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REPRESENTATIONS OF EUROPE AT TIMES OF MASSIVE MIGRATION MOVEMENTS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF GREEK-CYPRIOT NEWSPAPERS DURING THE 2015 REFUGEE CRISIS

Maria Avraamidou , Irini Kadianaki, Maria Ioannou and Elisavet Panagiotou

This paper presents a thematic analysis of a media criticism against the European Union (EU) during the so-called 2015 refugee crisis in one member-state, the Republic of Cyprus. Three inter-related negative representations of Europe were identified in the Greek-Cypriot newspapers studied at the time: inhuman Europe, fragmented Europe and Europe as perpetrator. All three represented Europe as unable or unwilling to deal with a crisis that Europe itself partly caused or reproduced. This media criticism focused on questioning Europe across pessimistic lines without offering or considering alternatives, thus served to reproduce the EU status quo. The paper discusses the implications of these findings in understanding the role of the media in the con-current skepticism towards EU in other member-states.

KEYWORDS media representations; refugee crisis; Europe

Introduction

The year 2015 was marked by massive, often deadly irregular migration movement mainly from the Middle East, like war-torn Syria, to European territories. This movement was delineated as Europe's refugee crisis, during which more than one million people applied for asylum in countries of the European Union (EU) and 3770 people died while attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea, only in 2015. The European protection system appeared broken and the EU was criticised from a pro-refugee stance for increasing border controls instead of offering safe alternatives (AI 2017). The European Press depicted the refugees as either vulnerable or dangerous outsiders (Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017) and the EU as the key institution to deal with the crisis but with a poor response (Berry, Garcia-Blanco, and Moore 2015). Evidently, media depictions of refugees went hand in hand with depictions of Europe but relevant analysis in the literature remains limited.

This study examines daily newspapers of one EU member state, the Republic of Cyprus and offers an in-depth analysis of meanings of Europe at the peak of a humanitarian crisis. In this regard the study takes a different approach from the corresponding quantitative media research that focuses on Europe's visibility in the national media of certain member states and the extent to which a Europeanized public sphere exists (Brüggemann and Schulz-Forberg 2009; Machill, Beiler, and Fischer 2006). It complements relevant

qualitative research on how national media talk about Europe and what values they associate it with during different crises (Triandafyllidou, Wodak, and Krzyanowski 2009). Its insights are important for the additional reason that they shed light on a relatively new and peculiar member-state, a former British colony which is ethnically divided and which, located in EU's periphery, rarely becomes the focus of European research.

Understanding representations of Europe in the media of one member-state, provides insights that can bridge disconnected perceptions and stances on the EU amid recent or future political crises in other contexts. Additionally, it problematises the role of media in diffusing pessimistic accounts against Europe in view of the refugee crisis but without in fact questioning the European status-quo that they criticise.

Europe in the European Media: A Note on the Existing Literature

The most prominent line of research concerning the Europe/communication nexus focuses on whether a European Public sphere exists and the degree of Europeanization of national media (Brüggemann and Kleinen-von Königslöw 2009; Brüggemann and Schulz-Forberg 2009; Machill, Beiler, and Fischer 2006; Semetko and Valkenburg 2000; Van Cauwenberge, Gelders, and Joris 2009). This line of research is informative as to the visibility of the EU in national media but poor in illuminating the specific meanings given to the EU. For example, it foregrounded that the degree of media coverage varies considerably across EU member-states but that overall EU matters and European actors receive marginal media attention (Kandyla and De Vreese 2011) and are approached mainly through national lenses (Heft, Alfter, and Pfetsch 2017).

Smaller scale case studies similarly argued that representations of Europe as a community vary across member states like Germany and France (Adam 2008). Studies focusing both on visibility and attitudes in the national media towards the EU are rarer. Exceptions focusing on a simplified axis of positive vs. negative attitudes in national media towards the 2008 European integration found that there has been a prevailing positive attitude in member states (Zografova, Bakalova, and Mizova 2012). Measuring media stances towards European integration, Pfetsch (2008) also found strong support of EU integration in print media in France, Italy, Spain and Germany but lesser support in the Netherlands and Switzerland, and opposition in the UK press. Perez (2013) looked for representations of Europe in the UK and Spain and illustrated representations of the EU as an outsider in the UK and as distant and elitist in a pro-Europe Spanish newspaper.

Triandafyllidou, Wodak, and Krzyanowski (2009) studied representations of Europe during past international crises, at times that the concept and shape of Europe were vastly different (e.g. amid the 1956 Hungarian crisis or during the building of the Berlin Wall). For more recent crises, (e.g. during the US-led Iraqi Invasion in 2003, the 2006 Mohammad Cartoons events and on climate change), their research showed media depictions of Europe as peace promoter, ascribed with humanitarian values (see also ter Wal et al. 2009a, 2009b). Still, as Europe did not appear substantially in their data, the analytical depth of these studies remained rather limited.

Research examining media representations of the EU in relation to migration is also limited. We know that during the refugee crisis, solidarity discourses amplified in media frames of Europe (Kontochristou and Mascha 2014; Williams and Toulas 2017). For German media Europe, amid the refugee crisis, was caught between a compassionate pragmatism

and a “fear of cultural, ethnic, and religious difference” (Holmes and Castaneda 2016, 18). The media of Eastern European and Baltic countries criticised Europe for being excessively emotional and were extensively hostile to refugees, especially the Hungarian Press (Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017). In discursive online constructions of Europe in Greece in relation to debates about citizenship rights to immigrants, Europe symbolised progress but also decline and failure of multiculturalism. These meanings were employed flexibly to justify arguments for and against immigrant citizenship rights (Andreouli et al. 2017).

Beyond media representations, Europe as a concept has always been contested. It has been described as an elastic and flexible concept (Leontidou 2004), as ambiguous (Jenkins 2008), ambivalent (Andreouli et al. 2017), and a discursive construct of different overlapping (Stråth and Wodak 2009) or conflictual (Karner and Kopytowska 2017) discourses. Notably, it has recurrently been construed as undergoing an identity crisis to the extent that crisis has become the norm (Jenkins 2008). Considering that it is during border movements that ideas about what Europe is (Light and Young 2009) are extensively challenged, the refugee crisis provides a context to study reconfigurations of Europe including within the media.

To conclude, Europe’s communication deficit is well grounded. Yet, the meanings that Europe takes in the media have been vastly overlooked. Those studies that stood as an exception associating Europe with solidarity or humanitarian values did not delve into the meanings of Europe and they have certainly not paid close attention to its meanings during the refugee crisis. Europe’s periphery, specifically Cyprus remained outside the focus of all approaches.

Cyprus and Europe

The Republic of Cyprus (RoC) joined the EU in 2004 with the expectation that EU membership would contribute to resolving the long-lasting Cyprus Issue (Demetriou 2005). Yet, attempts to reunite the ethnically divided island, held under the auspices of the United Nations (UN), failed even after accession to the EU and the eastern Mediterranean Island remains *de facto* divided. Currently, the Turkish occupied (since 1974) north is administered by the non-recognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), heavily subsidised by Turkey, and the south is controlled by Greek-Cypriots in charge of the recognised RoC. The EU acquit is suspended in the north.

Europeanization in Cyprus equalled to modernisation (Trimikliniotis 2001), democracy and respect to human rights (Agapiou-Josephides 2011). However, the aftermath of the 2013 Troika deal to confront RoC’s persistent financial issues, only 17% of the population considered European membership as positive (Katsourides 2014). RoC exited the bailout programme in 2016 with an unemployment rate of about 10% and the second highest rate of emigration among EU countries (Eurostat 2017). During both the financial and the refugee crises, Europe was largely problematised in the Cypriot context. This, despite the fact that Cyprus did not receive refugees like other south European countries and most Cypriots were exposed to the refugee crisis via the media.

Research Rationale, Methodology and Method of Analysis

Mainstream media and newspapers in particular, constitute key information fora on migration and EU affairs in member-states (Corbu, Stefanita, and Udrea 2015; De Vreese

and Kandyla 2009; Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017). Limited existing research on the Greek-Cypriot media showed that it had been overwhelmingly pro-Europe, infused with utilitarianism (e.g. supporting the EU if it protects Cyprus from Turkey) until the 2013 Troika deal which brought about a soft Euroscepticism (Katsourides 2014). Research on migration and Cypriot media is also limited. Of the existing studies, a study on Cypriot online media found that the framing of migrants was predominantly negative (Milioni, Spyridou, and Vadratsikas 2015). Another study analysed the interrelation between negative and positive representations of migrants in newspapers identifying polarisation and limited dialogue between opposing points of view (Kadianaki et al. forthcoming). The present study is the first to focus on EU representations in the Cypriot media which, by extent, illustrate predominant stances in the Cypriot society vis-à-vis Europe. This, because mainstream Greek-Cypriot newspapers, all part of larger media organisations, are closely linked to political and economic elites.

This study focuses on four Greek-Cypriot newspapers: left-wing *Haravgi*, *Politis*, characterised by liberal views particularly on economy, *Fileleftheros*, the oldest Greek-Cypriot newspaper not aligned to a specific party but usually pro-government, and right-wing *Simerini*. The data set consists of 80 articles published in 2015, 20 from each newspaper and deriving from a corpus of 2507 articles on migration between 2011–2015.¹ The data set was coded into four main, broad family codes (divided into sub-codes providing a total of 19 codes) using the inductive approach, guided by an open research question, *How and in what ways the newspapers represented migrants?* The four main code families were: 1. *Migrants*, extracts that referred to descriptions of migrants, 2. *International actors* which referred to primary and secondary actors involved in migration issues but who were not national actors e.g. the EU and the United Nations (UN), 3. *Cyprus*, references made to Cyprus as a country or its people, 4. *Racism/ Xenophobia*: references to racism and xenophobia as social phenomena or individual stances and ideologies. The extracts coded were relatively lengthy extracts of news and opinion articles in line with MacPhail et al. (2016) so as to maintain the context of the text.

For this analysis, interest was in identifying representations of Europe as Europe appeared recurrently in the data as a main actor of migration particularly when the refugee crisis was at its peak in 2015. Therefore, the analysis presented herein is based on codes on Europe in articles published in all newspapers in 2015 (general references and specific references to EU as an institution). The codes were then thematically analysed (Braun and Clarke 2006) to identify the different meanings linked to Europe (Willig 2013), revealing three major negative representations of Europe which are discussed subsequently.

Analysis: The Three Representations

Europe as Inhuman

The newspapers studied recurrently criticised the EU, European leaders and citizens for being inhuman in their response to the refugees' plight. They based this morally instigated accusation on an elusive expectation that Europe should have shown commitment to common, universal human values, like solidarity, and assist those in need. But instead, refugees, found European doors hermetically closed to their sufferings: "soul-less" Europe (*Haravgi*, October 29, 2015) "washed its hands" like Pontius Pilate (*Simerini*, August 22,

2015), while refugees were drowning in the Mediterranean Sea. For the survivors, Europe offered nothing but degrading and repressive measures, coupled with rising xenophobia and mistrust.

An opinion article in *Politis*, in a highly emotional and ironic tone, called Europeans and specifically the political leadership as being worse than jackals -a wild animal with violent instincts-, an attribution that deprived them of their humanity. Using rhetorical questions targeting specifically the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, the article implies that refugees in Europe are unwanted. This is a characteristic extract:

What is happening? Are you perhaps complaining that much because refugees have piled up in front of your doors? Tell us, iron lady of Germany. You don't have more bread to give to them, right? Send them back. To drown in the sea. Their corpses to be washed ashore like dead fish. Make them work for half a dollar a day, take their flesh away. Suck Africa's blood. To increase your prosperity on the back of these slaves. But also build a wall at your borders so that they don't seek refuge in your country and distort your peace of mind. Humanity is dead. You killed it! They are not dead fish. [It is] dead children that were washed ashore. Take a closer look, you world (you people). Despicable you, greater jackals than jackals themselves. One day these dead souls will spit on your graves. (*Politis*, August 31, 2015)

EU's representation as inhuman was exacerbated by the image of Europeans who did not soften even before the death of little children. In parallel, reference to "sucking Africa's blood" is perhaps a criticism to neo-colonial practices of exploitation upon which Europe's wealth is built (see also *Europe as perpetrator*).

Opinion articles, like the following, accused EU countries for wanting to keep refugees out and to construct fences towards this end. It probably alludes to the Hungarian wall² or fence (see also *Europe as fragmented*):

The western countries, some of which participate in the bombings of civilians, fight between them about who will take on less "burden" and some of these [countries] come up with ways (like building a fence) to keep refugees out of their back yard. This is the crude reality ... We will unfortunately continue to witness similar images with children's corpses and we will be shocked for two, three days. Then we will resume arguing that our country cannot "take" on so many refugees. (*Haravgi*, September 5, 2015)

Herein, European countries are part of an ambiguous concept of the West which is implicated in conflicts in war-torn regions. Ordinary Europeans are construed as hypocritical because their shock about the tragedies they witnessed was only short-lived but remained unwilling to take refugees in their countries. Therefore, European identity and the contemporary European citizen is represented as individualistic and xenophobic, inclining towards nationalism. The extract is likely implicating Cyprus/Greek-Cypriots in this criticism through the inclusive "we" and "our."

The following extract ironically described the European citizen as peaceful and conservative who, however, consciously or unconsciously remains indifferent to the plight of refugees:

Consciously, or unconsciously, the peaceful and conservative European citizen turns his head and thought elsewhere, when confronted with the view of people crowding wretched boats, inflatable boats, ports and borders, and corpses of children and women floating in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea. (*Simerini*, August 30, 2015)

References to grass-roots solidarity, contained a more positive representation of European people. But they still made a point of contrasting grass-roots solidarity with the lack of solidarity by the European elites. Articles noted for example that European citizens offered shelter to refugees in the Aegean Greek islands, for example, and elsewhere. A news article quoted an activist saying: “they [Hungarian authorities] just want to send them away from here and send them to camps.” (*Simerini*, September 4, 2015).

The representation of Europe as inhuman, despite being emotionally charged, carried political messages, namely that Europe fell short of even the most elusive expectations to protect refugees. It therefore questions the foundations of the European project, the very constitutional aims of the EU, and its commitment to humanism. The inhuman representation concerned predominantly the European elites and to a great extent ordinary Europeans too.

Europe as Fragmented

The representation of Europe as fragmented, attributed Europe’s failure to adequately respond to the crisis to internal cleavages, which prevented it from acting as a real union. These conflicts pertained primarily to issues of burden sharing and the extent to which the EU, in view of the crisis, should introduce a more open or restrictive approach to migration. Fragmentation reflected conflicting approaches to external (towards refugees) and internal solidarity (towards member states). Incapability to deal with the crisis was often linked to pre-existing shortcomings of the EU Asylum System, which became more profound with the escalation of the crisis. Some articles attributed EU’s incapability to systemic reasons, namely that EU was fragmented since its inception.

News reports covered various conflictual and divisive European meetings on the refugee issue. These conflict-oriented news articles quoted for example different European leaders exchanging accusations. Opinion articles built on these reports to express further frustration with the conflict-ridden environment and inability of EU leaders to take meaningful measures for the crisis. The following extract describes the expectation for a Europe of solidarity and responsibility and characteristically concludes with a pessimistic UN estimation that existing EU plans have proved inadequate. Simultaneously, refugees are represented as victims of a fragmented EU:

While thousands of refugees are tossed like a ball in European borders and the member states are exchanging accusations, the minister meeting held in a loaded and divisive atmosphere composed a large-scale trial for the Europe of responsibility and solidarity. The summit carried on till late last night and the information [regarding the nature of its progress] was mixed. The German Minister of Interior, Thomas de Maizire, referred to it as a difficult meeting with an uncertain result, while simultaneously stating that he remains optimistic, much like the Luxembourgian presidency and France. The relocation plan of 120,000 refugees based on quota which is opposed by central European states, was brought back on the discussion table. Whatever the outcome of the meeting is, the United Nations stress that current plans of the E.U. are not adequate. (*Simerini*, September 23, 2015)

Other reports quoted EU leaders announcing national-level solutions as opposed to European-level ones. For example, the following report quotes Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, announcing the construction of a barrier fence at Hungarian borders to keep immigrants out:

"We, Hungarians, are terrified, people in Europe are terrified, because they see that the European leaders, and amongst them prime ministers, are not capable of controlling this situation" (...) We, in the Hungarian parliament, are in the processes of preparing a set of measures, we are putting up a fence, (...) stated the Hungarian prime minister, while at the same time warning that without austere border control the quotas of the EU for the refugees constitute an "invitation" for these people, adding that the Schengen status is under threat at this moment. (*Simerini*, September 4, 2015)

Orban accused other European leaders for being incapable to manage the crisis and expressed frustration that the Schengen regime, Europe's external and internal border controls, was in the brink of collapse. To him, the EU was inviting refugees to Europe and this terrified European citizens. He therefore justified extreme measures, like a fence, in view of EU's inability to protect the in-group from outside threats. His statements offer an example of the main European cleavage in the newspapers studied, about whether and to what extent the EU should introduce a more open or closed approach to migration. Lifting fences is evidently indicative of the latter approach. Other EU leaders, like German Chancellor Angela Merkel, were quoted disagreeing, whereas British Prime Minister, David Cameron, was quoted rejecting EU proposals for the UK to admit more refugees.

The following opinion article quotes calls to unity by three main EU actors: The president of the commission Jean-Claude Juncker, the president of the European parliament, Martin Schulz, and the president of the European council, Donald Tusk.

Juncker says: "All member states move slowly when they should be speeding up". Schulz appears even stricter: "if the governments consider the national egoisms more important than the common solutions then this will work against the refugees as well as the European cohesion". His view is shared by Donald Tusk who warns for the possibility of the creation of "tectonic political changes" in the EU because of the refugee crisis. The three of them together ask for the common agreements to come into effect and unity within the EU ... Excuse me, but who says these and to whom? Who talks and who is to listen? Who takes the decisions? Who has the responsibility of materializing them? And (who has the power) to control that the decision come into effect? The European parliament was discussing for three hours the refugee flow in the Western Balkans and ways of addressing the refugee issue. And what was the conclusion of this discussion? To confirm that there is a gap between taking decisions and putting them into effect. And who will bridge this gap when the European institutions put their hands up? And admit that they are incapable of supporting these souls that are tormented in rotten boats, left in the mercy of slavers and traffickers? And still, they are unable to draw a common policy which would support the countries that receive refugees. (*Haravgi*, October 29, 2015)

For the author, it is a paradox and a sign of weakness that those EU officials, expected to ensure EU unity, were instead calling for unity. She emphatically adds that while EU officials fought with each other and spent useless hours in meetings, refugees, described as "souls tormented in rotten boats", remained helpless.

The next extract provides a more fundamental criticism about the overall EU project:

Europe has from its creation in the 1950s to date, not managed to create the conditions of a political union, that is the creation of an institution that would unite Europeans politically. Is the current crisis an opportunity for the leaders of Europe to contemplate on how going down the avenue of national pettiness and of incarcerating around everyone's national

and state interest is going to turn out to be a disastrous guide for the present and future of Europe. (*Simerini*, November 8, 2015)

According to the author, the EU failed to become a real political union. By contrast, member-states are still guided by their petty, national interests and this could be catastrophic for the EU.

In the media studied, the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nikos Kotzias, reportedly said that his country, a main entry point for refugees during the crisis, paid a heavy price although not implicated in the Syrian conflict. He called the EU to assume its responsibilities in the Middle-East. Kotzias reproduced the classic south/north divide and the powerful/weak divide in the EU according to which, countries of the south, typically poorer than those of the north, due to their geographical proximity to the countries of origin of refugees, took most of the migration burden whereas those countries responsible for people fleeing their countries of origin were not as heavily affected by the refugee influx. Cyprus was not a main entry point or transit point for refugees, but there were instances, albeit rare, of articles portraying Cyprus as a southern, non-powerful European member state taking on the migration burden:

Why should solely Greece, Italy, Malta and Cyprus be responsible for the management of problems pertaining to the fact that these [same] countries receive the greatest migratory flows? When will the powerful countries of Europe assume their responsibilities? And when will humanity in its entirety handle and manage the immigration policy with respect to every human existence? When will the causes that lead people to search for better fate cease to exist? (*Haravgi*, August 13, 2015).

In this extract as generally in this representation, another core characteristic of the EU, the idea of a union, as a coordinated complex of different states that aims to secure the interests of these states in an equal way, was questioned in light of the refugee crisis. In failing to act as a union, it failed to protect both member states and refugees. Europe was divided across multiple fronts: the classic north/south divide (e.g. that the south took most of the migration burden), divisions between Western and Eastern EU states about how open or closed EU migration policy should be and similar conflicts among Balkan states. Therefore, the traditional, simplistic divide of the north Vs south, EU member states (see for example Karner and Kopytowska 2017 for the Greek debt crisis) was complemented with more divisions and antagonisms. Paradoxically, calls for unity within the EU tracked in the media, co-existed with scepticism regarding the usefulness of the entire European project. Authors asked for a united Europe (more human and fairer) regarding migration while expressing little hope that it could indeed offer viable solutions.

Europe as Perpetrator

Representations of Europe as perpetrator revolved mainly around Europe as a key geopolitical actor that contributed to the emergence of the crisis in participating or supporting interventions in poorer regions at present times (i.e. support third party military interventions) and due to its colonial role in these regions in the past as well as in present times (neo-colonialism). Articles stretched the meanings of ambiguous concepts such as imperialism and colonialism and used them to mean mainly exploitation, aggression and domination. In this representation there was no expectation for Europe to show solidarity to refugees because it had always inherently been an unjust global actor. To a lesser

degree, the EU was criticised because it failed to promote peace and conflict resolution in the Middle East and elsewhere. Herein, lies an elusive expectation that the EU could have been a successful peacemaker.

In the following extract, EU is involved as a co-protagonist of contemporary imperialist interventions from which refugees were trying to escape. It claims that the EU was rather unified in its inhuman, hostile refugee policy whereas internal disagreements were contained merely on issues of burden sharing. The extract, is also a characteristic example of how the representation of Europe as a perpetrator of the crisis was mutually constructed with its representation as inhuman:

It is with the agreement of the “28” [member-states] that the inhuman policy of the EU reached a climax; since the only intense disagreements concerned the quotas and the distribution of immigrants and asylum seekers created by the imperialist interventions with Europe’s support. (*Haravgi*, September 3, 2015)

Europe’s colonial and neocolonial policies and practices were criticised through also an ultra-nationalist lens. A group called Greek Resistance Movement noted that:

The Movement of Hellenic Resistance contends that Europeans are to bear responsibility for the waves of illegal immigrants who are trying to enter European ground, mainly from Italy, Greece, Malta but Cyprus too. The responsibility of the supposedly civilized nations goes back in history, when the colonial powers were taking advantage of the wealth of Third War countries, subjecting the peoples of these countries to poverty. England, France, Spain, Portugal, Holland, Belgium and Italy, all these countries were maintaining colonies or military bases up until the 1970s. They suck out the wealth of third world people, they turned them into poor people, and then they brought them over as slaves or as cheap labour (*Simerini*, May 1, 2015)

In the extract, those European states with a colonial past bare a higher responsibility for the increase of third-country migrants in the EU. Stances like this one provide further evidence for the perception of fragmentation discussed in the previous theme. Reference to so called civilised people is indicative of a criticism of the superiority of the European or western civilisation. Notably, the European countries responsible for the exploitation of the so-called third world are all former colonial powers and, some, in the post-colonial era continue to exploit their former subjects as cheap labour. The argument is that while other countries, including Cyprus, bear no responsibility for the exploitation of third country migrants yet, they receive many of these people. In this extract the critical stance towards a Europe (that is, the powerful European countries) that is a perpetrator, is coupled with an anti-immigrant stance, as immigrants/ refugees are called illegal. So Europe is in a sense rendered responsible for causing countries like Cyprus to deal with rather unwanted, although desperate, people. Refugees remain unwelcome, probably as possible contaminators of ethnic purity, a value that the Movement of Hellenic Resistance supports.

The following extract notes that ordinary Europeans, consciously or unconsciously ignore or deny Europe’s colonial past and neo-colonial attitudes and thus denounce responsibility for the plight of today’s refugees. The European citizen, seems to ignore that s/he is sitting over “lakes of blood,” a metaphor referring to how indigenous populations of other regions suffered in the hands of European colonials. The contemporary suffering of people

of poorer regions is deeply enrooted to the practices of colonialism as the following characteristic extract suggests:

Consciously or unconsciously the quiet and peaceful European citizen ignores that s/he is sitting upon lakes of blood. Consciously or unconsciously s/he ignores that yesterday's shameless imperialism and colonialism have become the made-up neo-imperialism and neo-colonialism of today: nowadays these are called humanitarian interventions, in the name of human rights. They have the same results. Death and disasters, everywhere. Exploitation everywhere. Consciously or unconsciously s/he ignores that the countries s/he inhabits and where s/he elects multi-color governments, predominantly blue³ at the end of the day, they first create the problem with their wars and interventions and then they deny the right to life, to decent employment and to so many other things to those they forced into becoming refugees. Consciously or unconsciously, s/he ignores or at the very least tolerates the existence of an EU that is part of the problem via the policies it implements which turn it into a fort [a fortress Europe], just in case any "infectious" elements penetrate it. (*Simerini*, September 30, 2015)

The extract considers Europe as non-normative power in international relations but as a neo-colonial and neo-imperialist actor. The main message sent is that Europe supports military interventions in poorer regions and then enforces oppressive migration regimes to keep its victims, refugees, out. By calling Europe a fort, the author alludes to series of measures aiming to stop irregular migration to Europe, and further reinforces the image of Europe's neo-colonial and neo-imperialistic identity.

To a lesser extent, Europe was expected to contribute to effective conflict resolution, particularly in the Middle East. The expectation was that Europe's earlier so-called civilising, missionary role would be replaced by a peace-making mission in former colonies. This is an indicative extract:

The humanity is breathlessly watching the drama of immigrants who are forced to flee their countries for a safer and perhaps better life. At the same time, humanity is wondering about the incapability of the international community to find solutions, so that these people stop fleeing their countries and so that those who fled go back (...). Europe that is now paying the price of war in Middle East, should instead of trying to distribute and house thousands of refugees, [should] demand solutions to the core of the problem, which is a decisive fight against the Islamic State and finding peace in the region (...). The incapability of finding a definitive solution in the Middle East is due to conflicting interests of the great powers in the area, along with their inability to communicate regarding tackling the Islamic State. (*Fileleftheros*, September 20, 2015).

The extract criticises Europe's focus on managing the effects of the crisis on its territories (refugee resettlement) instead of dealing with the causes of the crisis. Europe is represented as a weak international actor and refugees, as desperate people and victims not only of conflicts in their own countries but also of the international community's, and more importantly Europe's, inability to resolve these conflicts. Europe is also understood to be a victim of these conflicts since it has become a major refugee destination.

In summary, EU in this theme is mainly represented as a force of evil, reliving its dark colonial past during the crisis. This contrasts with EU official declarations that Europe is meant to play a positive role in international relations and particularly in its relations with neighbouring countries (see Barbé and Johansson-Nogués 2008).

Conclusions and Future Work

The analysis illustrated three main negative representations of Europe in the four daily Greek-Cypriot newspapers studied, amidst the 2015 refugee crisis: Europe as inhuman, Europe as fragmented and Europe as perpetrator. All three representations depicted refugees mainly as vulnerable and sufferers of Europe's inability and/or unwillingness to respond to the crisis. Inhuman representations sent an emotional cry for respect of human lives lost unjustly in the Mediterranean Sea. Representations of Europe as fragmented portrayed a dysfunctional Europe, unable to respond to the needs of member states in view of the crisis but also to the plight of refugees. The third representation depicted Europe's and especially powerful EU states' former and current geopolitical role, as colonial and neo-colonial agents, as a cause of the refugee tragedy. Normative representations of Europe in the third theme also depicted it as unable to assume a peacemaker role in the Middle East. In all three representations, media depicted the refugee crisis as another power-conflict among powerful EU member-states similar to the argument of Oberhuber et al. (2005), on media coverage of the EU constitution.

Solidarity was the watchword across this analysis. Newspapers communicated expectations that Europe should show internal and external solidarity, as a humanistic union. Yet, they did not elaborate much on the content of solidarity. Rather they repeated slogans and rhetorical questions, such as "is this the Europe of solidarity?". This shows that solidarity has been considered as a core unquestioned value of the EU, despite being violated or being vague. Additionally, newspapers tended to share *weak or no* expectations that Europe *could* act differently and demonstrate solidarity. In general, these weak expectations for a positive role of the EU in the crisis across the three themes, contributed to its de-legitimization as a geopolitical actor and as an institution. Perhaps this lack of or fragile expectation that Europe could act otherwise, is the continuously disappearing glue, necessary to tight member-states close to the European project. Generally, the lack of or weak expectation that Europe could be different detected in the three representations, can be useful in understanding cases of Euro-frustration or Euroscepticism elsewhere. Lack of expectations by member-states in relation to Europe appeared to enhance frustration with the EU and foregrounded pre-existing skepticism.

Negative media representations of Europe had implications on the representations of European identity; they answered to what Europe is, but also to an extent to who Europeans are. Apart from some references to Europeans showing solidarity, overall, the ordinary European citizen was depicted as individualistic and xenophobic. Media therefore, may contribute to de-naturalising essentialist approaches of European identity and Europeaness as democratic, modern and civilised (Agapiou-Josephides 2011; Trimikliniotis 2001), by simultaneously naturalising it as xenophobic and racist.

Finally, we observed that Cyprus did not emerge as a core actor in Europe's negative representations but rather as an insider-outsider, watching the unfolding crisis and expecting the EU, to react. Cyprus's participation at the controversial EU meetings was not mentioned and only scattered references about Cypriots' reactions to the crisis were noted. This observation about Cyprus' position in the EU deems attention. Future research could seek whether the national media reproduce Cyprus and Cypriots as non-agents in the EU project.

To summarise, our study provided evidence that Europe, signifying in the Greek-Cypriot context before the 2013 financial crisis, modernisation and democratisation (Katsourides 2014; Trimikliniotis 2001), during the refugee crisis it was represented as

inhuman, fragmented and undemocratic across Greek-Cypriot newspapers of different political identities. However, the constructive potentials of a critical approach to the European migration policies in the mainstream media amid the 2015 refugee crisis remained merely that, a potential, as media did not share suggestions on how things could be done differently. Even criticism towards the EU, taking a postcolonial approach, remained rather pessimistic and descriptive. The media did not question the legality of core European actors to take decisions, by contrast they reinforced them as key, non-replaceable actors of the crisis, even if they were found to fail miserably. Simultaneously, they represented ordinary Europeans, mostly as fearful, xenophobic subjects aligned with their political elites and lacking agency. Subsequently, media, our study suggests, maintained their role in safeguarding the prevailing status-quo or how things must stay forever (Hall 1982) during the refugee crisis. This claim has implications beyond the case of Cyprus. The wider question arising that future studies can address, is how media criticism against Europe, more prevalent at times of crisis such as extended migration and refugee movements, reconstitutes European subjects as non-agents, drawing a questioning of Europe across pessimistic lines without offering or considering alternatives, therefore contributing to the reproduction of the existing European status-quo.

Overall, based on the findings of this exploratory study, future work could offer a more focused understanding of reconfigurations of European identity at times of crisis by the media and the media's role in sustaining power relations in Europe. Additionally, it could elaborate on differences and similarities across media of different ideological identities to foreground a better understanding of how ideology may shape media content on EU matters.

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NOTES

1. For more information on the methodological approach and method of analysis see also Avraamidou et al. 2018.
2. The Hungarian fence covering the country's southern borders was constructed in 2015 as a reaction to refugee movement to Hungary.
3. By using the color blue, the writer means right wing governments.

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