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Understanding Media Debate Around Migration: The Relation Between Favorable and Unfavorable Representations of Migration in the Greek Cypriot Press

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Continuous and increasing worldwide migration has sparked an intense social debate in multiple forums. Media play a key role in constructing, monitoring, and framing this debate. This study focuses on a qualitative analysis of the media debate around migration in Cyprus via (a) studying how migrants are represented in the Greek Cypriot Press and (b) assessing the extent and the way in which favorable and unfavorable representations around migration are in dialogue. Toward this end, thematic and dialogical analyses were conducted on articles published in 4 daily Greek Cypriot newspapers between 2011 and 2015. Findings showed that migrants were constructed in economic (e.g., as assets to economy) and humanitarian (e.g., as victims) terms in the favorable representations, whereas in the unfavorable ones, migrants were constructed primarily as a threat to the local economy, to security, and to the nation's culture and existence. In terms of the relation between the 2, favorable representations engaged more clearly and in more detail with alternative representations of migrants than unfavorable ones. Favorable representations focused more on countering negative representations of migrants while unfavorable representations focused more on countering negative representations of the authors (e.g., being racist), through disclaimers. Nevertheless, authors of favorable representations managed alternatives by stigmatizing those who held opposing views and did not elaborate on their arguments. These findings speak to the superficial and polarizing character of the debate and point to implications for further research on the relation between the different stances on migration in other forums such as social media and TV.

Public Significance Statement

This article contributes to the understanding of the ways that migrants are represented in the press and on the ways that the debate between oppositional representations around migration unfolds, by focusing on the Greek Cypriot press for a 4 year time period. Findings show that migrants are represented both favorably (i.e. as economic assets and as victims) and unfavorably (i.e. as an economic, cultural and security threat). The analysis exemplifies the ways that both favorable and unfavorable representations relate to each other and argues that there is little dialogue between the two and that the debate is superficial and polarized.

Keywords: migration, debate, representations, Cyprus, media

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The tragic loss of thousands of human lives in the Mediterranean Sea, particularly in the second half of 2015, constituted the so-called refugee crisis, which has motivated heated discussions both at the level of institutions (e.g., European Union [EU]) as well as at the level of the laypublic of directly or indirectly affected countries in Europe and internationally. Traditional and social media were inundated by the refugee issue through extensive reporting and discussion of a multitude of related issues.

The general public, who usually lacks possibilities of contact with migrants,¹ constructs knowledge mainly through the media (KhosraviNik, Krzyżanowski, & Wodak, 2012). Extensive literature shows that media serve to maintain and legitimize discrimination toward migrants associating them with criminality (e.g., Holmes & Castaneda, 2016; Lynn & Lea, 2003), financial decline (e.g., KhosraviNik et al., 2012; Milioni, Spyridou, & Vadratsikas, 2015) and cultural incompatibility (Van Dijk, 2000). By contrast, media representations that emphasize the infringement of migrants' human rights or their contribution to the receiving society are rare (e.g., Dahlgren, 2016).

We argue that relevant literature has been prolific in enriching academic knowledge about particular images of migrants circulating in the media, but has been silent in the ways that different, often oppositional representations coexist in the media. Contrary, these different representations about migration are considered independent of one another. However, media present arguments, which are formulated against certain counterarguments: They form representations about migrants against alternative, often oppositional representations. We therefore adopt a dialogical approach to the study of social representations (Gillespie, 2008; Marková, 2003) to investigate the ways that favorable and unfavorable representations about migrants coexist in the media. We propose that understanding the interrelation between different representations in the media can shed light to the ways social debate around migration unfolds, namely, how certain representations are legitimized over others.

Our empirical context is the Republic of Cyprus and the Greek Cypriot press. Cyprus has been de-facto divided since 1974 with two predominant communities that occupy two different geographical areas: Greek Cypriots in the south and Turkish Cypriots in the north. Negotiations for reuniting the island under a federation have thus far proven fruitless. This constitutes the infamous Cyprus issue, which alongside the fact that Cypriots of both communities have a history of becoming internally displaced in 1974 war and earlier interethnic conflicts, interrelates complexly with the debate on migration in the country. All these issues tap into ideas of identity, national sovereignty and citizenship. In the wake of the so-called refugee crisis between 2014 and 2015, the country was still in financial turmoil due to the Eurozone crisis facing a considerable rise of unemployment, restrictions in health care access and welfare benefits (Demetriou, 2015). The combination of these socioeconomic features makes empirical research in Cyprus² particularly interesting. We contend that the dialogical approach adopted in this analysis will take into account the complexities without losing its primary focus, which is to shed light on the interconnections of different representations.

A Note About Migration in the Cypriot Context

The Republic of Cyprus, an EU member state, shifted from an emigration country to a country receiving migrants since the early 1990s. According to the latest population census, 20% of

its population consists of third-country and European migrants (Trimikliniotis, 2013). Despite changes in the legal regime and some relaxation of its restrictive migration policies, influenced partially by its EU accession in 2004, Cyprus continues to implement a strict migration policy (Trimikliniotis, 2013). Since the 1990s, research reports anti-immigrant sentiments and racism, which are corroborated by a recent report (e.g., *European Network Against Racism*, 2016), albeit recently, there are also references to ambivalence toward migrants in the younger population (Zembylas, 2012).

In the mainstream media, the migration debate has been driven by overfocus on irregular migration, associating migrants with the rise of crime, social problems (e.g., lead to breakup of marriages), rise of unemployment among Greek Cypriots, exploitation of the welfare state and threats to Cyprus' Greekness (Milioni et al., 2015). Negative representations of migrants dominating the public sphere over the last 20 years, have exacerbated between the wake of the financial crisis in 2011 and its escalation in 2013 (Milioni et al., 2015).

Media Representations of Migrants

Thus far, studies conducted within the media-migration nexus, have shown a global media tendency for negative representations of migrants. Media conduct boundary work, drawing and redrawing the boundaries between "Us" and "Them," constructing migrants as an outgroup. As "others," migrants are associated with negative representations whereas the self/ingroup is positively represented.

Media tend to construct migrants as a deviant group creating around them moral panics representing them as threatening the interests and order of a given dominant culture, as research in the United Kingdom shows (Cohen, 2002). Research focusing in the United Kingdom and Canada argues that migrants are the epicenter mainly of economic, security, and cultural threats to the receiving society (Bauder, 2005; KhosraviNik et al., 2012). In both the United Kingdom and Cyprus, a common representation is that of economic threat whereby migrants are accused of stealing jobs from the local population and receiving social benefits (KhosraviNik et al., 2012; Milioni et al., 2015). Security threats are evident in various contexts where migration is associated with terrorism and other criminal activities or illegality (Rettberg & Gajjala, 2016; KhosraviNik et al., 2012; Holmes & Castaneda, 2016; Lynn & Lea, 2003). This representation is further intensified by the use of threatening and sensationalist media language (e.g., Van Dijk, 2000; Holmes & Castaneda, 2016).

Either implicitly or explicitly, migration is also "framed by the general categories of race, race relations and ethnicity" (Cohen, 2002, p. xxii). For example, different types of crime are linked to different ethnicities: Arabs are casted as terrorists in Western Europe and North America (Van Dijk, 2000) and Latinos as cheating the system in the United States (Chavez, 2001). However, gradually, in both Europe and North America, race discourse has been replaced by a cultural discourse, in line with the ideologies of "new racism" (Van Dijk, 2000), according to which race is now considered a social taboo and culture has become an equivalent

¹ The term *migrant* is used as an umbrella term to signify different groups of people within the spectrum of mobility: economic immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees.

² Reference to Cyprus stands for the areas controlled by the Republic of Cyprus.

term, leading to the justification and reproduction of social inequality (Malik, 1996). Migrants are thus framed as a cultural “other” and, by extension, a cultural threat due to their essential difference from the indigenous population.

Cohen (2002) noted the tendency of U.K. media to blur the boundaries between different migration groups—that is, asylum seekers, refugees, economic migrants—and generalize using categories such as foreigners or immigrants. Choosing one category over the other to refer to migrant groups may lead to the justification of human rights’ abuse for some of these groups or to differential social and policy responses to their needs (Holmes & Castaneda, 2016). Similarly, distinctions between bogus and genuine refugees (Lynn & Lea, 2003) or hardworking and free-riders have significant implications, as, for example, bogus refugees are deemed undeserving and represented a priori as suspects (Chavez, 2001).

International literature agrees that negative representations of migrants are fairly hegemonic, overshadowing the appearance of positive frames, which, however, exist. Positive U.K. media coverage emphasizes human rights and justice (KhosraviNik et al., 2012) in response to their overwhelming violation and some Swedish media project explicit antiracist positions stressing values such as democracy, responsibility, and generosity toward refugees (Dahlgren, 2016).

Yet, scholars raise concerns regarding the role of such positive frames as they may reproduce victim stereotypes and thus disempower refugees (Kyriakides, 2016; Milioni et al., 2015). The refugee issue, for example, dominated European media during 2014–2015, with emphasis on the human drama and people’s willingness to join efforts at rescuing and supporting refugees. At first glance, this is a positive representational shift in many European mainstream media. However, along these references, the distinction between deserving and undeserving migrants returned, categorizing refugees as deserving, versus undeserving economic migrants (Kyriakides, 2016). Finally, Bauder (2005) showed that simultaneous to being represented as culturally aliens and outsiders, seasonal migrants in Canada were also represented as “economic assets” (p. 41), and thus, they were discursively reproduced as “a desired labor force but unwanted people” (p. 53). These findings point to the importance of studying the interrelation between favorable and unfavorable representations, to which we turn subsequently.

Our Argument and Theoretical Position

We argue that by studying both the content and the interrelation of favorable and unfavorable representations around migration, we can understand the quality of the debate within the press and by extension reflect on how this may shape the social debate in a given society. Further, because negative, threatening representations of migrants circulate overwhelmingly in the press internationally, focusing on the ways that these negative representations are discursively formulated against positive ones and the other way around, can shed light on how each representation is legitimized or invalidated. This can further exemplify the ways that media absorb but also provide the public with arguments to legitimize and/or contest threat and stigma.

To do this, we follow the theory of social representations. Social representations are systems of ideas, practices and values that permit people to construct an understanding of their social world,

position themselves in that world and communicate with each other (Moscovici, 1961/2008). They emerge and transform through social interaction between groups and individuals and reflect but also transform the particular sociopolitical and ideological contexts they emerge in.

Moscovici (1961/2008) showed that media are a fertile avenue to access social representations. In his seminal study of social representations, he outlined the communicative processes through which psychoanalytical terms diffused in French media. In linking media research and social representations theory, Höjjer (2011) emphasized that as a theory of communication, social representations theory “touches the very heart of mediated communication—how the media naturalizes social thinking and generates collective cognition” (p. 3).

Because our interest is also to identify *how* social representations about migrants are formulated by establishing different relations with alternative representations (e.g., engaging with them, refuting and/or blocking them), we adopt a dialogical approach to the study of social representations (Marková, 2003). The dialogical approach contests that representations about social issues incorporate and negotiate alternative representations (Gillespie, 2008). In our analysis, we focus on the semantic level of discourse (Kadianaki, O’Sullivan-Lago, & Gillespie, 2015) in an attempt to identify explicit instances of *dialogicality*, that is, instances where authors/speakers clearly bring an alternative to their own representation about migration/migrants and where there is tension between different points of view.

The scope of this article is to empirically identify the ways that authors relate to alternatives and that dialogical engagement is regulated. We focus particularly on the use of structures of meanings and rhetorical strategies, such as semantic barriers (Gillespie, 2008) and disclaimers (Augoustinos & Every, 2007), which are both ways of presenting alternative ideas or those who hold these ideas in ways that delegitimize them. We argue that this approach permits us to see the interrelation between different points of view in the media debate around migration.

Method

Data Selection

The study utilizes articles published between July 2011 and December 2015 in four daily Greek Cypriot newspapers (*Haravgi*, *Politis*, *Fileleftheros*, and *Simerini*),³ representing different standpoints across the political spectrum.⁴

A total of 2,507 articles that contained the terms *refugee*, *immigr-*, or *migra-* were retrieved by the media monitoring company Matrix Media for the aforementioned period. The amount of articles from May to September 2015 was disproportionately large

³ The data were collected as part of a Horizon 2020–funded research program, part of which aimed at studying the change in representations of migration in the Greek Cypriot press. The time frame was chosen as to reveal changes in the representations of migrants but it was also constrained by the availability of the searchable electronic media archives.

⁴ *Haravgi* is officially the mouthpiece of left-wing AKEL, *Politis* is the newest newspaper in the sample characterized by liberal views particularly on economy, *Fileleftheros* is the oldest Greek Cypriot newspaper and usually aligns with governmental policies, and *Simerini* is a right-wing newspaper.

comparing to other years, due to the sharp increase of articles regarding the refugee issue. We thus deployed stratified random sampling (i.e., proportional sampling per month and per newspaper) for articles published between May and September 2015. This resulted in 1,422 articles, which we categorized to news and opinion articles: news articles aimed primarily at informing about facts or events and opinion articles aimed at conveying the author's views on a matter. From the corpus, we excluded all news articles shorter than 100 words, as we deemed that there was not enough information for analysis in these articles. This process resulted in a total of 1,163 articles. To make our corpus manageable for qualitative analysis, we employed random stratified sampling for opinion and news articles separately, to reduce our sample size in a way that was proportional to the number of articles per year. The final sample for analysis consisted of 40 articles per year from 2011 to 2014 (five news and five opinion per newspaper per year) and 80 articles for 2015 (10 news and 10 opinion per newspaper, per year), reaching a total of 240 articles.

Extracts of all articles were subsequently coded into 19 codes (e.g., representations of migrants, consequences of migration, international actors, local actors). For this analysis, we were interested in identifying representations of migrants, thus we focused on the 618 extracts coded under this code ("representations of migrants"). Furthermore, we noted that extracts from opinion articles contained richer information by comparison to news articles so we decided to focus on those. This resulted in 95 opinion articles.

We observed that each article adopted clearly a favorable or unfavorable stance toward migrants/migration, so we divided all 95 into these two categories, and we subsequently selected for analysis only those extracts that contained explicit traces of dialogicality,⁵ corresponding to 34 articles. Dialogicality was identified in the instances that authors brought explicitly in their discourse alternative representations (Kadianaki et al., 2015). A focus on dialogicality, as explained above, permits to identify the relation between different arguments of the social debate.

Our final corpus contained dialogical extracts that belonged to 34 articles, covering the entire time frame, originating from all four newspapers. These were categorized in two sets of data: those with a favorable ($N = 23$) and an unfavorable ($N = 11$) stance toward migration/migrants. This numeric difference is interesting but can only allow for speculative interpretations at this point. We chose instead to focus on the qualitative understanding of how the two stances enter in a dialogue, particularly given that the sample did not allow for generalizations.

We first performed a thematic analysis of the two sets of data, focusing on the ways that each set represented migrants/migration, grouping together similar ideas presented in the extracts in broader, abstract themes that reveal recurrent patterns of meaning (Willig, 2001). Then, we proceeded to dialogical analysis (Kadianaki et al., 2015), which entailed two steps: first, we identified instances in the extracts where authors introduced an alternative/opposing point of view to theirs. These are instances of quoted text or reported speech of someone else (*italicized in the extracts*) directly or indirectly expressed. Second, we examined how the authors managed the presence of this alternative view through the examination of the discursive strategies employed.

Analysis

Favorable representations: Profit and human drama. We identified two themes in the ways that the favorable representations constructed migrants: a *profit* theme and a *human drama* theme. The first theme replied to arguments regarding the negative financial consequences of migration, specifically, regarding how migrants allegedly steal jobs from Cypriots and drain governmental resources due to the social benefits they receive. Countering these arguments, favorable representations constructed migrants as laborers offering cheap services and covering an employment void by doing jobs that Cypriots do not want to do. This is a characteristic example:

No one will admit that s/he is a racist in this place despite that *everyone goes on air in the morning radio shows ready to decapitate every migrant worker who gets on their way*. Lately in fact, we have started becoming more hellenocentric, nationalists I could say . . . To the extent that I feel that the motto "*anyone who is not Greek is a barbarian*"⁶ is reborn. And I wonder, what would we really do, here in Cyprus, without these people, without these *illegal [migrants]*,⁷ as we call them. Why do I say this? Simply because I do not think there are many Cypriots who haven't sought *[their]* cheap services. *They take away our jobs and our children are led to unemployment*, I often hear them say. And then I wonder again, if those who say these things understand what they say or whether they talk for the sake of talking. And I say this bearing in mind that no Cypriot would accept doing the kind of jobs migrants do (and I do not only have pig farms in mind), but also that none of us would ask one of our own to do his or her handy jobs and overpay him [. . .]⁸ knowing that s/he could have his or her house redone with the equally good job of a migrant. (Charalambous, 2012, p. 2)

In this extract, foreign workers are constructed as handymen who do necessary work of equally good quality as Cypriots but much more cheaply. This argument replied to the quoted voice of a generalized other, possibly the Cypriot citizen, "they take our jobs and our kids are led to unemployment." Interestingly, the author naturalized inequalities in the job market between indigenous and migrant workers: migrants, despite doing equally good quality work as Cypriots, are paid less and work in sectors that are socially disrespected. The author constructed Cypriot people who criticize migrants as racists (i.e., "nobody admits s/he is racist") and nationalists and therefore stigmatized them. Stigmatization is a semantic barrier (Gillespie, 2008) that blocks the view of the other through negative characterizations.

A similar strategy of stigmatization is used in the following extract where the author counters a common representation of migrants receiving high benefits by the state, attributed to an unspecified general other. Ideas about welfare benefits are stigma-

⁵ Arguments in all articles are formulated against alternatives and are thus dialogical. However, to be able to map dialogicality empirically, we chose to focus on those that explicit brought those alternative views and argued about them.

⁶ The author cites a historic phrase of unknown origin "Whoever is not Greek is barbarian" often used to claim superiority of Greeks over all other nationals deemed as "barbarians."

⁷ Brackets including words in italics are explanatory additions by the authors, for example, *[migrants]*.

⁸ [. . .] signifies omitted and irrelevant to the analysis text: here, the author talks about the work of plumbers.

tized, presented as “naïve propaganda” and the idea of “being flooded by migrants,” that “we,” possibly the Cypriots, voice, is presented as phobic. The author thus blocked any engagement with the stigmatized ideas and counterconstructed migrants as covering important employment but also social needs such as taking care of children, elderly people and households.

We read about the concerns with which many have received the initial census statistics according to which the number of foreigners living in Cyprus has raised to 20%, that is, 179,547 foreign citizens. How many of these people have actually wondered who are these foreigners and why they came to Cyprus, while leaving aside the useless propaganda surrounding benefits? [. . .] Before we therefore utter once again the phobic “we have been flooded by foreigners” let us remind ourselves how convenient it was for 8% of Cypriot households, to bring foreigners to take care of their children, their elderly, and to clean their houses. (“How Many Foreigners Did You Bring?”) (Homo Clericus, 2011, p. 12)

It is interesting that the profit theme disappears from 2014 onward in our data. The human drama theme, although it appears throughout the reporting period, becomes salient with the onset of the refugee issue in 2014 and culminates in the summer and autumn of 2015. In the human drama theme, migrants are presented as victims of war, of drowning, of abject living conditions either in their home countries or abroad, of discrimination, and of unjust asylum procedures. The human drama counters and criticizes a lack of sensitivity and humanistic concerns on behalf of the Cypriot society and/or the European leaders in view of the refugee crisis.

One–two days passed before we found the correct way of referring to the people who were lost in the sea and washed ashore in Cyprus: “*Illegal immigrants*,” “*refugees*” “*immigrants*.” Lost in our effort to find the correct term and carried away by our distrust, we missed the obvious: humans. After the initial shock experienced by the society, the usual skepticism arose regarding “*What are we going to do with them*.” Everybody seems to forget one important detail, that beyond the human dimension, which for some (those who think inhumanely) is merely procedural, there is the . . . cold reality: According to the international conventions we are obliged to rescue and host these people [. . .] *It’s been said by many that the adventure of these people, their placement in tents, reminds us of all the things we experienced in Cyprus in 1974. Persecuted by the invaders, surrendered to the mercy of a mighty enemy, we tried to secure our survival more than anything. For this reason, all that is happening around us at this moment should be awakening our own experiences [. . .] What we as society, as a country, should be defending with zest is that the right to life and freedom should become a priority. This should be a matter of concern for us, despite the fact that some people outside our country have forgotten this, or have sacrificed it for their own interests. In our days, wars, conflicts, and interests, have managed to demonize even refugees, dividing them into “good” and “bad.” We have many reasons to object to that.* (Venizelou, 2014, p. 5)

The author constructed migrants who arrived at the Cypriot shores as “humans,” claiming that this is the right term to use compared to all others used by the society, namely, “illegal immigrants, refugees and immigrants.” The author emphasized their human drama, by presenting them as people lost in the sea and the waves. This is contrasted to the phrase “what are we going to do with them,” attributed to an abstract other, possibly Cypriot society. In response to this lack of sensitivity, the author presented

those who voice their concern about what to do with migrants as inhuman and distrustful, thus stigmatizing them. He further reminded them of the international conventions that oblige Cyprus to provide shelter to refugees. Finally, he employed a highly emotional appeal to the Cypriots’ experience of 1974 events,⁹ in which he constructed Cypriots as having additional reasons (possibly comparing to other nations) to welcome refugees. The strategy is based on an interesting contradiction, constructing simultaneously its targeted audience as inhuman and insensitive while also appealing to its expected increased sensitivity due to the drama they have themselves experienced.

In the following extract, the human drama is again exposed. A migrant mother dying in front of the aghast and innocent eyes of her child is contrasted to the voice of a Cypriot woman shouting in TV that migrants should go home.

Enough yet with the racist dispositions of some. A “lady” was screaming in TV for them to “*go home*,” that “*enough is enough, they brought them all here, they steal our jobs and our benefits. . . .*” It’s about the death of a mother before the aghast, innocent eyes of her own 5-year-old child. No matter who she is or where she is from, the tragic happening cannot be undone. A human being lost her life in a slum and surely some are responsible to a lesser or a greater degree for the decay of the Cypriot society. These racist comments are in some occasions not only unacceptable but merely redundant too. Really, are there no Cypriots living abroad? If one of our compatriots for some reason died helpless in England, Australia, Germany or anywhere else, what would the reaction of this “lady” be? (Anonymous, 2014, p. 5)

The author dealt with the woman’s view with indignation, describing her reaction as racist and questioning her integrity by putting the term *lady* in quotation marks. Stigmatization thus appears again together with an appeal to the migrant identity of Cypriots and a call for role-reversal, namely, asking the “lady” to think of how she would react if an expatriate Cypriot died helpless abroad.

Finally, some authors pointed to the inefficient measures taken at the level of the EU to manage the refugee issue. They implied that European leaders showed insufficient or superficial concern for the loss of human lives or they contributed to this loss with their policies. In the following extract, Europe is constructed as abhorring migration, having been inflicted with xenophobia, and causing illegal migration.

The E.U. and all European nations, ought to, to begin with, get rid of xenophobic syndromes and racists views. Europe should not abhor migration and drive it down to illegal and dangerous paths. We have therefore very concrete concerns about some aspects of the European agenda concerning migration according to which *military interventions are permitted in order to eradicate networks exploiting migrants in third countries*. It was and still is the policy of military interventions of colonizing and neo-colonizing European countries that led these countries to poverty and to civil wars. (Perdikis, 2015, p. 22)

The author was suspicious of European military intervention to counter smuggling and trafficking of migrants into the EU. In parallel, the author stressed the responsibility of Europe for the

⁹ Refers to the 1974 Turkish invasion that led to the displacement of about 162,000 Greek Cypriots, called to the present day “refugees.”

current state of extreme poverty and violent conflicts in third countries as they have been European colonies in the past. In effect, the author undermined the motive of EU policies. Undermining the motive is a powerful semantic barrier that targets and attacks the motivation (i.e., hidden motives/interests) of those who hold the opposite to the writer views and “provides an excuse to discount the significance of what they say” (Gillespie, 2008, p. 387). The idea is that while these policies appear to protect migrants, they in fact conceal the real motives of European leaders who subscribe to them, which are to reproduce their power over these countries.

Unfavorable representations: Financial, ethnocultural, and security threats. Three themes of unfavorable representations were identified all exemplifying different types of threat: financial, ethnocultural, and security threats. The financial theme can be juxtaposed to the profit theme that appeared in the favorable representations. It constructed migration in financial terms, as a drain to the economy of the country and migrants as free-riders who take advantage of state benefits. Interestingly, articles falling within this theme did not reply to arguments about migrants’ contribution to the economy of the country. Rather, the traces of dialogicality identified were about denying being racist or accepting that migrants should be treated fairly and live decently. These are disclaimers, replying to an imagined audience expected to ascribe a racist identity to the author and are widely recognized in negative talk around migration internationally (e.g., Augoustinos & Every, 2007). They are indicative of people’s awareness that expressing oneself negatively about migrants is a social taboo. Consider the following extract:

The government tries to characterize as *racist nationalists, or even heartless and inhuman* those who justly protest about the rights and the economic wealth of the state and of themselves being threatened. I assure you that none of the above characterizes me, on the contrary, due to my origin and my occupation I nurture a particular sympathy toward any tortured and persecuted human being. I, however, acknowledge the obligation of this person to work and not sit around and enjoy generous benefits, which [*the generous benefits*] essentially comprise a motive for the increase of illegal migrants. (Chajihannas, 2012, p. 14)

The author criticized the government for characterizing as racists those who “justly protest” against migrants and clarified that he greatly sympathized with the “tortured” and “persecuted” person. This is a disclaimer, followed by an insinuation that this persecuted and “tortured” person does not work as s/he should, but sits and enjoys rich state benefits, contributing to the loss of economy wealth. Generous welfare benefits are in turn constructed as a motive for “illegal” migrants to come to Cyprus. Thus, the author was self-represented as sympathetic to migrants’ sufferings, whereas migrants were constructed as illegal free-riders who take advantage of welfare benefits.

Evidently, a major concern for those adopting a negative stance toward migration/migrants was not to appear racists or impinging on basic human rights. In the following extract, the author began with a generally accepted social norm regarding the value of treating foreigners equally and without discrimination. But then, he constructed migrants as posing both ethnocultural and security threats:

There is no doubt that we should treat foreigners decently and without unfavorable discriminations. On the other hand, foreigners should try and assimilate into the country that provided them with hospitality, to learn its language and to mingle with its residents. Some ethnicities though remain fanatically attached to their religion, their customs, which results in their inability to assimilate in the country they resorted. They remain a foreign part in society which creates unrest and sometimes serious episodes within the country. (Theodoulou, 2011, p. 44)

The phrase “There is no doubt . . . discrimination,” functions as a disclaimer, replying to an imaginative audience who could accuse the author of discrimination. It permits the author to construct foreigners in a negative way, while maintaining a positive identity for himself (i.e., as respecting human rights). Foreigners are represented as people who cannot “assimilate” in the hosting country, whereas they should, if they want to be accepted in the hosting country. The repeated use of verbs such as “should (. . .) assimilate,” “should (. . .) mingle,” “they remain (. . .) attached,” or attributions such as “their inability” puts the responsibility for integration on the migrants whereas the hosting society is represented as passive, with no responsibilities over the matter. Note here how migrants are constructed as “guests” who are accommodated in the country. This is followed by a representation of them as fanatics, attached to their own religion and customs, forming ghettos and endangering social order. In this excerpt, culture is used as equivalent to race to justify discrimination (Malik, 1996): Migrants are not unwelcomed for being, for example, Arabs, but because of their alien culture. Trimikliniotis and Demetriou’s (2006) findings also confirm this media depiction of migrants as carrying “alien cultures and religions” that pose a threat to Cypriots.

Similarly, the author below disclaimed that raising concerns over the increase of foreign population in Cyprus should be regarded as racist and xenophobic by society. He then, however, constructed his “own” nation as being under threat.

There is nothing racist or xenophobic in noting the worrying increase of the foreign population in Cyprus. At the same time, we ought to think of the future of our own people and the ones responsible should sit down and find solutions. Because the potential [*threat*], as this is exhibited via statistics showing the swift increase of foreign citizens coupled with the low birth rates which plague our country, is nightmarish. We are not a big European country that can face uncontrolled immigration. We are a meaningless spot in the world map, with a small population, which, aside from the above, has to face the uncontrollable and illegal settlement of the north part of our country by Turkish settlers. Their [*settlers*] numbers are continually growing and no one knows how far Turkey will attempt to go when this violent demographic alteration is completed. (Antoniou, 2011, p. 9)

Threat is conveyed in words such as a “nightmare” and “swift” increase of foreign citizens coupled by low birth rates of Cypriots. The author constructed Cyprus as a “meaningless spot in the world map,” with “small population,” confronted with “incontrollable and illegal settlement” of Turkish settlers. All this leads to a “violent demographic alteration.” The representation of Cyprus as small and weak, being under constant threat of foreign exploitation has been noted by other authors, too (Trimikliniotis & Demetriou, 2006). The choice of these emotional and threat imbued words

serves to attribute concerns about the increase of foreign population to objectively threatening facts rather than racist sentiments.

This perceived threat could be understood from a Greek Cypriot nationalistic perspective. Settlers in this context are Turkish citizens understood to be brought in the occupied north by Turkey with the aim of altering the demographics and in effect Turkify north. In this perspective, the ethnic composition of the “genuine” Cypriots is threatened by two enemies, Turkey and migrants. Only restrictive migration and citizenship policies can prevent this. The following extract raises security threats and it responds directly to migrants themselves instead of using disclaimers.

I hear these [*opinions*] every day from immigrants: [*in bad English*] “we are all people,” “need one chance to work,” “where is the human rights?” You, idiots, where are the human or the European rights when your compatriots are cutting the heads of European people? Why aren’t you there to fight them or to help them? Right, you cowardly chose to become defectors and run away to Europe and remind us of human rights. Where is the evidence that you and you are not one of them who came here to cause havoc? Why didn’t you stay in your countries to fight against them and if necessary die heroically for your homeland? When your brothers send suicide bombers to spread death, where are the human rights of innocent people? Where are they, tell me, where are they? (Koutroukidis, 2015, p. 59)

The author quoted directly hypothetical migrants asking for their human rights. He then explicitly rejected their claims on two grounds: first that migrants may be terrorists and second, that their “compatriots” are terrorists who “cut the heads of European people” and “spread death to innocent people.” Through an emotionally charged discourse written in the Greek Cypriot dialect¹⁰ and using an insulting language, the author constructed almost all migrants as extremists and terrorists. Simultaneously, migrants are criticized for being coward and abandoning their countries at times of war. Therefore, migrants cannot be other than terrorists, compatriots of terrorists or coward (see also Rettberg & Gajjala, 2016). This exemplifies a multifaceted and inevitable stigmatization, independently of the very different positions that migrants may take. Although, a rare example of explicit association of migrants and refugees with terrorism in the Cypriot press studied here, the constructions the article offers are in line with international literature that migrants are often constructed as potential terrorists (e.g., Lynn & Lea, 2003). Evidently, the author here, unlike the authors of other anti-immigrant articles analyzed, was not concerned about being accused as “racist.”

Unfolding the media debate: Content of and relations between opposing arguments. Our research aimed at identifying (a) the ways that migrants were represented in both sets of favorable and unfavorable representations and (b) whether and how favorable and unfavorable representations established dialogue with opposing representations.

The analysis of unfavorable representations revealed that they used argumentation pertaining to economic burden and threat (e.g., security and ethnocultural threat), in line with international literature (e.g., Bauder, 2005). Migrants were represented as free-riders who receive generous benefits, live against the welfare of indigenous people, form ghettos and do not assimilate, pose a threat to the ethnic composition of the nation, are related to criminality and terrorism and possess certain negative attributes (e.g., coward for leaving their conflict-ridden countries). These negative represen-

tations support the exclusion of migrants from the Greek Cypriot society. Further, migrants’ actions were predominantly attributed to their inherent traits rather than to contextual factors. This implies that even if the situation changes (i.e., economic development, reduction of benefits given to migrants), due to these fixed traits, migrants remain unwelcome. Finally, ideas about ethnocultural threat were indicative of an essentialist cultural and ethnic representation of the nation. Authors presented the nation as a culturally homogenous entity comprising of Cypriot people, clearly distinguished from Turks and other foreigners. The latter were seen essentially different, threatening national composition and exacerbating existing fears of national “extinction” due to the islands’ division. These essentialist ethnocultural ideas are strongly related to arguments supporting exclusion of migrants from the society (Kadianaki & Andreouli, 2015).

Dialogicality in the unfavorable representations was evident in disclaimers that indicated awareness that expressing negative views toward migrants could be characterized as racist while at the same time negating such potential characterizations. Authors counterconstructed themselves in nonracist terms and justified their views based on an extreme, problematic construction of migrants. Thus, authors of unfavorable representations did not engage in replying to opposing representations of migrants, rather they engaged solely in replying to how they are represented by their readers and the society in general. An exception (“When Will Europe Lock Its Doors?”) is by an author who did not use disclaimers but replied to quoted voices of migrants asking for human rights. The author mocked these voices by counterconstructing migrants as extreme terrorists.

Favorable representations of migrants were constructed in both financial terms and in terms of human drama. These findings are in line with findings in the international (Bauder, 2005; KhosraviNik et al., 2012) and Greek Cypriot literature (Miloni et al., 2015). Despite reflecting favorable representations of migrants, supporting their presence in the country and their rights, they both have potentially negative implications. Representing migrants solely in terms of their capacity to contribute financially to the country paints a rather utilitarian picture of them (i.e., as sources to be exploited) and possibly legitimizes their exploitation as cheap labor. Under this light, migrants who do not contribute financially are not useful and are thus potentially undesirable. This view of migrants accords with the Greek Cypriot migration policy of third country nationals who are granted entrance only following employment contract with a specific employer and are obliged to leave the country when their contract ends/cancelled while restricting them from engaging in civic activities hindering their integration prospects (Trimikliniotis & Demetriou, 2006). This sort of instrumental calculative argumentation is further encouraged in conditions of financial crisis (Miloni et al., 2015).

Additionally, constructing migrants in terms of the human drama they live is to some degree unavoidable given the many incidences of people fleeing their countries and losing their lives during the reporting period. It also raises social concern and

¹⁰ Greek Cypriot dialect, while orally used in the everyday, it is rarely found in written form including the Press—save for some exceptions. Its use here implies that the author speaks the language of the “people,” which is contrasted to a more sophisticated discourse exemplified in the use of Modern Greek.

support toward those people. At the same time, constructing migrants solely in terms of their drama and suffering leads to their victimization and representation as helpless and needy people (see also Milioni et al., 2015; Kyriakides, 2016). Simultaneously, it may justify discrimination against those migrants or refugees who may not fit in the human drama frame.

Taken together, these two favorable representations are to some extent contradictory. The first theme is rather utilitarian, focusing on practical, financial benefits of migration while the other is humanitarian, focusing on the human aspect of migration. One points to migrants' capacity to offer and the other to their vulnerability. Notably, both themes reflect concurrent social concerns. The profit-oriented representation responds to arguments regarding the financial consequences of migration, which intensified between the wake (2011) and the culmination (2013) of the economic crisis. This discourse was gradually replaced by the human drama discourse about refugees losing their lives at sea, which, although present throughout the reporting period, it intensified in 2014 and culminated in 2015.

Dialogicality in articles with favorable representations was found in instances where authors responded to arguments about migrants posing a financial threat and/or a burden to society raised by Cypriots and the society in general. They responded to these arguments either with counterarguments (as opposed to disclaimers) about covering an employment void or with an overemphasis of the humanitarian aspect of the matter, which, in a sense, treats any negative take on immigrants as inhuman.

Conclusions and Avenues for Future Research

While existing literature has been informative on representations around migration internationally and on their implications, it lacks attention on how these representations are legitimized against alternatives and how they gain their power through argumentation. As Howarth (2006) argued, social representations "are drawn on both to naturalize and legitimize exclusion and othering as well as to critique and challenge such stereotypes and marginalizing practices" (p. 79). For these reasons we extended our analysis to understand, beyond the content of representations, the interrelation of different representations.

Our analysis of favorable and unfavorable representations with regards to dialogicality, showed that favorable representations engaged more clearly and in more detail with alternative views of migrants than unfavorable ones. The former focused more on countering negative representations of migrants while the latter focused more on countering negative representations of the authors, through disclaimers such as "I am not a racist, but." Still, favorable representations were constructed through superficial arguments. They were not based for example on detailed facts regarding the consequences of migration or the governmental expenditure on refugee benefits. Their authors stigmatized those who held alternative views as racist, phobic or insensitive. The presence of these semantic barriers corroborates that there was no detailed engagement with alternative views (Gillespie, 2008). Thus, the overall debate seems to be framed mainly in terms of building and refuting charges of racism; it does not advance much further than attributing a negative identity to the "other" and building a positive identity for the self. This renders it a superficial

and polarizing debate that does not critically discuss the social issue under consideration.

As we have used a small sample of articles, our findings do not provide a generalized picture of the Greek Cypriot media on this issue. Our analysis, however, provides rich insights about the content of these representations and the processes of dialogicality. We suggest that future research delves more into the study of the variety of representations and the relation between the different stances on social debates concerning migration. It can extend the examination to how different types of forums (e.g., social media, press, TV), with varying ideological and political positioning may shape the debate differently and exhibit other forms of dialogical relations. Understanding how this clash of ideas unfolds in different forums means understanding how people manage to maintain or disrupt social order and the existing distribution of power within a social context through the ways they form and refute representations.

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