

# Covert Prejudice and Discourses of Otherness During the Refugee Crisis: A Case Study of the Greek Islands' Press

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## Abstract

This study identifies the recurrent repertoires of covert prejudice in the regional press of three Greek islands (Lesvos, Chios, Samos) during the refugee crisis. Between 2015 and 2016, these islands were the first-line receiving communities for the many refugees and migrants who arrived in Europe through the Eastern Mediterranean route. This article applies a synthetic qualitative approach to discourse analysis, emphasizing the argumentation and narrative complexity of prejudiced discourse as articulated through the idiosyncratic prism of locality. By focusing our analysis on expressions of neo-racism, symbolic and aversive racism, our study identified five interpretative repertoires of prejudicial discourse: “superfluous bodies,” “threats of multiculturalism,” “agents of misery,” “bogus refugees,” and “capitalizing on the refugee crisis.”

## Keywords

covert prejudice, refugee crisis, discourse analysis, interpretative repertoires, regional press

## Résumé

La présente recherche a mené une analyse discursive de la presse régionale de trois îles Égéennes (Lesvos, Chios, Samos), pendant la crise des réfugiés. La recherche focalise sur l'identification des répertoires du préjugé implicite, en mettant l'accent sur l'analyse de formulations du néo-racisme, articulées à travers le prisme local.

## Mots-clés

néo-racisme, préjugés, réfugiés, analyse discursive, presse régionale

## Non-Technical Summary

### Background

This research analyzes covert prejudice in the Northeastern Aegean regional press coverage during the 2015–2016 period. During that time, the Aegean islands were the first-line receiving communities for the many refugees and migrants who arrived in Europe through the Eastern Mediterranean route. At the forefront of the refugee crisis, the islands faced unprecedented challenges related to hosting massive migrant populations amidst a Greek public sector that was already weakened by the long-lasting debt crisis. Against this backdrop, the refugee crisis became a central public controversy for these communities, highlighting new expressions of prejudice. The regional press we analyze in this study reflects how media discourse has contributed to disseminating prejudice against the newly arrived refugee population in the public realm.



**Why was this study done?**

The study investigated new forms of prejudiced discourse during a particularly challenging period for the Aegean Island communities. The regional press is a largely understudied genre of media discourse that is community-based; therefore, studying it offers significant insights into the communicative processes through which the island communities have interpreted the collective experience of the refugee crisis. Our research focused on covert prejudice, highlighting the particular mitigating and ambivalent characteristics of this type of discourse. Since the beginning of the refugee crisis, policymakers and stakeholders have been called upon to design and implement specific policies to integrate Greece's refugee population. A detailed, localized understanding of the stereotypes that permeate the social sphere is important for delivering more effective cross-cultural policies. Our research seeks to increase knowledge for this purpose and to contribute to the scientific literature on social discrimination and inequalities that refugees experience.

**What did the researchers do and find?**

We applied a qualitative approach to discourse analysis to detect repeated patterns of covert anti-refugee prejudice in the regional press of three Northeastern Aegean islands (Lesvos, Chios, Samos) between 2015 and 2016. Specifically, we analyzed 339 articles from four local newspapers. We identified five recurrent repertoires: "superfluous bodies," "threats of multiculturalism," "agents of misery," "bogus refugees," and "capitalizing on the refugee crisis." The main research findings suggest that the prioritization of communal interests prevails in local expressions of prejudice. Moreover, we found that the identified prejudiced formulations use disclaiming and mitigating strategies to preemptively deny racism, while still reproducing dehumanizing representations of the refugees. For the most part, the refugees' own voices and experiences were marginalized in the journalistic coverage.

**What do these findings mean?**

The findings suggest that the regional press's emphasis on local (economic and social) interests has been a central element of representing refugees as a threat to local prosperity. As such, the discourses we analyzed help better comprehend the context of the xenophobic reactions from some parts of the local societies and the latent ways in which modern democracies perpetuate racism and discrimination. The research findings also indicate that expressions of prejudice adjust to communicative and situational challenges, often taking a covert form, which allows them to escape identification and prevent anti-racist critiques. Thus, these findings could contribute to advancing our knowledge about implementing policies to combat racism and anti-refugee discrimination.

This study analyzes the Northeastern Aegean regional press coverage of the refugee crisis through an integrative approach to discourse analysis, drawing on discursive psychology, critical discourse analysis, and social theories of covert prejudice and neo-racism. By approaching prejudice as a complex social phenomenon that is shaped not only by subjective attitudes but also the boundary-expressing repertoires that form each community's interactive code (Cohen, 2001), we emphasize language's role in forming discrimination. Our analysis uses a three-fold analytical framework that focuses on: i) the discursive aspects of prejudice; ii) their variations within a specific communicative and situational context; and iii) the ambivalence of prejudice within modern democracies. The empirical section of this paper conducts a discursive analysis based on this three-fold perspective to highlight the specificities of prejudicial formulations in the regional press of the Greek islands during the refugee crisis.

## Theoretical Framework

### Prejudice Through the Discursive Lens

Our research is based on the core hypothesis of a wide range of social constructionist approaches that argue discourse plays a performative role in producing the social world's dominant categorizations and Othering phenomena—prejudice, racism, and stereotypes (Augoustinos & Every, 2010; Billig, 1985, 1987; Fairclough, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; van Dijk, 1984, 1989, 1997; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). This perspective approaches language as a constituent element of social interactions that co-constructs social identities and hierarchies (Fairclough, 1992). As recent studies have shown, public xenophobic discourse about the refugee crisis is a central factor in the consolidation of prejudice in that it disseminates

dehumanizing representations within society and contributes to legitimating anti-refugee behaviors and policies (Bye, 2020; Esses, Hamilton, & Gaucher, 2017).

The field of social psychology has approached prejudice largely as a socio-cognitive phenomenon that consists of subjects' negative representations of perceived out-group members, and it is formed within the identification, evaluation, and attribution processes that govern inter-group relations (Hogg & Vaughan, 2008). In this context, *prejudice* is defined as an aversive or hostile attitude toward a member of a group (or whole group), which is mentally organized through *categorization* and *inflexible generalization* and characterized by *cognitive rigidity* and *emotional resistance* to change (Allport, 1954). Following the socio-cognitive perspective, van Dijk's theory, which is placed within the realm of critical discourse analysis, articulates the mental properties of prejudice with the processes of discourse production. According to his conceptualization, prejudice is a "shared form of social representation in group members, acquired during processes of socialization, and also transformed and enacted in social communication and interaction" (van Dijk, 1984, p. 13). This perspective defines prejudice as a socio-cognitive "group schema," based on a hierarchical categorization of social beliefs about minority groups stored in memory and expressed through various discursive strategies (van Dijk, 1984, 1989, 1997).

Although the socio-cognitive perspective offers significant insights into prejudice's perceptual properties, discursive psychology theorists have prioritized studying the narrative sophistication of prejudice in specific communicative contexts over its cognitive properties. As Potter and Wetherell (1987, p. 53; Wetherell & Potter, 1992) suggest, studying language use in real settings reveals significant variations in the stereotypical accounts that social agents produce about a minority group, depending on a communicative situation's demands. In the same epistemological vein, Billig's (1987) rhetorical approach advocates comprehending language and the social mind in their dialogical dimensions. Arguing for an oratory image of the subject, Billig suggests that *categorization*—a key concept in studying prejudice—should be reconceptualized as an argumentation strategy instead of an inflexible perceptual process. Focusing on the argumentative aspects of prejudice shows that categorization is integrally related to *particularization*, defined as the opposite discursive process of distinguishing an element from a general category and introducing exceptions (Billig, 1985). According to this analytical perspective, examining prejudice through the lens of argumentation reveals that discriminatory thought in complex interactional contexts is more flexible, fluid, and multifaceted than traditional cognitive theories describe (Billig, 1985, pp. 93-94).

Despite their different conceptualizations of the presence and role of pre-existing cognitive entities in forming prejudice (Potter, 2012), both van Dijk's critical discourse analysis and discursive psychology share significant epistemic assumptions about language's role in producing socio-cultural patterns of discrimination. As Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) have argued, the synthetic implementation of different perspectives on discourse analysis into a *multiperspectival approach* is not only possible, but it also sheds light on multiple angles of the discursive practices (p. 154). Accordingly, our analysis draws on the common epistemological ground that critical discourse analysis and discursive psychology share, focusing on prejudice's discursive properties in order to spot both its argumentation strategies and the variant repertoires that structure its content (Potter, 2012; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; van Dijk, 1989, 1997). Without entering into ontological assumptions about the cognitive properties of prejudice, our analysis emphasizes prejudice's narrative content, argumentative complexity, and variations. Thus, our research's main analytical unit is discursive psychology's concept of interpretive repertoires, but our analysis is also informed by critical discourse analysis's insights into the argumentative strategies that consolidate certain prejudicial formulations in public debate.

## Interpretative Repertoires

Our research uses as a basic analytic unit *interpretative repertoires*—a concept formulated to approach discourse within the flexible requirements of social practices (Potter, 2012, p. 105). Interpretative repertoires are defined as "broadly discernible clusters of terms, descriptions and figures of speech, often assembled around metaphors or vivid images" (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 90). These discursive modalities are systems of signification used for evaluating actions, events, and other phenomena (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 149). While repertoires evince stylistic and grammatical patterns, this concept's analytical focus is not linguistic; rather, it emphasizes discourse's content and flexibilities (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, pp. 90-92). Hence, interpretative repertoires are recurrent narrative constructions that serve as building blocks of meaning with varied uses that depend on a communicative situation's challenges (Potter & Wetherell,

1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). This concept differs from identifying themes in that it permits understanding how narrative constructions can be combined to articulate different arguments.

Here, the concept of interpretative repertoires is used to: i) detect *recurrent narrative formulations* that represent shared symbolic resources in the formation of prejudiced stances within the public sphere; and ii) understand their *discursive adjustments* in different situational and communicative challenges. Lastly, our analytical framework draws on social theories of covert prejudice and neo-racism that scrutinize the socio-political reshaping of discriminatory stances towards minorities in the context of modern liberal democracies.

## Covert Prejudice

Contemporary social theories of discrimination have detected ongoing reformulations of prejudice against minorities into subtler forms of expression (Augoustinos & Every, 2010; Billig, 2012; Coates, 2011; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Pearson, 2017; Virtanen & Huddy, 1998). In modern democracies, racism is institutionally denounced as incompatible with the values of equality and tolerance; this development reflects post-World War II socio-political transformations and the end of the colonial era and racial segregation in the USA (Balibar, 1991b). However, legal and moral condemnations of racism have not translated into ending prejudice against minorities. Divergent public and elite discourses—in which media discourse plays a prominent role—reproduce negative representations in more “delicate” forms (Augoustinos & Every, 2010; van Dijk, 1997), but they still operate as boundary-keeping mechanisms to maintain social distance between different groups (Coates, 2011, p. 121).

Social theorists describe this re-articulation in different terms, including “aversive racism” (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Pearson, 2017); “differentialist racism” (Delanty & Millward, 2007; Taguieff, 1988a, 1988b); “symbolic racism” (Kinder & Sears, 1981); “colorblind white dominance” (López, 2011); and “laissez-faire racism” (Bobo & Smith, 1998). These new discriminative phenomena no longer focus on the blatant rejection of minorities based on the alleged biological superiority of certain races over others, as in traditional racism. The new modes of discrimination are primarily based on arguments about the *supposed incompatibility of cultural identities, mentalities, and traditions* and the *harmfulness of abolishing borderlines*. This rhetoric is based on the belief that minorities are *unwilling or unable to adjust to Western culture’s moral values*, i.e., individualism, self-reliance, work ethic, obedience, and discipline (Kinder & Sears, 1981; Virtanen & Huddy, 1998). Closely linked with the era of globalization, these stereotypes signal the emergence of a *neo-racism*, which is defined as a “racism without race,” where the category of immigration replaces race and the dominant theme is the alleged unsurmountability of cultural differences (Balibar, 1991a, pp. 20–21).

As Dovidio, Gaertner, and Pearson (2017) suggest, new forms of racism are subtle and indirect. For example, “aversive racism”—a form of neo-racism displayed also by politically and socially liberal individuals and groups—is often expressed in rationalized ways and contains selective sympathy for minorities’ suffering (p. 270). Aversive racists regard themselves as non-prejudiced while still possessing “conflicting, often nonconscious, negative feelings and beliefs” about minorities, accompanied by sentiments of discomfort, anxiety, or fear (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Pearson, 2017, p. 271).

The cultural incompatibility hypothesis is complemented by seemingly *pragmatic arguments of socio-economic competition* between the national population and immigrants, focusing on the scarcity of financial resources, rising unemployment, and concerns about welfare benefits (Delanty & Millward, 2007; López, 2011; van Dijk, 1989). By citing “objective” obstacles to the state’s capacity to integrate migrant populations, prejudiced stances are presented as rational statements and distanced from racial biases. *Liberal rhetoric* is also integrated into these discursive patterns through ostensibly egalitarian arguments, which invoke the state’s obligation to eschew the “positive discrimination” of legislative and social remedies for the inequalities that minorities suffer (Bobo & Smith, 1998; López, 2011).

Through different *disclaiming argumentation strategies*, new prejudiced modalities achieve social legitimacy as non-discriminatory views (Augoustinos & Every, 2010); in this way, they maintain the majority group’s *positive self-representation* versus the minority’s *negative Other-representation* (van Dijk, 1997). These mitigating strategies, which political and media discourse disseminate in the public sphere, normalize prejudice; at the same time, they deny the blatant rejection of minorities and defend the receiving community’s moral superiority. As Delanty and Millward (2007) suggest, the new racism routinizes prejudice, representing it as an “everyday value” that permeates ordinary life.

Against this backdrop, this research focuses on identifying these new prejudicial forms, which share the following common discursive characteristics: *ambivalent and rationalized ways of expressing anti-immigrant sentiments; the use of*

*mitigating and disclaiming strategies*; and the *self-representation of the dominant group as non-racist*. However, despite their distinctive characteristics, new and old forms of racism cannot be always differentiated in a clear-cut way. Covert prejudice often interconnects with arguments of open rejection and is not always cohesive and unequivocal. As Balibar suggests, new prejudiced modalities lack fixed frontiers and cannot be delineated into rigid typologies of content; they are produced through ongoing historical and socio-political transformations, giving rise to a spectrum of latent potentialities of racism (Balibar, 1991b, p. 40).

## Context

### Greece as a First Host Country

Between 2015 and 2016, Greece was the main receiving country for refugees from war-torn countries—e.g., Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan—arriving in Europe through the Eastern Mediterranean Sea routes. According to UN Refugee Agency data (UNHCR, n.d.), 1,030,173 refugees arrived on the Northeastern Aegean islands between 2015 and 2016. The vast majority of these refugees intended to move to other European destinations. However, the closure of the Balkan migration route and restrictive European asylum and migration policies “trapped” many asylum seekers on Greek soil (Amnesty International, 2016). Hosting and managing massive migrant populations posed unprecedented challenges for Greece with many state agencies being unprepared to respond to the situation (Papadopoulos, 2017).

The long-lasting *Greek debt crisis* had already weakened the public sector and exposed much of the population to serious socio-economic precarity. Politically, a significant increase in anti-immigrant ideology also marked this period. The rise of the radical neo-Nazi organization Golden Dawn as the third largest party in the Greek Parliament, after receiving 7.0% of the vote in the 2015 elections, signaled xenophobic discourse’s normalization in the mainstream political agenda. Moreover, across the political spectrum, the refugee crisis became a central theme of political debate, with representatives from right-wing and centrist parties calling for stricter border policies and demanding the refugees’ immediate transport to other EU countries. Against this backdrop, certain political agents translated Greek citizens’ own experiences of economic and social vulnerability due to the economic crisis into social antagonism with the refugee population. Such views spread from the Greek Parliament and the media to society at large.

### Island Societies as Community Frameworks

The local communities we study here were the *first entry points* for the refugees arriving from the Eastern Mediterranean. At the forefront of the refugee crisis, these communities were called on to provide the refugee population with humanitarian aid, accommodations, and health care, even as they often lacked the resources and infrastructure to do so. It is worth noting that large parts of these communities clearly displayed solidarity with the refugees and filled in the institutional gaps at all levels, including rescue missions. However, significant portions of civil society reacted to the refugees’ presence by organizing rallies and assemblies against them. At the same time, the refugee crisis mobilized humanitarian agents, NGOs, reporters, European stakeholders, and public figures, bringing them to the Aegean islands. This international spotlight on traditionally closed communities had a mixed impact on them and highlighted conflicting interests and re-articulations of prejudice.

In this context, the refugee crisis became a central public controversy for these communities, challenging the existing *boundary-expressing symbols* (Cohen, 2001, p. 15) that shape their shared code and underscoring their internal contradictions. The media discourses discussed here represent an integral part of the interactional process through which these communities interpret their collective experiences. Thus, these discourses incorporate and produce meanings tied to the communities’ shared representations and the stratification processes that form their *local idioculture* (Fine, 2010).

### The Regional Press

The regional press is a largely unstudied subgenre of media discourse that has a *community-based orientation*, differentiating it from the national press in terms of its localized effects and structure. This local emphasis creates “communities of meaning” (Cohen, 2001)—cohesive symbolic representations of collective life based on the diverse views that circulate



inside the community—by comprehensively soliciting, adjusting, and rearticulating these different perspectives (Lowrey, Brozana, & Mackay, 2008).

Moreover, this genre is *structurally different* from large national media corporations. The newspapers studied here are published by small-scale local media organizations, which, to a certain degree, follow the “two-way communication” model (Berrigan, 1979). This means that their content relies on the active participation of community members, public servants, and local organizations through opinion articles and extended announcements, whereas large-scale national media’s content is produced within a more vertical organizational model (Carpentier, Lie, & Servaes, 2003). Thus, the texts analyzed here reflect both the media discourse’s constructive power within small local communities and the discursive nodes that parts of these communities create through ongoing communicative processes.

## Method

This study applies a synthetic qualitative methodology of discourse analysis, emphasizing the narrative and argumentation patterns of covert prejudice in the Northeastern Aegean press. Our methodological design drew upon the research guidelines proposed by discursive psychology (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1992) and integrative approaches to discourse analysis (Antaki, Billig, Edwards, & Potter, 2003; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

### Newspaper Selection

Our sample consists of *four local newspapers* from three Aegean islands: Lesbos, Samos, and Chios. The General Secretariat of Information and Communication—the state service that monitors press issues—does not keep official records of the regional newspapers’ circulation. Thus, we selected newspapers based on their publication frequency, historic presence, and brand awareness within the studied communities. For Lesbos, the largest of the three islands, we selected *Empros* and *Dimokratis*, two daily newspapers with a longstanding presence on the island. From Chios, we chose *Alitheia*, one of the island’s oldest and most recognizable weekly papers. Finally, our sample includes *Samiakon Vima* from Samos, a traditional weekly newspaper.

### Data Collection and Coding

We collected a total of 648 issues from May 2015 to December 2016. Initially, we identified all refugee-related articles (reportages, editorials, opinion articles, and interviews) and organized them into coded thematic subcategories (“increase in arrivals,” “immigration policies,” “refugee camps,” “NGOs,” “integration issues,” and “other”). Then, following a “corpus construction” rationale (Bauer & Aarts, 2000), we gradually integrated texts into our sample for detailed analysis until there was evidence of saturation, meaning no additional representation types could be detected. The final corpus of texts that we analyzed included 339 articles (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Corpus of Analyzed Texts by Article Type and Central Theme*

Main Themes	Reportages	Editorials and Opinion articles	Interviews
Increase in Arrivals	33	25	1
Immigration Policies	37	32	4
Refugee Camps	52	24	1
NGOs	19	16	1
Integration	24	31	–
Other	9	30	–
Total	174	158	7

## Data Analysis

The study's basic analytical unit, as indicated above, is the concept of *interpretative repertoires*. We did multiple comparative readings of the selected texts to detect reiterative patterns of narration and stylistic regularities, which cut across the initial thematic categories. Given our special interest in covert forms of prejudice, we focused on discursive formulations that demonstrated an ambivalent attitude toward the refugees' presence. During this part of the analysis, we identified *five recurrent repertoires of covert prejudice*: "superfluous bodies," "threats of multiculturalism," "agents of misery," "bogus refugees," and "capitalizing on the refugee crisis." Subsequently, we closely analyzed each repertoire's most representative texts for their *argumentation, rhetorical specificities, and narrative variations*.

## Analysis

### 1. The "Superfluous Bodies" Repertoire

This repertoire discursively reduces refugees to an *anonymous crowd*, whose physical presence on the islands is described as *superfluous*. Refugees are portrayed as rambling bodies and their publicly visible precariousness unsettles the local communities. Most of the articles with which this repertoire is identified call for the islands' *decongestion*—an appeal to the state to transport the refugees elsewhere. Hence, this repertoire highlights the concept of "superfluous populations," which generalizes certain social groups as outcasts to be removed from public view (Bauman, 2004).

This repertoire repeatedly uses "water metaphors" (El Refaie, 2001), including "tide," "flood," "influx," and "tsunami," to refer to refugees. Its metaphorical discourse consolidates the image of an overflowing space, accentuating a sense of fear and anxiety about a perceived external threat to the communities' wellbeing. In our sample, this typically dehumanizing discourse often appears alongside more sophisticated arguments that seek to protect the writers' humanitarian face from accusations of racism.

#### "Shhh...the State Is Sleeping!"

Unbelievable, but true. Within 24 hours, on Thursday, literally 758 fugitives—migrants and refugees—disembarked at Lesbos. It is a record number that at least proves that Mytilini has been taken over, because of the state apparatus's inability to deter such an immigration tide. But even supposing that such a tide could not have been deterred, the existing situation in the island's streets, where armies of people are walking towards Mytilini, unfed for two or three days, worn out, and often carrying their children, proves that the state is incapable of preventing, in a coordinated way, these images of wretchedness and misery—shameful images for our homeland to be associated with [...] with all that this implies for Lesbos and its public image, especially during this crucial touristic period.

*Empros, 5/30/2015, reportage*

The initial phrase "unbelievable but true" introduces the text's threatened tone. It presents Lesbos as an endangered community, abandoned to face an external demographic danger alone. The expression "record number" further accentuates this sentiment of an overwhelming situation, which is gradually articulated by combining the typically *dehumanizing themes* (El Refaie, 2001) of "water" ("immigration tide" x2) and of an "invading army" ("Mytilini has been taken over," "armies of people").

While these metaphors disseminate an underlying xenophobic message, the rejection of the refugees' presence is not openly projected onto them. Instead, the negative stance on their arrival is rhetorically structured as a *criticism of the state* and its inefficiency. Thus, the passage represents repelling refugees as the state's principal obligation, and it adduces their free circulation as evidence of the state's inability to protect local communities from defamation ("images of wretchedness and misery," "shameful for our homeland").

The extract's argumentation becomes controversial when the writer uses a strategy of "apparent sympathy" to negate any prejudice in his perspective (van Dijk, 1997). He partially acknowledges the hardship that refugees and immigrants face with a mixed phrase that aims to express both the local community's threatened sentiment and the writer's humanitarian concerns: "armies of people walking towards Mytilini [...] carrying their children." This phrase seems to imply that these images offend the human dignity of the refugees *themselves*.

The passage's concluding phrase, however, reveals that the writer's principal preoccupation is not humanitarian but rather economic: safeguarding Lesvos' touristic product ("with all that this implies...during this crucial touristic period"). This phrase establishes a *hierarchy of conflicting interests*, prioritizing in-group prosperity and portraying the refugees' presence as superfluous and dangerous to the community's wellbeing. Thus, the extract constructs a "local we" ("our homeland") that is presented as simultaneously humanitarian and threatened by uncontrolled refugee movements.

### "They Didn't Fit"

Of concern and alarm is the fact that on Monday, at noon, a familiar image from the nightmarish summer of 2015 was revived in our city's port—an image that raised reasonable questions. More specifically, approximately 75 foreigners have been transported to the port's fenced area, near the swimming pool, as, according to initial reports, they...didn't fit in Moria's Reception Center, which now hosts 3,800 people. The Mayor of Lesvos was unequivocal: "These are our municipality's capacities. There is no likelihood of building another Identification Center or Hosting Center. We won't accept a repeat of last year's situation. Turkey's threat to open its borders and violate the agreement with the EU is no less than a threat of war and must be considered seriously by some people" [...].

*Dimokratis, 9/3/2016, reportage*

This extract portrays refugees—labeled "foreigners"—as overflowing from the hotspot of Moria, while the mayor's statements voice the regional authorities' determination to reject building a new hosting unit in Lesvos. For the writer, quoting the mayor functions as an *interdiscursive strategy* (Fairclough, 1992) that mixes two orders of discourse (institutional and reportorial) to establish a *consensus* that a serious threat exists and "something should be done" (Cohen, 2011).

Although the writer initially refers to the overcrowding of Moria's existing hosting unit, he *gradually projects* the image of an overflowing space onto the whole municipality of Lesvos to create an image of a general impasse. The passage invokes the "nightmarish summer of 2015" as a traumatic collective memory and uses the possibility of its repetition to *justify* refusing new hosting units. Thus, the mayor's statements represent a variant of the "firm but fair" dogma (van Dijk, 1997) to convey that, while harsh, rejecting new hosting units is just and reasonable. Through strongly worded expressions ("unequivocal," "no likelihood," "we will not accept"), the writer presents the mayor as the guardian of the in-group's prosperity amidst a perceived burden on Lesvos' capacities.

This extract is distinct in that it combines pragmatic arguments with the previous passage's threatened tone. The first part treats the refugees' superfluous presence as a mere logistical issue. The unwillingness to accept new accommodations is attributed to the fact that there are too many refugees, who simply "do not fit." However, in the last phrase, another narrative modality complements the argumentation: the possibility that Turkey might push large numbers of migrants toward Greek borders. This allegation imbues the text with a panicked sense of an imminent demographic attack ("act of war"). *Merging these discrete narrative modalities* further solidifies the impression of an alarming situation that should mobilize the government to "decongest" Lesvos.

However, at the same time that the extract conjures a sense of threat by portraying the refugee movements as an invasion, it also represents the refugees as completely devoid of agency. The text constructs the refugees as passive, either as excess bodies that must be transferred ("didn't fit" x2, "have been transported") or as mere instruments of pernicious external interests. This representation of the refugees as both passive and threatening highlights the ambivalent character of prejudice. Discriminatory discourse is not always cognitively cohesive; it often combines dissonant assumptions from the socially available argumentative and rhetorical resources (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, pp. 196-200).



## 2. The “Dangers of Multiculturalism” Repertoire

This repertoire’s main narrative contests *multicultural coexistence* based on different arguments of *symbolic and differentialist racism* (Balibar, 1991a; Kinder & Sears, 1981; Taguieff, 1988a, 1988b). In our sample, this prejudiced modality was far more common than traditional racist formulations. The repertoire problematizes the *multicultural perspective* through arguments about the refugees’ purported *cultural incompatibility with Western values* and their *resistance to assimilation*. Thus, the articles that form this repertoire vividly exemplify a version of *neo-racism* (Balibar, 1991a) that presumes a radical mental and moral heterogeneity among members of different cultural traditions (Taguieff, 1988b).

### “The Multicultural Society Is Self-Destructing”

Instead of promoting a “cohesive polymorphy” or a “polymorphic cohesion,” multiculturalism promotes and highlights each group’s distinctive identities, while often creating, designating and instigating them. The result of multiculturalism is a fragmented society with its parts sealed off and hostile towards one another, violently brandishing strong identities of “difference,” and lacking the desire or the ability to integrate. Multiculturalism does not go beyond pluralism—it destroys it. There are many pressing questions: Why do western democracies continue to collaborate with and not denounce the Arab countries that finance Islamists? Why don’t they abolish the extremist mosques on their soil? Why don’t they deport (in the case of immigrants), or why don’t they punish, in the case of citizens, the extremist imams and the budding terrorists who live in the West? And why do western countries constantly make compromises, thus violating the laws of democracy, in order to satisfy the Muslim migrants?

*Empros, 3/25/2016, opinion article*

The columnist’s argument starts by introducing a *rhetorical binary* between “multiculturalism” and “pluralism,” arbitrarily identifying the former with its adherents’ refusal to integrate and the latter with a genuine respect for democracy. Juxtaposing multiculturalism with pluralism serves the purpose of *moral splitting*; it seeks to sublimate the writer’s view and also devalues multicultural ethics. Instead of ascribing his arguments to “monoculturalism,” the writer refers to them as “pluralism” to situate himself within the democratic tradition of tolerance. By discursively assuming a democratic posture, this extract highlights Taguieff’s point that differentialist racists may portray their stance as genuinely antiracist in contrast with the putative totalitarianism of mixing cultures (Taguieff, 1988b).

In the course of the argument, the writer takes a rhetorical leap by equating multiculturalism with the alleged prevalence of Islamic extremism in “western democracies.” Through this discursive shift, he targets a specific cultural and religious category (“Muslim immigrants”), generalizing them as “budding terrorists.” By posing rhetorical questions, he articulates his argument as a criticism of western states’ leadership for “violating the norms of democracy.” Here, he deepens the initial moral splitting by equating pro-immigrant policies with promoting violence and terrorism. Thus, a *blurry aggregation of multiculturalists, Muslim immigrants, and pro-immigrant politicians* emerges, representing an imaginary rhetorical opponent to whom the writer addresses his polemic. Overall, the argument is structured not only by the hypothesis of cultural incompatibility, but also the *a priori* democratic superiority of western values over the putative totalitarianism of Muslim civilization.

### “Everything Wrong”

A serious problem that will occur during the next school year is the way and the system in which the foreigners who will ultimately stay on the island will be integrated into the classrooms of the primary schools and high schools [...] Consequently, the presence of foreign kids with a different mentality and religion in the same classroom with the regional students is very difficult. [...] How will foreign kids be able to follow along, what will they understand, and how will they keep up? It is very doubtful that they will understand the teaching and the school’s functioning. [...]

The residents of these areas are concerned, referring to the creation of blended classrooms, where foreigners will actually predominate.

*Dimokratis, 7/2/2016, opinion article*

This passage raises the issue of refugee children's integration into Lesvos' local schools. Unlike the previous extract, it introduces prejudice vis-à-vis multicultural coexistence more covertly. Recurring to ostensibly realistic arguments, the writer does not openly reject the refugees' integration into local schools, but he makes it an *a priori* problem. Throughout the article, he creates the image of an obstacle course ("serious problem," "very difficult," "very doubtful," "concerned"). In this way, he contests the benefits of school integration for refugee children. Thus, this specific extract introduces a "for their own good" discursive modality (van Dijk, 1997), suggesting that the writer's principal concern is the educational outcome *for refugee children*.

At the same time, the writer employs the abstract concept of a "different mentality," coupled with a "religious" parameter, to denote a fundamental *cultural heterogeneity* among local and refugee children. While not explicitly analyzed in the text, the presumption of cultural incompatibility implies that *cultural mixing* would not educationally benefit *all students*.

In the last phrase, the writer introduces the perspective of certain island village residents, portraying them as "concerned" about the possibility of refugee children attending local classes. By projecting the most xenophobic concerns onto anonymous "residents," the writer invests his argumentation with a consensual tone and implies that the claim that there will be "blended" classes with a predominance of foreigners is *not his* but rather that of the *local inhabitants themselves*. This mixed discourse of empathy for both the refugees' educational needs and the local communities' concerns implicitly disavows any prejudice in the writer's arguments, even as it preserves the underlying hypothesis of insurmountable "mental and religious differences" between cultures.

### 3. The "Agents of Misery" Repertoire

This repertoire approaches the refugee presence on the islands in terms of a widespread atmosphere of *decadence and misery*. It differs from other interpretative modalities in that it emphasizes the presence of NGOs and humanitarian agents in the local communities, describing them as *proxies in the ongoing destruction* of social cohesion and the local economy that prolong the refugees' stay on the islands.

This narrative largely transfers anti-refugee discourses to these organizations and stakeholders while avoiding accusations of racist intolerance. Hence, this repertoire could be seen as introducing a peculiar form of *triangulation*, where the NGOs and pro-immigrant groups represent the "third person" against whom hostility and rejection are projected. At the same time, this discursive modality largely deprives refugees of their agency by portraying them as the instruments of devious "humanitarians."

#### "NGOs or Development?"

The Ministry of Migration Policy's plans for Samos were officially revealed. Thousands of immigrants trapped for months and years, "customers" of the NGOs, which will exploit them within the various little shops that they'll set up wherever they find indebted hoteliers to accept renting them their hotels as "hosting units." Instead of tourists, trapped immigrants. Instead of operators and charters, NGOs. Instead of development, creating an open "jail," sponsored by the NGOs. This is the vision of certain "humanitarians" for our island, without even taking the trouble to ask the opinion of the people of Samos. They don't even ask the refugees themselves, who want to leave and are condemned to stay against their will!

*Samiakon Vima, 7/18/2016, editorial*

This extract's initial sentence alleges a hidden plan by the Migration Ministry, implying that local communities are the victims of a state plot that degrades them. Here, the writer constructs a muddled category—the "humanitarians"—that completely merges the roles of the state and NGOs. The article presents this blended category as the source of

widespread social destruction, characterized by false intentions. The text's repeated use of unnecessary quotation marks further consolidates this image of a *pseudo-humanitarianism* implemented at the local communities' expense.

Throughout this argument, we can detect the local communities' paradoxical identification with the refugees, based on their putative *joint victimization* by humanitarian agents. Words like "exploit," "trapped" (x2), "jail," and "condemned" create the image of an oppressed population that suffers alongside the islanders. Indeed, the extract's last two sentences draw an unfounded parallel between the refugees' desire to depart and the ignored will of the "people of Samos."

Despite the attempt to establish a united front against the alleged "exploiters," the underlying tension between the refugees and local inhabitants looms in the background. The writer primarily uses the *exploitation theme* to denounce the economically destructive consequences of the refugees' presence on the island. *Economic anguish*—a widespread social sentiment during the Greek debt crisis—is invoked to highlight socioeconomic antagonism as the central interpretative modality of the refugees' presence. The article draws a *dramatic contrast* between the islands' prosperity and the current situation through a series of opposing phrases ("instead of") that delineate conflicting prospects. Here, the in-group's economic wealth is prioritized as the ultimate ideal, while the refugees—despite being victimized—are described as part of the "exploitative complex" that deprives Samos of healthy income from tourists.

#### "NGOs Must Be Removed From our Island"

[...] Even foreign media channels report incidents in Moria. Our potential customers see them. Why would they want to visit this place? Someone must stop our island's defamation. Hollywood actors and other "stars" who have visited our island should come with their friends for vacations in Lesbos, if they want to help us, now that we have reached bottom. [...] The NGOs that have flooded and overwhelmed us for the past year are acting against the touristic product called "Lesvos." As long as they stay on the island, we are moving away from the tourist industry-economy. [...] The NGOs, which have taken so many liberties from the authorities, have invaded our island and imposed a colonial system. [...] They must be removed from our island as soon as possible.

*Empros, 6/11/2016, interview*

This extract comes from an interview with a Lesbos Municipal Council member. The interviewee's argumentation is structured by a division between the well-received interest of potential tourists and the "colonial system" of the NGOs. This narrative dichotomy establishes an *asymmetrical hierarchy of international attention*; it portrays economic development and humanitarian aid as conflicting circumstances, asserting that in Lesbos, the latter comes at the expense of the former.

In this context, "Hollywood actors and other 'stars'" are welcome on the island ("should come") since they can spend money to increase the island's income. However, the interviewee portrays NGOs as highly undesirable agents ("must be removed") who defame Lesbos internationally. Despite the "colonization" argument, which creates the impression that islanders are oppressed by the NGOs, the writer clearly takes a profit-oriented perspective, suggesting that the gloomy image of suffering people in Moria repels potential "customers."

Beneath its hostility toward the NGOs, this extract rejects the refugees' very presence without expressly saying so. The claim that the humanitarian units for hosting refugees are incompatible with an attractive image befitting a tourist destination is moderated by a discursive overinvestment in referring to the island's inhabitants as victims. Thus, the interviewee portrays the local communities as having "reached bottom" and also projects the typical metaphors of "superfluosity" (see the "superfluous bodies" repertoire—"flooded," "overwhelmed," and "invaded") onto the network of humanitarian agents, who represent an ongoing catastrophe for the island's economy.

#### 4. The "Bogus Refugees" Repertoire

This repertoire establishes criteria for *categorizing* and *hierarchically differentiating the newcomers*, introducing a distinction between "genuine" and "bogus" refugees. This well-known prejudiced reformulation (Lynn & Lea, 2003; van Dijk, 1997) provides an effective way to distinguish the welcome from the unwelcome, those who merit protection and compassion from those who do not. It also represents a successful rhetorical maneuver that allows the writer's

argument to preserve a reasonable guise; sympathy is directed toward the “genuine” refugees, while the “bogus” ones are constructed as “undeserving.”

### “Exaggerations”

However, the concern is that all this gloomy imagery raises some questions that remain unanswered for the moment. For example, these Syrians are wandering around with euros in hand, high-tech cell phones and sportswear like well-off people coming from...the war! They sell—it is said—their belongings. But what kind of transactions can be done there now?

*Samiakon Vima 8/31/2015, opinion article*

This extract subtly introduces the notion of bogusness in terms of a visual discrepancy between how refugees should look—according to normative and media-dramatized representations—and how they actually appear. The writer’s main argumentation strategy is to *carefully cultivate uncertainty* and *employ a “calculated ambivalence”* (Wodak, 2015). By raising doubts about Syrians’ true plight and need for protection, the passage indirectly depicts them as essentially dishonest.

In particular, the text delineates a seemingly incomprehensible contradiction between the newcomers’ “prosperous” lifestyle and the “expected,” widely shared stereotypical image of the “wretched refugee,” as if such an inconsistency in itself signals disguised fraud. The figure of the technologically literate Syrian, capable of using smartphones and dressed in stylish western clothes, is perceived as an irregularity that disrupts the habitual aesthetic code dictated by the colonial gaze and blurs the visual boundaries between sameness and (Oriental) otherness (Pellander & Kotilainen, 2017). The writer allusively presents the cell phones, cash, and sportswear as “sensible evidence” of an odd situation that remains incompatible with the normalized image of the war-victim, who is expected to display specific characteristics, such as voicelessness, poor clothing and a lack of purchasing power.

Thus, the extract suggests a suspicious abnormality that demands investigation (“unanswered questions”). Even the final supportive argument about refugees selling their belongings is reduced to an unfounded rumor (“it is said”) and disputed by alluding to an “uncontested” illustration of warfare: one that does not allow transactions. This diffuse disbelief introduces a spectrum of potential mistrusts about the claimants’ credibility, aiming to deprive Syrians of their refugeehood and portray them as not really in need of help.

### “Who Is Coming to Us From Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan?”

Besides the Syrian families who are real refugees, whom we need to except, the rest—and there are a lot—are in their majority runaways escaped from prisons, who have been freed by jihadists, and from the Syrian Army [...] Among them, there are a lot of deserters from the ranks of jihadists and fugitives from justice. They all provide fake information, and nobody knows where they come from or what kind of crimes they have committed.

*Samiakon Vima 5/4/2015, opinion article*

This extract clearly distinguishes between an exceptional minority of “Syrian families,” who are “real refugees,” and the “rest,” the assumed majority (“there are a lot”) of newcomers, who become the targets of imagined Islamophobic projections (“jihadists,” “escaped from prisons,” “fugitives from justice”).

The division between Syrian families and the “rest” ethnically distributes risks, so that displaced Syrian families emerge as the only beneficiaries of “real refugee” status. As such, they are associated with a distinct regime of visibility and acceptance within the “imaginative geography” of the Islamic Orient (Desbiens, 2017). The columnist’s use of certain words (“besides,” “we need to except them”) constructs *genuineness* as a privileged exception, while *bogusness* represents the norm (“in their majority”).

However, as the use of the word “families” suggests, the Syrian exception only becomes conceivable through an implicit familist ideology that prioritizes families’ needs over those of individuals. Moreover, juxtaposing “Syrian families” with single male migrants hints at a gendered migration narrative (Gray & Franck, 2019) that renders female agency invisible—crushed under the signifying force of the umbrella term “family”—and demonizes male travelers

as evil-doers and would-be terrorists. This discursive gender-based discrimination—also indicated in Greek by using masculine grammatical categories—trivializes Muslim men’s vulnerability as legitimate asylum seekers and symbolically dehumanizes them. Additionally, criminalizing the allegedly “fake” refugees’ agency (“what kind of crimes they have committed”) raises latent concerns about the islanders’ security. Thus, limiting refugee status to Syrian families allows the writer to pay the customary moral debt to some of the newcomers, while still portraying the majority as a crowd of anonymous (“no one knows where they come from”) extremists (“jihadists”) and cheaters (with “fake information”).

## 5. The “Capitalizing on the Refugee Crisis” Repertoire

This repertoire represents the refugee crisis as an opportunity for the local communities to gain financial, touristic, and other benefits. In Billig’s (1985) terms, it introduces a specific form of *particularization* by establishing an exception for the benefits that the local communities could derive from the situation. However, this instrumentalized exception, which attempts to highlight the tragedy’s “positive side”, is intrinsically linked with an opportunistic rationale that depersonalizes refugees in favor of economic and touristic boosts and casts them as a tool for achieving subjective gains.

### “Transforming the ‘Disadvantage’ That Befell Us Into an ‘Advantage’”

Too many [international personalities] arrive daily on the island to be informed firsthand and see Lesbos’ situation up close, which has become synonymous with solidarity. This fact represents a unique opportunity [for Lesbos] to become famous all over the world and be publicized as the island that, although it shouldered the biggest burden as regards the refugee challenge, eventually made an impression and won the international community’s praise [...]. That is why it is very important that Lesbos decides what compensatory measures it will demand and claim both from the government and the European institutions, given the burden that our island has carried over the past months [...]. To the point that European visitors, official or not, declare themselves impressed by the local society’s stance, which despite its many problems, stood in solidarity with these people, giving humanity lessons to all the world! Thus, it is necessary to transform the “disadvantage” that befell us due to our geographical location—this tremendous and intense problem—into an “advantage [...].”

*Empros, 10/17/2015, editorial*

This extract highlights the refugee crisis as an exceptional opportunity for locals to demand compensation from the state and the European Union, and to advertise the island internationally to reap potential touristic and economic rewards. The article reconsiders the refugees’ “problematic” presence (“the biggest burden”) from an opportunistic perspective (“unique opportunity”), aiming to exploit Lesbos’ limelight and maximize its possible gains (“transforming the ‘disadvantage’ [...] into an ‘advantage’”).

The author’s main argumentative strategy consists of generalizing the solidarity that *parts* of the local community showed (“[...] stood in solidarity with these people”) and presenting it as a valuable asset to capitalize on and publicize—almost like an advertising slogan—to promote the island (“Lesbos has become synonymous with solidarity”). At the same time, a pattern of dehumanization lurks beneath this repertoire’s explicit content. It still discusses refugees with metaphors and expressions that denote undesirability (“burden” x2, “tremendous [...] problem”). In contrast with this dehumanization of refugees, the writer “hyper-humanizes” the collective subject of “Lesbos” by invoking a moral superiority to describe the community (“made an impression,” “giving humanity lessons to all the world”).

### “Will Refugees Bring Tourists?”

Can refugees bring us closer to abolishing the visa requirements for Turkish citizens to visit, in order for our islands to be flooded with tourism? Yes, if Turkey honors its signature for once. This prospect arose after the 28 EU member-states’ leaders [gave] the “green light” for a wide joint action plan between the EU and Turkey to manage the refugee crisis at the summit in Brussels [...]



The President of the European Commission stressed that the agreement's goals are to ensure that refugees who already went to Turkey will remain there and not move to the EU [...].

*Alitheia, 10/19/2015, editorial*

This extract refers to the *EU-Turkey joint action plan*, which established that all “irregular migrants” and asylum seekers arriving on the Greek islands, whose asylum applications were denied, would be returned to Turkey. It is worth noting that many international NGOs and humanitarian institutions denounced this agreement as a blatant violation of refugees' human rights. The writer's argument assumes that, in exchange for the agreement, the EU would accelerate the liberalization of tourist visas for Turkish citizens wishing to visit Europe.

The straightforward central questions in the introduction (“will refugees bring tourists?”, “Can refugees abolish visa requirements?”) signal a cynical focus on the community's self-promotion, which totally silences moral preoccupations. The author conceives of the refugees in a depersonalized way, as a mere means to achieve economic ends and facilitate the arrival of Turkish tourists. Here, the catchy expression “our islands will be flooded [...]” usually reserved for pejoratively likening refugees to a natural disaster (see the “superfluous bodies” repertoire), paradoxically refers to a desire for tourists to visit, implicitly contrasting the two prospects—“flooded by tourism” *instead of* refugees. In contradistinction to welcoming the unobstructed mobility of tourists, the passage depicts refugees' movements as rightly subject to institutional restrictions (“to ensure that refugees [...] will remain there and not move”).

## Discussion

Our sample shows that communal interests are prioritized heavily in constructing prejudiced formulations. Invoking a shared community identity, in which ethnocentrism is rearticulated through a regional idiolect, delimits the in-group/out-group hierarchy. The islands are represented as *threatened communities* on the frontiers of the nation-state, abandoned to face an external danger alone.

As we saw in the “superfluous bodies” and “agents of misery” repertoires, prejudiced discourse is often articulated as a criticism of the state for failing to control refugee movements and humanitarian projects. In certain cases, this critique indicts governmental policies and NGOs for undermining the local communities' economic prosperity to subsidize the refugees' needs (as in the “agents of misery” repertoire). In others, it demands compensation to remedy the effects of the refugees' presence on the islands (as in the “capitalizing on the refugee crisis” repertoire). In these narratives, depicting the islanders as heroic figures in a lonely struggle for survival against all manner of adversity (economic crisis/refugee crisis/state inefficiency/ NGO “colonialism”) lends the call for decongestion a dramatic tone while allowing the writers to preserve a compassionate face.

Against this backdrop, many writers intersperse their argumentation with *mitigating discursive modalities* to express empathy with the refugees' suffering and appropriate the solidarity that many islanders did display. Doing so serves to preemptively disavow any accusations of racism and intolerance in their positions. However, these arguments usually include a qualifying “but” that indicates the limits of the discursive agents' tolerance and inclusivity. This discursive ambivalence, typical of expressions of prejudice, symbolic and aversive racism, in contemporary liberal democracies (Billig, 2012; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Pearson, 2017; van Dijk, 1997), lays the rhetorical foundation for rationalizing the rejection of refugees in the name of “objective” difficulties, not attitudinal biases. Thus, arguments about economic scarcity, lack of space, organizational chaos, overcrowding, disrupted community routines and social cohesion, appear across the repertoires we have identified here. They convey, in pragmatic terms, that the refugees' presence is inconducive to the communities' wellbeing.

The “capitalizing on the refugee crisis” repertoire introduces a distinct narrative that reframes the refugee crisis as a circumstance that, while unfortunate, could produce secondary benefits for the local communities. However, the argument's instrumental and calculating character degrades refugees as a kind of depersonalized bargaining chip, failing to support a substantial inclusionary account. Moreover, this repertoire's unilateral appeal to the “ethos of solidarity,” which certain parts of the local communities showed, without devoting equal attention to the xenophobic reactions

these communities also displayed, could be interpreted as a form of self-image management meant to defend the in-group's moral superiority and undermine any anti-racist critique's legitimacy (van Dijk, 1993).

The "threats of multiculturalism" repertoire further highlights how discursive agents adapt their accounts to specific social questions and debates. Most of the other repertoires assume that the refugees' presence on the islands is a temporary situation to be contained by state decongestion policies. In this context, these repertoires focus on the disruptive consequences of the refugee crisis for the local communities' economy and social life. However, the "threats of multiculturalism" repertoire introduces a vivid *variability of accounts* (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), as the *hypothesis of cultural incompatibility* emerges in response to the issue of *integrating* the refugees into local communities, especially state decisions about refugee participation in the local schools. Thus, the question of long-term coexistence gives rise to arguments based on cultural and religious generalizations. Indeed, we detected the "threats of multiculturalism" repertoire most when the integration issue became a major topic of national public debate.

Across the repertoires, refugees are portrayed in ambivalent terms as both victims who need help and as an out-group whose presence threatens the islands' social cohesion. This semantic ambiguity is also manipulated through notions of genuineness versus bogusness, as in the "bogus refugees" repertoire. The fluctuations between vulnerability and fraudulence mix humanitarian narratives of selective "care" with concerns about "securitization" (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017). Migrants who fail to satisfy the predetermined requirements (visual, ethnic, gendered, familial) for "deserving protection" are discursively constructed as menacing strangers.

Meanwhile, refugees' voices are clearly underrepresented in the media discourses studied here. In our sample, refugees themselves remain largely silenced; their own stories, desires, and experiences are mostly absent from the journalistic coverage. This exclusion and the repeated use of patterns of objectification (such as the "natural phenomena" and "invasion" metaphors) produce a dehumanizing discursive effect.

The interpretative patterns discussed above represent a fluid and highly pervasive form of discriminative discourse that allow for readjusting prejudice to the specific contextual challenges of the refugee crisis for the island communities. These formulations introduce innovative semantic reconfigurations of the out-group/in-group hierarchy, while allowing their proponents to avoid the undesirable label of racist. In our material, the argumentative strategies through which covert prejudice manifests itself might be grouped roughly as follows: i) *merging arguments of rejection* with expressions of *empathy* towards refugees; ii) framing anti-immigrant sentiment as a *genuine defense of democratic norms* and the *values of social and economic equality*; iii) *rationalizing* a non-inclusionary stance based on *pragmatic arguments of losses and gains rather than attitudinal preferences*; iv) *transferential mechanisms* for re-articulating hostility towards the refugees as *critiques of the state* and *the humanitarian agents*; and v) *selective concern* about the newcomers by differentiating between genuine and fake refugees.

Our findings indicate that the local perspective represents a central meaning-building matrix for understanding the challenges of the refugee crisis. Future research could benefit from further exploring the specificities of different community frames and their variations for interpreting emerging forms and readjustments of prejudice. In this sense, a localized understanding of discrimination, which is a rather overlooked issue in the study of prejudice, offers an analytical angle that could enhance the existing literature on new articulations of prejudice. Moreover, the interconnections between regional and national political discourses constitute an important research topic that remains open for further investigation.

## Conclusion

To conclude, the island media discourses included a wide variety of representations of the refugee crisis. Here, we focused on identifying the *repertoires of covert prejudice* expressed within this framework and on analyzing their complexity as a highly pervasive form of discriminative discourse shaped by the local context. Thus, we did not include glaring racist formulations, which were dispersed throughout our sample, or purely solidarity-oriented and humanitarian themes, which, while rarer, also appeared; we did, however, consider them as part of the wider contextual understanding that informs our analysis. In this sense, the formulations we discuss here do not exhaust the entire range of discourses, produced within the local communities, but rather highlight the originality, distinctiveness, and prevalence of implicit prejudice.

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