggests that emotion presupposes the involvement of the individual through a specific experience. Furthermore, Peters (2011) notes that in sociology the expression of emotion indicates the involvement of the individual who expresses it. This kind of understanding has only recently emerged in the relative scholarship. For instance, Kovacs Burns, Richter and Chaw Kant (2013) found that journalists' personal experiences, as well as what they want others to feel, influence how they frame their articles on homelessness. Moreover, as they point out, journalists' preferences for story topics, framing considerations and impact goals reveal who they are as the people behind the media stories.

### 3. Research Question and Methodology

Bearing the above in mind, we argue that the emotional trauma that impacts journalists who cover crisis stories can also be traced and articulated in their own texts and specifically through the frames they employ to cover the news. Following this line of thought, this study aims to seek and trace the way emotions are articulated in journalistic contents. To do so we focus on Greece, a country that has been severely impacted by the economic as well as the pandemic crisis, and we adopt a framing analysis methodology. Entman (1993) defines framing as selection and salience in a news story: To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item. Frames play the role of giving meaning to the world, but their characteristic is that they operate at the individual level (Scheufele, 2006). Correspondingly, journalistic frames are interpretive constructions employed by individual journalists in order to interpret the facts and consequently form the corresponding news frames (Bruggeman, 2014). The frame can be manifested in various strategies such as choice of words, language and style of writing with metaphors, exemplars, descriptions, arguments and visual images (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Thus, it is worth noting that journalists frame their articles more or less in line with their own interpretations.

This study builds on Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) set of five generic frames (i.e., attribution of responsibility, conflict, human interest, economic consequences, and morality). Specifically, economic consequences frame refers to issues that are approached from the perspective of their economic consequences on the individuals, organisations, or country. The human-interest frame refers to issues that are approached from a human perspective, the conflict frame emphasizes conflict between individuals, groups, or institutions as a means of capturing audience's interest. Morality/religion frame, puts the event, problem, or issue in the context of religious tenets or moral prescriptions and finally, attribution of responsibility presents an issue or problem in such a way as to attribute responsibility for its cause or solution to either the government or to an individual or group. It should be mentioned that framing has been extensively used to analyse the way media cover various issues, such as for instance the European Elections of 2019 (Antoniades, 2020).

Specifically, to research the existence of the five generic frames, we initiated a qualitative content analysis, a technique which is systematically used to describe the apparent content of communication as well as draw inferences.

In so doing, our study focused on three leading print media websites

- 1) Kathimerini: A Greek conservative leading newspaper
- 2) Efimerida ton Syntakton: A left-leaning newspaper and
- 3) Naftemporiki: A leading financial newspaper

Initially, we specified the under-research period for both crises. In the case of the economic crisis, we selected to analyze texts that appeared online from October the 1st 2013 to December 31th, 2013. According to various data, the specific reference quarter recorded the highest unemployment rates (27.5%), the highest percentage of population living in poverty or on the verge of poverty (35,7%), numerous bankruptcies (437) and suicides (533). The above circumstances, accompanied by the banking and national debts, had decisively affected all aspects of the local society (political, economic, social, cultural, etc.) (Papadopoulou & Maniou, 2020). Our framing analysis included all stories

that mentioned the words: Economic Crisis, Austerity, Bankruptcy, Debt, Breadline, Unemployment, Over-indebted, Auctions, Suicides, Homeless.

In the case of the health crisis, we selected to study the first three months of the pandemic (according to WHO, 2019), namely from 11 March 2020 to 10 June 2020. Our framing analysis included all stories that mentioned the words: Coronavirus, COVID, COVID-19, Pandemic, Epidemic, Disease, Virus and Crisis (Table 1).

After having identified all the relative key words, we initiated our study by using the under-research websites' search engines to find the stories mentioning the specific keywords for each crisis. Subsequently we read all the relative stories that came up in the search engines and attempted to classify them based on Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) set of five generic frames (i.e., attribution of responsibility, conflict, human interest, economic consequences, and morality). While following this procedure we were also taking notes of stories that could not fit into any of the established categories and could possibly lead to new frames.

Table 1. Stories selected for content analysis

Content analysis		
Economic crisis		
Selected Period	News outlets	Keywords
01/10/2013-31/12/2013	Kathimerini Efimerida ton Syntakton Naftemporiki	Economic Crisis, Austerity, Bankruptcy, Debt, Breadline, Unemployment, Over-indebted, Auctions, Suicides, Homeless
Health crisis		
Selected Period	News outlets	Keywords
11/03/2020-10/06/2020	Kathimerini Efimerida ton Syntakton Naftemporiki	Coronavirus, COVID, COVID-19, Pandemic, Epidemic, Disease, Virus and Crisis

#### 4. Findings

Our initial research affirmed the existence of various frames. Moreover, we managed to record another frame, the *trauma frame*, that described the emotional toll of both these crises on people. Furthermore, we argue that this frame essentially revealed journalists' own emotions and feelings as they were shaped during this decade of continuous crisis and trauma.

Regarding the five frames indicated by previous literature, our study found that journalists in both our cases used the *human-interest frame* to record the way people experienced the economic and the pandemic crisis. For instance, several stories focused on the human aspect by presenting the way specific well-known people experienced the lockdown and the new habits they adopted to deal with this new situation. For example, Kathimerini published an article focusing on "the twenty-four-hour quarantine with the singer Eftychia Mitritsa" (Kathimerini, 04.05.2020<sup>1</sup>). On another instance, a news story featured a famous actress who talked about her own experiences in the pandemic and expressed the hope that "We will rebuild what is demolished (Kathimerini, 06.04.2020<sup>2</sup>). Our sample was also overwhelmed by personal stories about Covid survivors, like the one with a man that "...closed the 100 and defeated the coronavirus" (Naftemporiki, 29.04.2020<sup>3</sup>).

The *economic consequences frame* was found in both cases and most prevalent- as expected in the economic crisis. For instance, various articles referred to the country's debts and bankruptcy (e.g. "Bankruptcy or exit of Greece from the eurozone", Naftemporiki, 02.12.2013<sup>4</sup>) emphasizing "the ominous forecasts for the following years" (Naftemporiki, 05.12.2013<sup>5</sup>). An abundance of articles also referred to the citizens' own debts as the word "unpaid" and "over-indebted household" appeared repeatable in the news. (Kathimerini, 01.12.2013<sup>6</sup>; Naftemporiki, 16.10.2013<sup>7</sup>). As regards to the

<sup>1</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/life/people/1076268/ena-eikositetraoro-karantinas-me-tin-tragoydistria-eytychia-mitritsa/>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/life/people/1072395/maria-naypliotoy-stin-k-tha-xanachtisoyme-o-ti-gkremistei/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.naftemporiki.gr/story/1594474/ekleise-ta-100-kai-nikise-ton-koronoio>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.naftemporiki.gr/finance/story/737267/ft-xreokopia-i-eksodos-tis-elladas-apo-to-euro>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.naftemporiki.gr/finance/story/738824/bea-louketo-ebalan-7747-bi>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/economy/local/61267/pano-apo-ena-ekatommyrio-oi-aplirotoi-ergazomenoi/>

health crisis, this study found numerous news stories related to the pandemic's economic consequences. For example, a news story reports that "the Greeks, may have won the battle with the coronavirus, but they paid a heavy price on employment and the wider economy" (Efimerida ton Syntakton, 09.05.2020<sup>8</sup>). Another article argues that the pandemic is most likely to lead to the largest increase in unemployment in the last decade higher even than in 2011-2013 (Kathimerini, 04.05.2020<sup>9</sup>).

The *attribution of responsibility frame* is also present in both cases. In our first case, namely the economic crisis, we noticed that the responsibility was put on the shoulders of both the politicians but also the citizens. On the one hand, we have the responsibility of politicians (government) that, at some level, could alleviate the problem and choose more suitable and society-friendly decisions. But, on the other hand, we identify a pattern regarding the citizens' own share of responsibility. For instance, we read about citizens that largely withdrew their deposits, causing further cash flow problems (Efimerida ton Syntakton, 13.08.2013<sup>10</sup>). Various stories also put the blame on previous governments (Naftemporiki, 18.10.2013<sup>11</sup>) and other actors such as the troika (e.g. Naftemporiki, 19.12.2013<sup>12</sup>, Kathimerini, 11.12.2013<sup>13</sup>).

The current government is also to be blamed for the health crisis as various news stories for the pandemic adopted the attribution of responsibility frame to report on the way that the government dealt with the economic impact of the pandemic (Kathimerini, 30.04.2020<sup>14</sup>).

On the other hand, Prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis suggested that people hold the key to getting rid of the virus. Kathimerini reported that "Kyriakos Mitsotakis pointed out that the key to the success of the measures will again be our individual discipline, responsibility and trust in the instructions of experts" (Kathimerini, 28.04.2020<sup>15</sup>). On another instance, some news stories reported about people's own responsibility in transmitting the virus as they violated the strict measures imposed by the government (e.g. Kathimerini, 17.03.2020<sup>16</sup>).

The *conflict frame* was evident in both crises. In the context of the economic crisis we found various news stories that adopted a "we versus the others" narrative, in which on the one hand there were Greek people and on the other actors such as lenders, rating agencies, and support mechanisms (Kathimerini, 16.11.2013<sup>17</sup>). Another binary construction was between citizens and the state. On the one hand, there were hard-working and paying taxes citizens versus an irrational state (Kathimerini, 24.11.2013<sup>18</sup>). Another conflict frequently mentioned in multiple articles is the one in which the country's economics are flourishing but people's lives are being sacrificed (Naftemporiki, 21.11.2013<sup>19</sup>). The *conflict frame* was also found in the context of the pandemic as various articles emphasized the war between life and death (Efimerida Ton Syntakton, 26.04.2020<sup>20</sup>) and the conflict between science and conspiracy theories, (Kathimerini, 24.03.2020<sup>21</sup>).

*Morality frame* was much less evident in the context of the economic crisis. The only reference found concerned priests'

<sup>7</sup><https://www.naftemporiki.gr/story/716586/gsee-sto-65-ta-uperxreomena-noikokuria>

<sup>8</sup>[https://www.efsyn.gr/oikonomia/elliniki-oikonomia/242609\\_bary-timima-sta-eisodimata](https://www.efsyn.gr/oikonomia/elliniki-oikonomia/242609_bary-timima-sta-eisodimata)

<sup>9</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/economy/local/1076635/sev-anamenetai-i-megalyteri-ayxisi-anergias-tis-teleytaias-dekaetias/>

<sup>10</sup>[https://www.efsyn.gr/oikonomia/elliniki-oikonomia/2053\\_pros-ton-noembrio-i-syzitisi-gia-koyrema-toy-hreoyis](https://www.efsyn.gr/oikonomia/elliniki-oikonomia/2053_pros-ton-noembrio-i-syzitisi-gia-koyrema-toy-hreoyis)

<sup>11</sup><https://www.naftemporiki.gr/story/717825/d-koutsoumpas-oso-kai-na-meiothei-to-xreos-pali-tha-tin-plierosei-o-laos>

<sup>12</sup><https://www.naftemporiki.gr/finance/story/744508/kritiki-sto-rollo-tis-troikas>

<sup>13</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/opinion/738037/antistasi-stin-troika-gia-ti-sotiria-toy-laoy/>

<sup>14</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/politics/1076164/al-tsipras-i-yfesi-poy-erchetai-tha-echei-ti-sfragida-mitsotaki/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/1075863/atomiki-eythyni-kai-empistosyni-stoys-eidikoyis-to-stoichima-tis-epomenis-imeras/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/1069594/oi-thessalonikeis-den-menoy-n-spiti-gemati-kosmo-simera-i-paralia-fotografies/>

<sup>17</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/opinion/59855/emeis-kai-oi-alloi-6/>

<sup>18</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/opinion/737821/o-ypokofos-thymos-tis-astikis-taxis-2/>

<sup>19</sup><https://www.naftemporiki.gr/finance/story/732545/ntaiselimploum-xreiazontai-nees-thusies-apo-tous-ellines>

<sup>20</sup>[https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/ygeia/240642\\_nosokomeio-sotiria-i-niki-tis-zois-pano-ston-thanato](https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/ygeia/240642_nosokomeio-sotiria-i-niki-tis-zois-pano-ston-thanato)

<sup>21</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/life/people/1070338/ntalas-kampel-i-epistimi-kata-tis-synomosiologias/>

who urged people to be patient in order to overcome the crisis (Naftemporiki, 27.10.2013<sup>22</sup>). Things were a bit different in the health crisis as many stories referred to religion. For instance, a news article captured the ways that religious ceremonies were transformed to comply with the coronavirus restrictions. (Naftemporiki, 26.05.2020<sup>23</sup>). On another instance, various news articles reported on the ways that people and priests tried to violate coronavirus restrictions so that they could pray (Naftemporiki, 20.03.2020<sup>24</sup>). Naftemporiki, 21.03.2020<sup>25</sup>).

## 5. Trauma Frame

Apart from the already established frames, our research managed to record another frame that was prevalent in both our case studies. The *trauma frame* refers to news articles that essentially describe people's traumatic experiences during these extreme situations, namely the economic and the pandemic crisis. Apart from merely reflecting their sources' feelings, however, we argue that in some cases, the trauma frame reveals journalists' own emotions as shaped during this decade of continuous traumatic events. In order to better assess the *trauma frame* we further analyzed it into three subcategories:

### 5.1 Personal Traumatic Stories

The first subcategory is *personal traumatic stories* and essentially refers to news items presenting the way people were traumatized by both crises. With regards to the economic crisis, our research documented various stories about hungry and malnourished children that were often absent from classes, nervous and not in the mood to attend their lessons. As one of their teachers stated in an article, "*taking in mind the problems of survival they face at home, coming to school is indeed an achievement*". (Efimerida ton Syntakton, 08.07.2013<sup>26</sup>). Another article referred to an old woman that lost her life when her house was set on fire by a candle she lit as she had no money to pay the electricity (Naftemporiki, 06.12.2013<sup>27</sup>). Numerous other articles referred to personal stories about people who were left homeless (Kathimerini, 07.12.2013<sup>28</sup>), could not afford buying their own medicines, (Kathimerini, 13.10.2013<sup>29</sup>) or pay for heating (Kathimerini, 14.10.2013<sup>30</sup>). A specific news item referred to a 74-year-old pensioner who wanted to commit suicide after bailiffs visited him at his home to issue him an eviction order (Naftemporiki, 06.11.2013<sup>31</sup>). The same pattern was recorded in the context of the Covid 19 crisis as various news articles reported on the traumatic impact that the pandemic had on their lives. People who lost their loved ones without a chance to say goodbye, or stories about whole families that caught the virus and died the one after the other flooded the headlines (Naftemporiki, 13.04.2020<sup>32</sup>, 28.04.2020<sup>33</sup>).

### 5.2 Impact on Mental Health

Another subcategory concerned stories about the traumatic impact of both crises on people's mental health. With regards to the pandemic, many articles referred to the serious repercussions such as severe sleep disorders, anxiety, and feelings of depression that the lockdown and the lack of physical contact - caresses, kisses and hugs – could have on people's mental health (Efimerida ton Syntakton, 05.06.2020<sup>34</sup>). Numerous other news items tried to provide tips and practices to help people alleviate the impact of the health crisis in their lives. Some of the most indicative headlines read

<sup>22</sup><https://www.naftemporiki.gr/story/721451/thessaloniki-anaxorisi-tou-oikoumenikou-patriarxi-gia-tin-konstantinoupoli>

<sup>23</sup><https://www.naftemporiki.gr/story/1602630/paniguriki-anastasimi-akolouthia-stis-ekklisies-apopse>

<sup>24</sup><https://www.naftemporiki.gr/story/1578293/koronoios-zografou-sullipseis-ennea-allodapon-se-atupo-tzami>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.naftemporiki.gr/story/1578518/koronoios-prosixthi-gia-parabiasi-ton-perioristikon-metron-o-mitropolitis-kuthiron>

<sup>26</sup>[https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/3117\\_ston-aspropyrgo-tis-bias-tis-ftoheias-kai-tis-exathliosis](https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/3117_ston-aspropyrgo-tis-bias-tis-ftoheias-kai-tis-exathliosis)

<sup>27</sup><https://www.naftemporiki.gr/story/739240/thessaloniki-mia-akomi-fotia-se-spiti-xoris-reuma>

<sup>28</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/505689/katafygio-ypnoy-gia-peninta-astegoys/>

<sup>29</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/56271/graps-ta-sto-tefteri-kai-sta-farmakeia/>

<sup>30</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/56387/wwf-ellas-okto-stoys-deka-polites-den-xodeyoyn-chrimata-gia-thermansi/>

<sup>31</sup><https://www.naftemporiki.gr/story/725832/xania-apopeirathike-na-autoktonisei-otan-tou-epidothike-entoli-eksosis>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.naftemporiki.gr/story/1589228/thuma-tou-koronoiou-o-epistimonas-kai-ereunitis-th-papazoglou-pethanse-ilikia-57-eton-stis-brukselles>

<sup>33</sup>[https://www.efsyn.gr/kosmos/boreia-ameriki/240986\\_aytoktonise-diakekrimeni-giatros-sti-nea-yorki-stin-proti-grammi-tis](https://www.efsyn.gr/kosmos/boreia-ameriki/240986_aytoktonise-diakekrimeni-giatros-sti-nea-yorki-stin-proti-grammi-tis)

<sup>34</sup>[https://www.efsyn.gr/epistimi/mihanes-toy-noy/246479\\_oi-anthropines-epafes-se-karantina](https://www.efsyn.gr/epistimi/mihanes-toy-noy/246479_oi-anthropines-epafes-se-karantina)

“Coronavirus (COVID-19) Instructions for Psychological Support of Citizens” (Naftemporiki, 23.03.2020<sup>35</sup>), “Stress management during the coronavirus season” (Naftemporiki, 04.04.2020<sup>36</sup>), “The “gymnastics” of the mind helps people deal with stress due to coronavirus” (Naftemporiki, 22.04.2020<sup>37</sup>), “Health crisis and mental health crisis in the coronavirus era” (Efimerida Ton Syntakton, 11.04.2020<sup>38</sup>). A lot of news items also pointed out that the various effects of the virus on the social body do not stop with the end of the health crisis but on the contrary, there could be long-term mental health issues (Efimerida ton Syntakton, 03.05.2020<sup>39</sup>, Efimerida Ton Syntakton, 27.04.2020<sup>40</sup>).

For instance, Kathimerini (11.05.2020<sup>41</sup>), hosted statements by scientists who pointed out to the certain increase in mental illness after the pandemic. Other news stories focused on the impact of coronavirus on medical and nursing staff referring to the very high rates of stress, psychological distress, insomnia and depressive symptoms in hospital staff treating patients with COVID (Naftemporiki (08.04.2020<sup>42</sup>) featuring articles such as “Doctors' 'Trauma' will be seen later” (Kathimerini, April 14, 2020<sup>43</sup>). This subcategory was also prevalent in the economic crisis case study as various articles reported on the heavy mental price that people will have to pay due to the extreme austerity, they were forced to live in. For instance, research published in Naftemporiki (3/10/2013<sup>44</sup>) revealed that 56,9% of the respondents reported that their mental health was affected by the economic crisis. On another research regarding the mental health of Greeks during the economic crisis we read that “12% of the population suffers from depression” (Kathimerini - 11.10.2013<sup>45</sup>).

### 5.3 Emotionally Charged Texts

According to relative literature, journalists do not express their own emotions in their texts. They rather outsource their emotional labor to non-journalists – the story protagonists and other sources (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013). This was not however the case in various articles found in both the extreme crisis situations we researched, as journalists essentially expressed their own emotions through words and expressions that revealed anger, or despair. The language used in both our case studies combines despair, anger and frustration at varied proportions. For instance, in a news article about the pandemic entitled “Lives in Suspension”, the journalist pointed out that the current situation is *unbearable as it is going on for over a decade now with the same feelings of uncertainty and fear* (Efimerida ton Syntakton (01.06.2020<sup>46</sup>). The intensity of the story they had to cover, their own possibly involvement or identification with what their story protagonists were going through, or possible even a personal need to express their own feelings resulted in the use of emotionally charged language in various occasions. For example, in an article about the elderly residents of nursing homes, who had to face the covid pandemic without medical supplies, ie, masks and gloves, the journalist argues that there is “a cry of agony from the country's nursing homes amid the pandemic” (Kathimerini, 27.03.2020<sup>47</sup>).

In many instances, journalists chose a personal tone to describe their feelings, just like a journalist who wrote that “after spending three days in this municipality, we recorded pictures of absolute poverty and destitution” (Efimerida ton Syntakton, 08.07.2013<sup>48</sup>). Another one writes, “The desperation of whatever middle class is left in the country cannot be described. This desperation risks trapping us into a vicious circle, from which we will hardly get out?” (Kathimerini, 13.10.2013<sup>49</sup>). On another note, a journalist writes that “the hard times are ahead. As COVID-19 continues to spread, a

<sup>35</sup><https://www.naftemporiki.gr/documents/1579764/koronoios-covid-19-odigies-psuxologikis-ypostirixis-ton-politon>

<sup>36</sup><https://www.naftemporiki.gr/story/1586415/diaxeirisi-tou-stres-tin-epoxi-tou-koronoiou>

<sup>37</sup><https://www.naftemporiki.gr/story/1591973/i-gumnastiki-tou-mualou-boitha-stin-antimetopisi-tou-stres-logo-koronoiou>

<sup>38</sup><https://www.efsyn.gr/node/238892>

<sup>39</sup>[https://www.efsyn.gr/nisides/241616\\_psyhiko-trayma-enos-ioy](https://www.efsyn.gr/nisides/241616_psyhiko-trayma-enos-ioy)

<sup>40</sup><https://www.efsyn.gr/node/240812>

<sup>41</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/1077510/eyaloti-i-genia-tis-pandimias/>

<sup>42</sup><https://www.naftemporiki.gr/story/1587563/i-psuxologiki-epibarunsi-tou-ugeionomikou-prosopikou-en-meso-pandimias>

<sup>43</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/opinion/interviews/1073500/stiven-xenakis-stin-k-ta-traymata-ton-giatron-tha-fanoyn-argotera/>

<sup>44</sup><https://www.naftemporiki.gr/story/710829/kapa-research-oi-foboi-ton-ellinon>

<sup>45</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/56165/stoicheia-sok-sto-12-5-toy-plithismoy-ta-kroysmata-katathlipsis-sti-chora-mas/>

<sup>46</sup>[https://www.efsyn.gr/stiles/apopseis/245955\\_zoes-se-anastoli](https://www.efsyn.gr/stiles/apopseis/245955_zoes-se-anastoli)

<sup>47</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/1071106/kraygi-agonias-apo-ta-girokeia-tis-choras-en-meso-tis-pandimias/>

<sup>48</sup>[https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/3117\\_ston-aspropyrgo-tis-bias-tis-ftoheias-kai-tis-exathlios](https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/3117_ston-aspropyrgo-tis-bias-tis-ftoheias-kai-tis-exathlios)

<sup>49</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/opinion/56297/oi-voyliagmenoi-einai-aoratoi/>

new threat to health systems is brewing. If we were not ready for the coronavirus pandemic, we are certainly not ready to deal with its consequences” (Kathimerini, 11.05.2020<sup>50</sup>). Finally, when describing their sources’ emotions, journalists write about people who are outraged and desperate (Kathimerini- 13.10.2013<sup>51</sup>) as they have found themselves in a frightening situation (Kathimerini, 10.10.2013<sup>52</sup>) in which their lives are sacrificed (Kathimerini, 13.10.2013<sup>53</sup>) and they feel that that they are at a dead-end (Kathimerini, 24.11.2013<sup>54</sup>).

## 6. Discussion

This study aimed to contribute to our understanding of the way journalists navigate the emotions that stem from covering crisis stories and research whether these feelings can be traced in their news articles. By doing so, we managed to document *the trauma frame*, used in various stories to describe people’s traumatic experiences but also to reveal journalists’ own emotions as shaped during this traumatic decade of continuous deaths and tragedies.

This frame was further analyzed in into three subcategories. The first subcategory, namely, *personal traumatic stories* referred to news items that were focused on the way(s) people were traumatized by both crises. This finding is consistent with previous literature which argues that journalists articulate their own feelings through their protagonists and other sources (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013). Indeed, we found numerous stories where people expressed their exhaustion, despair and pain for the losses they suffered during this decade. In this respect, journalists who shared the same experiences, used their story protagonists to essentially outsource their own exhaustion, despair and pain. By doing so, and without any obvious signs of their own personal involvement, journalists did their job, just as it was expected, but at the same time they also treated their own feelings by not keeping their trauma locked inside.

The second subcategory this study identified concerned the traumatic impact of both crises on people’s mental health. This category is especially important as it points out specifically to both crises’ emotional toll on people. Journalists described the heavy emotional burden that people who have suffered both those crises are carrying and recorded the specific imprint that those crises left on people’s mental health. Stories on sleep disorders, anxiety and depression made the bulk of this subcategory. By focusing on those stories, journalists essentially acknowledge those crises as primarily and explicitly traumatic for society.

The third and final subcategory, *emotionally charged texts*, refers to news stories that use a language showing off despair, anger, and frustration. By making these specific linguistic choices, journalists reveal directly their true feelings and allow their own thoughts and experiences shape their news articles. This finding is of great importance as it effectively reconceptualizes journalistic labour as primarily affective. In this context, journalists are not mere vehicles through which emotion is transmitted. On the contrary, they allow themselves to express their emotions through a personal tone as shaped after a decade of continuous crises and tragedies. Their own trauma may not be depicted explicitly in their news articles but nevertheless it guides their linguistic choices.

## 7. Conclusions

Recent literature may have moved away from the notion of journalist as distant observer; however this trend has not been equally applied in the context of their texts. Most of the studies in the field of trauma journalism (e.g. Smith et al., 2018; Papadopoulou & Maniou, 2020), are focusing explicitly on journalists themselves as subjects of various traumatic symptoms such as depression, burn out and PTSD (Pyeovich et al., 2003; Newman et al., 2003; Dworzniak, 2011; Feinstein et al., 2018; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020). Notwithstanding the importance of these studies, most of this research seems to be looking for signs of trauma by focusing specifically on journalists leaving behind the manifestation of their own feelings; their texts.

The last decade has decisively transformed the kind of news stories that journalists have to cover (Maniou, 2013; Maniou & Seitanidis, 2018). The financial crisis that engulfed Greece in the last decade has drastically restructured not only the political system but society itself. While the crisis is no longer acute, it has had profound and ongoing effects on society that feed into journalism (Siapera and Papadopoulou, 2021). The same can be argued for the pandemic. Human suffering seems to be part of journalists’ daily routine since both the economic and pandemic crisis have caused a great amount of tragedy in society. Journalists’ everyday working routine, however, is not the only thing that has changed. According to various studies, this last decade has taken its toll on journalists’ mental health who seem to suffer

<sup>50</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/1077510/eyaloti-i-genia-tis-pandimias/>

<sup>51</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/opinion/56287/logiki-kai-apelpisia/>

<sup>52</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/opinion/55983/exorgismenoi-2/>

<sup>53</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/opinion/56297/oi-voyliagmenoi-einai-aoratoi/>

<sup>54</sup><https://www.kathimerini.gr/opinion/60607/o-ypokofos-thymos-tis-astikis-taxis/>



from various mental health issues. What is interesting is that although recent literature has moved on from the notion of journalist as neutral observers and acknowledges their emotions, the same cannot be said about their writings.

Emotionality was until very recently considered as one of the characteristics that separate fact-based and neutral “quality” journalism from popular or tabloid journalism (Panti & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011) thus reproducing the notion of the distant and neutral journalism but now with regards to their writings.

In this article we have analyzed how media professionals navigate their emotions when it comes to writing news articles about the economic and pandemic crisis. Moving on from recent literature that focuses its attention on journalists, this study instead discusses emotional trauma in the context of their own writings. Based on primary evidence from three Greek digital newspapers, we shed a light on the direct and indirect way(s) that journalists reveal their own feelings.

The findings of the study show that apart from all the already documented frames that journalists tend to use to cover the news, i.e. morality, attribution of responsibility etc, when it comes to covering crisis, another frame, the *trauma frame* emerges.

What is most interesting in this frame is that it is used to describe people’s traumatic experiences but also to reveal journalists’ own emotions. Moreover, the *trauma frame* was found both in the economic as well as in the pandemic crisis stories we researched.

To sum up, this study has suggested that journalists who cover traumatic news stories for a prolonged period of time can be emotionally traumatized and that -most importantly- sometimes their own feelings find their way into their news articles. This is not to say however, that their writings lack professionalism. On the contrary, we argue that we should acknowledge trauma journalism in the context of news articles per se and dismiss the notion that emotions are explicitly connected with tabloid news tactics.

Ultimately, we argue that journalists, just like any other professional who has experienced various traumatic incidents for a prolonged period can and may express their own emotions in their work, which in this case is their articles. They may do so to seek solace, blow out some steam, or alleviate the pain they may feel. No matter what the reason may be, this kind of journalism cannot and should not be labeled as unprofessional. On the contrary, it should be taken quite seriously and further researched as yet another sub field in the new and expanding field of trauma journalism.

## 8. Limitations and Future Research

The study has certain limitations which may provide pathways for future research. First of all, it is based exclusively on qualitative data. It would be beneficial if these findings were supported by quantitative data so as to provide a more holistic insight into this field. It should also be pointed out that a bigger sample could also lead us to more conclusive findings. Nevertheless, our findings point towards a new understanding of the way that journalists cover and experience traumatic situations, and there is no doubt that more research is needed to put into the analysis of their news articles.

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