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A comparison between Cypriots with and without historical refugee background towards Syrian refugee influx in their country



Master Thesis

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Preface and Acknowledgements

The present Master thesis is a part of the Master programme in Global Refugee Studies in Aalborg University, Copenhagen. This thesis constitutes 30 ECTS credits and was conducted from February 2017 till July 2017 at the Department of Culture and Global Studies. The fieldwork was carried out at Paphos, Cyprus, between 14-May-2017 and 18-May-2017.

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Abstract

During the last six years, there has been observed a Syrian refugee crisis, where Syrians are forced to leave their country and seek for safety to neighbouring countries and Europe. Cyprus is a neighbouring country to Syria, with an interesting refugee history, where in 1974, the north part of the island was occupied by Turkey, and thousands Cypriots fled to the south part of the island, becoming refugees in their own country. Hence, it is very interesting from a social perspective based on historical events and social theories to analyse and understand the attitude of a population with refugee background towards a new refugee crisis.

The present study aims at evaluating whether Cypriots coming from refugee background have a different attitude and perception towards Syrian refugee influx in Cyprus compared to Cypriots without refugee background. The research is built on the assumption that Cypriots with refugee background show a more welcoming and accommodating attitude towards Syrian refugees. This is the basis of the investigation carried out in this research and the aim is to evaluate if the initial assumption is right or wrong. For this purpose, a fieldwork has been conducted, where local people from Cyprus with (indirectly through family members) and without refugee background were interviewed. The research question to be answered by the present study refers to if there is any difference on how Cypriots with and those without refugee backgrounds perceive the influx of Syrian refugees in Cyprus? Working questions are have been also used as complementary tools to research question with main topics being the locals' perception and involvement of Cypriots in Syrian refugees' settlement, the influence of Cypriot history on formation of locals' perception towards Syrian refugees and the impact of culture and more specifically religion on the formation of locals' perception towards Syrian refugees.

The data collection method used in the present research is qualitative, where semi-structured interviews were conducted and a total of five interviewees participated in the research. Discourse analysis and the strategy of comparison are used in order to analyse and present the collected data, supported by theoretical framework and literature data. From the analysis of the collected data from the interviews, it can be concluded that Cypriots with refugee background appear to be less empathetic, more concerned and less tolerant towards Syrian refugee influx compared to Cypriots without refugee background that seem to have adopted a more open and positive perception. This finding is contradictory to the initial assumption of the researcher, which is evaluated to be wrong. The research proposes also that an interaction between Cypriots and refugees affects in a positive

way the perception of the natives on refugees and the different cultural background and especially the different religion between Cypriots and Syrian refugees is a factor that negatively affects the locals' perception towards refugees.

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1. Introduction

During the last six years, there has been observed a Syrian refugee crisis which is considered by international organizations to be the largest humanitarian challenge worldwide since World War II (Right to a Future, 2015). Syrians are forced to leave their country and seek for safety to neighbouring countries but also to Europe, where they ask for asylum and protection (UNHCR, 2015). Cyprus is a neighbouring country to Syria, where Syrians can enter via the Mediterranean Sea (Fargues & Fandrich, 2012). Therefore, it could be expected that there is high Syrian influx in Cyprus, however, there has been observed a small amount of Syrian asylum seekers in Cyprus.

Cyprus is a country with refugee history, where in 1974, the 36.7% of the island was occupied by Turkey, and approximately 160.000 Greek Cypriots fled to the south part of the island, becoming refugees in their own country (Papadakis *et al.*, 2006). Hence, it is very interesting from a social perspective based on historical events and social theories to analyse and understand the attitude of a population with refugee background towards a refugee crisis.

The present study aims at evaluating whether the people coming from refugee background have a different attitude towards refugees compared to the ones without refugee background. For this purpose, a fieldwork has been conducted, where local people from Cyprus with and without refugee background were interviewed on their perception on Syrian refugee influx in Cyprus, in order to better understand their attitude and beliefs towards refugee influx in their country.

2. Problem formulation

This research is within the global refugee studies field. This is a field of study that seeks to equip students with knowledge on refugees' law and policies around the globe. It brings into perspective internal and external forces that trigger migration and refugee status. It also explores issues on asylum, international laws and governing policies that look at refugees' welfare around the world and deals with issues of integration of refugees in communities and the factors that influence these integrations. The present research, having the focus on Cyprus, aims to find out the different views Cypriots have on the influx of refugees in their country based on their backgrounds.

2.1 Assumptions

The research is mainly built on the assumption that Cypriots with refugee background, due to the displacement from Turkish forces, show a more welcoming and accommodating attitude towards Syrian refugees. Hence, the statement of the present thesis is built on the assumption that the Cypriots with a refugee background, having had similar experiences and knowing how it feels to become a foreigner and live with a refugee status, are expected to be more inclined to have a positive attitude and to be more sympathetic and empathetic towards Syrian refugees. It could be reasonable, that Cypriots with refugee background could better understand the feelings, thoughts and acting of Syrian refugees, and hence, have the willingness to support them psychologically, ethically and financially and help them to adapt themselves in the new reality. This is a viable expectation since by human nature, people tend to identify with those who share similar experiences or any other common factors, and they usually form groups with these people (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

It is therefore assumed that Cypriots with a refugee background may be more sympathetic towards Syrians because they have experienced the feeling of being displaced. This is the basis of the investigation that will be carried out in this research, and the aim is to evaluate if this initial assumption is right or wrong, through interviews conducted during the study and analysis of the collected data. There are two groups of Cypriots involved in the study; the first group includes people with a refugee background either directly or through family members and the second group involves Cypriots with no refugee background.

2.2 Research question

For the assessment of the initial hypothesis, the research question of the present study is formulated as follows:

Is there any difference on how Cypriots with and those without refugee backgrounds perceive the influx of Syrian refugees in Cyprus?

2.3 Working questions:

Working questions are used in the present study as complementary tools to research question. They are related to the main research question and aim to support exploring and answering the main by expanding fields considered to be relevant. The working questions include:

1. In what ways is the Cyprus community involved in Syrian refugees' settlement?
2. Does the direct involvement alter negative perceptions, foster better support for refugees, and eliminate negative feelings towards them?
3. How does the unique history of Cyprus influence the attitude of Cypriots on Syrian refugees?
4. Does culture and more specifically religion influence the public perception of Cypriots towards Syrian refugees? If so, in what ways?

The purpose of the two first questions, which refer to the involvement of Cypriots in Syrian refugees' settlement, is evaluate if a possible interaction between Cypriots and refugees could affect the perception of the natives on refugees, due to a possible close proximity with them. Since, by getting closed to them, they could expel myths and fictional stories that do not exist and slander the refugees. This is based on the idea that there is an interrelationship between people's perceptions and the interaction with refugees. Hence, if Cypriots are negative towards refugees, they may start to change their opinion, adopting a more positive attitude, when getting in contact with them. Since, they may identify with those and discover common factors, and according to Jorgensen & Phillips (2002), people identify with others that share similar experiences or any other common factors, and they usually form groups with these people (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

The working question that refers to the unique Cypriot history acknowledges the influence that Cypriot history may have in the perception formation of Cypriots, and especially of those with refugee background, towards refugees.

The scope of the last question regarding cultural influence is to evaluate if there could be any cultural aspects influencing the public perception. From the cultural aspects, religion appears to be the most relevant to be addressed in the present study, based on historical data. More specifically, this question is linked with and derives from the Cypriot history and their occupation by Turkey, where cultural difference was obvious (i.e. Christians vs Muslims).

2.4 Motivation

As student within global refugee studies, I am interested in different topics that explain the occurrence of refugees around the world. One of my subjects of interest was the case of Syrian refugees' influx in Cyprus. This presents a rather unique situation that can serve as a great case study in my field. The historic background of Cyprus coupled with the current situation of refugees in the country is rather unique and a great study area. Cyprus has a history of displacing its own nationals during the Turkish invasion, almost 4 decades ago, where the Northern Cypriots were displaced to the South, thus becoming refugees in their own country. This makes an excellent ground for investigation on the matter of their perception based on their backgrounds.

The topic caught my attention after watching the news and reading several political blogs of my homeland country Greece, which has been in close relation with Cyprus for historical, religious and linguistic reasons. Not much research has been done towards the direction of elucidating the actual purposes of why Syrian refugees are reluctant towards taking the faster route to Cyprus as the first-to-come European country. I was stunned that people in Cyprus who has this background historically as nation, suddenly have this negative attitude towards and spread hate on social media. Knowing the island's historical background, I was pretty surprised and curious to make a fieldwork and to find out what is going on.

Mostly, I was surprised by the statement of a Cypriot governmental official, Mr. Hasikos, a minister of the Interior and responsible for migration policy : "A maximum of 300 Syrian refugees can be taken in ... but we seek for them to be Orthodox Christians", based on assumption that orthodox Christians would be integrated easier in the Cypriot society. Religion appears to be a major determining factor on the perceptions of the Cypriot public, where the decision to take up this research was based on. It would be interesting to find out if Cypriots are sharing the same opinion as their officials and to which extent religion is an obstacle regarding the integration of Syrian asylum seekers. This research will provide a great resource for my course work and help me achieve my goals in the global refugee study field.

3. Historical overview

The content of this chapter constitutes of an overview of historical events that are evaluated as important to refer to, for a better understanding of the present study. The historical overview aims to introduce the basic knowledge on a. Syrian crisis, its extent and the Syrian influx to neighbouring and other countries, and b. the refugee background of Cyprus, and how a part of Cypriot population became refugees in their own country, after Turkish invasion. For this purpose, the historical overview is divided in two parts: a. Syrian crisis and b. Turkish invasion in Cyprus. The historical part is of utmost importance for the understanding of the present study; since it constitutes one of the main references that is pointed out in the research question; as half of the interviewees have refugee background back in the history. This part is crucial in this research as it actually points out that Turkish invasion lead to the displacement of Cypriots to the South. The focus is on the history of the Cypriots before the invasion and mainly after the invasion and displacement of the Northern Cypriots to the South. The worldview of the new nation after the invasion is also mentioned just to give an understanding of how the country is currently run and whether or not the international community is in support. In addition, it is evaluated that a presentation of Syrian crisis and its extent is important, since the research question refers to Syrian influx.

3.1 Syrian crisis

The Syrian war is already considered by international organizations the largest humanitarian challenge worldwide since World War II (Right to a Future, 2015). According to Berti (2015), the Syrian civil war has been defined as the worst humanitarian crisis for the international community during the past decades, which counts thousands victims (approximately 200,000 according to data from 2015), millions people (approximately 7,600,000 according to data from 2015) that have been internally displaced and millions refugees (approximately 3,200,000 according to data from 2015) (Berti, 2015). According to UNHCR (2015), since the beginning of the conflict in 2011 until 17th of November 2015, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) registered a total of 4,289,729 Syrian refugees (UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response, 2015). The war in Syria started seven years ago and the situation within the country is continuously deteriorating. That is why Syrian people are constantly trying to flee their country and to seek for safety to neighbouring countries, according to statistical data from 2015, a population of more than 7,000 Syrians are leaving the country on a daily basis (Handicap International, 2015).

Except of the option of Syrians fleeing through land borders to neighbouring countries like Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, there is the option of fleeing to Europe through the following three routes (Fargues & Fandrich, 2012):

- Land route to European Union (EU), where Syrians enter Greece or Bulgaria through Turkey. Syrians either choose to stay and seek for asylum to the country they enter first, or continue travelling for another European destination.
- Air route to a European country of their choice as common travellers arriving from a third country
- Sea route via the Mediterranean Sea, where they can enter Cyprus, Greece, Italy, and Malta, with a possibility to enter also Spain and France. This is the available route for the ones lacking proper documentation, since they enter the countries being irregular migrants and afterwards, some of them apply for asylum.

When Syrians reach Europe, they either become irregular migrants or asylum seekers. Their proportional distribution to the different European countries can vary depending on the host country and their welcoming attitude/openness towards asylum seekers and on the geographical location and accessibility of the country. The number of Syrians sheltered in EU is significantly small compared to the extent of Syrian crisis. An overview of Syrian asylum seekers in Europe from 2010 to 2012 is given (figure 2), demonstrating the small amount of Syrian asylum seekers in most of European countries, including Cyprus. It should be mentioned that the highest numbers of Syrian asylum applications have been noted in Germany and Sweden out of the rest European countries, while in Eastern European countries and Greece have been observed higher rejection proportions (Fargues & Fandrich, 2012).

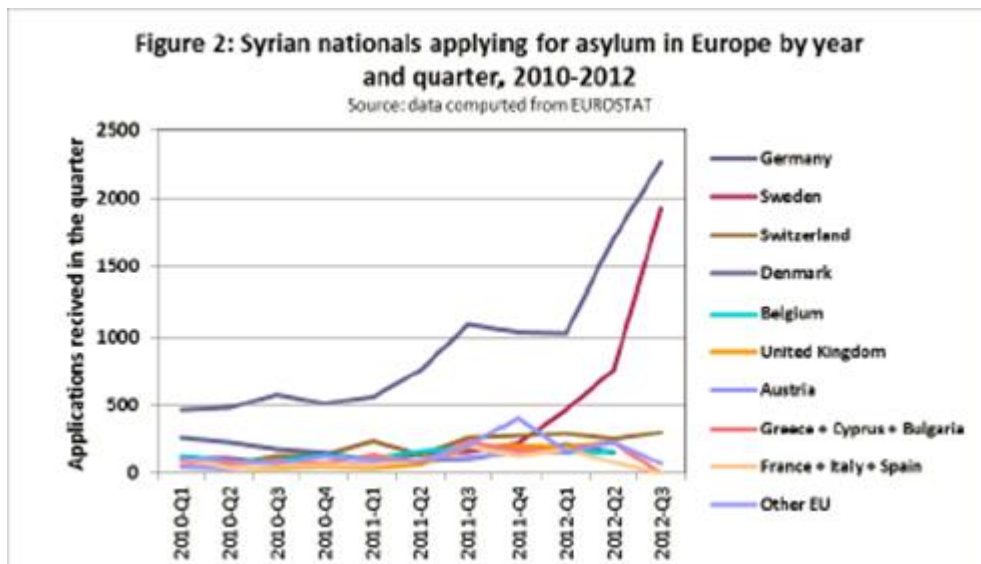


Figure 2 Overview of applications by Syrians asylum seekers in EU countries, given by quarter during 2010 to 2012 (adopted by Fargues & Fandrich (2012)).

It can be concluded that from the time that crisis started, the numbers of Syrians reaching EU countries, including asylum seekers, irregular migrants (based on borders data) and regular migrants who apply for visa, are significantly small compared to overall numbers of Syrians that cross the borders of their country. This fact indicates that Europe does not have an open and welcoming attitude towards Syrians and does not share the burden with Syria's' neighbouring countries in this humanitarian emergency (Fargues & Fandrich, 2012).

3.2 Cyprus- A divided island

During the last half century, Cyprus has been facing anti-colonial and postcolonial struggles, invasion, war, brutality between the major ethnic groups (i.e. Greeks and Turkish), division of its territory and multiple forced displacement (Papadakis *et al.*, 2006).

Cyprus, after being under the Ottoman Empire for three centuries, was taken over by the British in 1878, who ruled in the island until 1960. During those colonial years, an increase in nationalism was observed by Greeks and Greek-Cypriots, who inspired attempts for the concept of "enosis". "Enosis" refers to the union of Cyprus with mainland Greece. The two countries, Greece and Cyprus share the same linguistic, cultural and religious background, which have contributed to the feeling of unity between the two nations. At the same time the Turkish minority of Cyprus, who remained in the land

after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, in favor of the maintenance of British rule, adopted the concept of “taksim”, which refers to the partition of Cyprus (Papadakis *et al.*, 2006).

In the mid-1950s, Greek and Turkish organizations with intense nationalistic feelings and with obvious opposed interests were emerging, leading to interethnic hostility and conflicts in Cyprus. In 1960 an independent state, known as “The Republic of Cyprus”, was created, as an agreement, reflecting the antagonistic interests of the two opposing parties. The independence of the island did not fulfil the ambitions of neither of the two ethnic groups. As a result, in 1963, interethnic conflict broke out in Cyprus until 1967. Both sides faced heavy human cost in terms of casualties. UN went to Cyprus having the role of the “peacemaker” and established the so called “Green Line” which divided Cyprus in two zones (Papadakis *et al.*, 2006).

In 1967, the conflict between Greece and Turkey moderated, negotiations among interethnic groups begun, the political situation of Cyprus was stabilized and the Greek division, with aimed to defend Cyprus in case of Turkish invasion, backed off, leaving the island vulnerable to the military appetites of Turkey. The withdrawal of Greek division in Cyprus opened the way for Turkey’s invasion that followed in 1974 (Papadakis *et al.*, 2006).

3.2.1. To the Invasion-Coup

By 1967, a military junta took power over Greece by army forces. The newly formed government of Greece begun inter communal negotiations between Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities in order to find a solution in the name of “enosis”, fruitless results. In the meanwhile, Greek Cypriot government had abandoned the concept of union and were more focused on imposing political stability .This was considered as a betrayal from Greek junta and gave rise to preparation of sabotage of the Cypriot leadership. This interethnic conflict among Greek Cypriots came to climax in the coup of July 15, 1974 when Greek government overthrew Cypriot government which was led by Archbishop Makarios. Makarios was no longer considered a pure defender of enosis and was replaced with pro-enosis defender, nationalist N. Sampson. After five days, Turkey, with a pretext of the coup against Makarios, intervened military. This military intervention was considered as a violation of international relations, divided Cyprus and resulted in the occupation of 36.7% of the island by Turkish. Approximately 162.000 Greek Cypriots fled to the south part of the island, becoming refugees in their own country, while Turkish Cypriots were settled in the north part (see Figure 3). In addition, new settlers coming from Turkey, establishing communities and exploiting the

properties of the expelled Greeks. The human cost in terms of people killed, missed and displaced was heavy for Greeks Cypriots. Moreover, the fate of approximately 1479 Greeks Cypriots is still unknown. Monuments, orthodox churches and antiquities were ruined (Papadakis *et al.*, 2006).

The General Assembly of UN expressed complete disapproval of the invasion of Cyprus and requested the return of Greek Cypriot refugees to their territory and homes, demanding respect of human rights of Cypriots. Eight years later, in November 1983, Turkey proclaimed an independent state called "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" (see Figure 3). The International Community and Humanitarian Organizations disapproved and condemned it, as invalid and unlawful, while demanding the withdrawal of this statement. To date, this state has only been recognized by Turkey (Papadakis *et al.*, 2006).



Figure 3. Geographical division of Cyprus after Turkish invasion (found at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38593506> , the 15th of June, 2017)

4. Methodology

The goal of this study is to understand the perception and feelings of Cypriot residents concerning the influx of Syrian refugees in their country. The Cypriots in scope have been divided in two different groups; Cypriots that were forced to become refugees, directly or indirectly (i.e. through their ancestors, family members), when Cyprus experienced the Turkish invasion and Cypriots that have no refugee background. Hence, through qualitative research analysis, there will be established the response of Cypriots to the increasing number of Syrian refugees fleeing their country based on humanitarian grounds and seeking asylum and refugee status in European nations. By the end of the research, it will be evaluated whether or not the historical background of Cypriots affects their response towards Syrian refugee crisis.

This chapter describes the research process, and more specifically, the data collection method, the sampling approach method, the approach used for the interviews and interviewers roles in the research. In addition, the translation, transcribing and the limitations and ethical considerations encountered during the research are part of the present chapter.

4.1 Data collection method

The data collection method used in the present research is qualitative. It is important to explain what is meant by the term “qualitative data”. The term covers a wide range of approaches and methods in different research fields. Ritchie *et al.* (2003) give the following definition:

“Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices ... turn the world into a series of representations including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”

The main advantage of qualitative research is its ability to describe the way that people perceive and experience the specific research topic. Through qualitative research information on the “human side” of an issue can be gained, which is often linked with contradictory behaviours, opinions,

feelings and relationships of individuals. The effectivity of qualitative methods can be also seen in identifying social factors that could for example include ethnicity and religion that have a not easily defined and apparent role in the research (Mack *et al.*, 2005).

The qualitative research aims to uncover the narratives of participant interviewees and understand their perceptions, and to collect information on their opinions regarding values, beliefs and emotions on social issues by using qualitative techniques. Qualitative methods are used to give particular emphasis on the understanding of the social world by examining the participants (Mack *et al.*, 2005). Hence, qualitative method applies in this research, since the goal is to observe and investigate the perception of the participants in the social phenomenon that is known as Syrian crisis.

4.2 Sampling process

The selection of interviewees was not random, which in the present study conforms to the purposive sampling technique that involves the in-purpose-selection of certain cases or units rather than random selection in order to serve specific goals (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). According to Teddlie & Yu (2007), the purposive sampling technique aims to be a tool for comparability and representativeness, where through the purposive strategy, the researcher is able to gain thorough and comprehensive information and knowledge even from a relatively small number of selected cases that have been carefully chosen (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). In the present study, the idea was to involve a generation of Cypriots, at the age of 20 to 30, where both groups; people with and without refugee background could be part of. They do not belong to the same social circle, which makes the sampling more representative of Cypriot reality. Different sources were used to approach the interviewees; these include personal network, social media and recommendations.

Regarding the sampling size, it is believed to be sufficient to use less than ten interviewees. This is explained by the fact that the focus is on the use of language and it is often that the more interviewees are not necessarily linked with more enriched analysis, but rather with just more work in conducting the analysis. In addition, it is evaluated that, by involving only few people, discursive patterns can be created. The size of sample depends on the research question and there is no correct or wrong limit that defines it (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). In the present study, since the aim is to compare two different groups of people, the sample size should include at least two interviewees with different refugee background. Hence, it is evaluated that a number of 5 to 6 mixed interviewees is sufficient enough to conduct the study. In total, five interviewees participated in the research;

three males and two females. All five participants are of Cypriot nationality, either with (i.e. through family members) or without refugee background (see Appendix, for a small presentation of interviewees). However, they are all aware of the refugee history of Cyprus, where a part of the country was displaced to the south. Each interview was conducted in Greek with translations being made later on in English. The interviews were recorded for the purpose of frequent referral during the analysis, translation and interpretation stages. The fact that the interviews were in Greek necessitated that translation and transcription of the information. This may have in one way or another interfered with the clarity of the respondents' comments as transcription and translations are known to sometimes hinder the original meaning from being revealed (Di-Cicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

4.3 Semi-structured interviews

In order to gain a deep understanding and to gather detailed information on how Cypriots perceive and feel about Syrian refugee influx in their country, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Semi-structured and unstructured interviews are the main methods used in discursive psychology in order to produce material, and not structured interviews or questionnaires. During the semi-structured interviews, the interviewees participating in the study may potentially affect the agenda and extend it. While, in unstructured interviews, the interviewer has the control when directing the interview, in semi-structured interviews, the interviewer should ensure that all topics in agenda are covered; however they are not necessarily coming with the same formulation or order (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Therefore, due to the flexibility they offer, I decided to use semi-structured interviews, meaning that I could ask relevant follow up questions. In addition, when using semi-structured interviews, it is possible to gain a deeper insight on the respondents' perceptions and views, through non-verbal cues (Gordon, 1975).

Being geographically far away from Cyprus, I travelled there in order to conduct my interviews and to collect information about the topic. The respondents in these interviews have been encouraged to discuss about their feelings concerning the Syrian asylum seekers in Cyprus. The questions were standardized. A set-up of up to 11 structured questions to be asked was in the agenda for the interviewees, and follow-up questions, were asked in few cases to get more details on the feelings and perceptions of the respondents on specific issues.

4.3.1 Interview questions

The interview questions were chosen carefully, with many revisions, where additions and deletions took place, after consulting relevant parties. The questions were split in different themes to be able to capture as much information as possible. The themes aim to reveal Cypriots' perceptions on the importance of the on-going Syrian war, their feelings about Syrian refugee influx in Cyprus and the factors that may affect them. The questions were structured in a way that they would only serve as a guide and have a good flow during the interview, since the major focus was on the interviewees. This explains the existence and the importance of follow-up questions, so that what is important and relevant for respondents is addressed.

The questions used as a guide during the interviews include:

- When did you first hear of the Syrian refugee crisis? What did you think about it? How do you perceive the refugee influx in Europe? Just your views. What do you think about it? Why do you have that opinion about diversity?
- Do you yourself have a refugee background or do you know someone from Cyprus who has? If yes what is the story behind it?
- Did you see Syrian refugees somewhere in the city since there has been an influx in Europe? Do you have any encounters with Syrian refugees?
- Should the refugee status be given to them and continue residing in Cyprus or should they be deported to other European countries?
- Are you aware of how EU is dealing with the Syrian refugee crisis?
- Are you informed of how Cypriot government is dealing with Syrian refugee crisis?
- How Media is presenting the Syrian refugee crisis in Europe? As a humanitarian crisis or as a threat to western values? How do you perceive the media debate on Syrian refugee crisis?
- Do you think the Syrian refugee crisis would affect the welfare system of Cyprus in a bad way?
- Are you informed about the news of Syrian war?
- What do your friends/family think in general about Syrian refugee influx in Europe/Cyprus? Have you ever discussed about it?
- Do you think Cypriots have a hostile attitude towards refugees or not?

4.3.2 Interview process

A friendly approach was maintained all through the interview sessions and the tension was released by creating comfortable atmosphere between interviewer and interviewees by inviting them to a cozy coffee spot and getting to know the respondents before starting the interview. I conducted the interviews by myself. The responses were all in Greek, which I recorded in order to facilitate the interpretation. I opted to record the interviews in order to facilitate the process of going back to the same content every time I needed to confirm the responses from the interviews.

4.3.3 Translation

It is important to note that all interviews were conducted in Greek and therefore, the data used for the present research has been translated. The aim of the research has been to quote the respondent as accurately as possible. However, it is possible for several potential minor errors to occur during the process of data translation, since I am not a professional translator. However, I feel confident that the intended original meaning of the Greek words has been maintained and not altered. While, it may have been possible to have the interview in English, it was more convenient to finally perform it in Greek, because both parties, interviewee and interviewer, share Greek as a mother language. Since, the nature of the questions asked was personal and subjective; the choice of Greek language facilitated the flow of conversations during the interview and made the interviewees feel more comfortable and open. It is very important for the interviewer and researcher to ensure that the respondents feel comfortable (Di-Cicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

4.3.4 Transcribing

The interviews were recorded through both a tape-recorder and a phone device, for back-up reasons. This is the most common way to record interviews according to Di-Cicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006), so that the important findings to be captured. Recording gives to the interviewer the possibility to go again and again through the collected data and to identify the main points. Taking notes of what is being discussed is not as advantageous as recording, because important statements and comments might be missed out due to poor concentration. However, it should be noted that there could be issues interfering with the accuracy of data during transcribing. For example, it could be difficult to capture the oral speech due to the structure of the sentence or the use of wrong or

incomplete phrases or words (Di-Cicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). During the present study, technical issues and difficulties did not come up through the data processing. The interviews have been transcribed, while listening to audio data, in English, since they were conducted in Greek language. The transcribed and translated interviews can be found in Appendix section.

4.3.5 Limitations

Some challenges have been experienced during the present research. These include:

- Travelling to Cyprus to conduct the research, as the final approval for the travel grant was not available until late April.
- Possible distortion of information because the interview was recorded in Greek and later translated to English and transcribed. Since as referred in sections 4.3.3 and 4.3.4 there is a chance that the transcription and translation could have slightly altered the original meanings of the respondents' feedback (Di-Cicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).
- The researcher's personal influence. The researcher translated the interviews according to what she understood. This could have been different from what the respondents meant since people choose to understand certain things differently (Di-Cicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006)

These limitations may have influenced the research in one way or another and probably affected the precise recording of respondents' feedback on their perceptions.

4.3.6 Ethics

As stated by Scheyvens *et al.* (2003):

"The research process must ensure the participants' dignity, privacy and integrity"

The present research follows certain process in order not to harm the participants, and to ensure researcher's ethical responsibility. In this way, participants were well-informed about the academic nature of this paper (i.e. to be published), the fact that the interviews were expected to be tape-recorded, and the duration of them. This process is according to the ethical principles outlined in the

Code of Ethics (IGC, 2012), which refers to the commitment of being honest towards the participants, when conducting a research. The participants were therefore informed on and agreed to the fact of using and analysing the information collected through interviews by the researcher for research activities and purposes, as well as using their real names. Due to time limitations, since some of participants had strict daily dairy, flexibility and respect was shown regarding their schedule, as well as they were encouraged to interrupt in case they needed further explanation to what they were asked or not to answer any unrelated or inconvenient for them question.

5. Literature review/ Theories

The present section aims to present the theoretical framework and literature that can be used as methodological tool in order to read and analyse the data collected from the interviews.

5.1 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is a widely used constructionist approach for cultural and social theories (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Discourse analysis is the study of the language that we use and the meanings we give to it with the sentences we combine in different ways in order to express our views and opinions and to achieve the intended goals and purposes (Gee & Handford, 2012). Discourse analysis is therefore, the analysis of the different patterns that are used in different sectors of the life (e.g. political or medical sector) and consist of the different ways that the language is structured. For example, discourse analysis can be an essential tool to analyse social issues, such as national identities and to better understand the possible impact that the division in different identities has on the world (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Discourse analysis is therefore, a vital tool to be used in order to analyse the different perception the people have regarding world and social issues, based on how the language is used and structured.

5.2 Identity and group formation

A very interesting tool for analysis could be to explore the importance of identity and group formation with regard to people's interaction within a society. For this purpose the concept of identity is regarded to be highly associated with group formation, where the latter is based on possibilities of identification, by considering some of them and ignoring others. An example is seen in the group called "blacks" in British society, which does not necessarily refers to specific population (e.g. Jamaicans, Pakistanis, women) but rather to all people that were "no whites", based on the logic of equivalence, where all the different origins and colours were merged in the "blacks" group. In this case, the group formation is based on political beliefs and any other common factors (i.e. gender) that could lead to group formations are ignored (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

5.3 The concept of “the Other”

The concept of “the Other” is highly linked with research topics of social nature, and refers to an individual that does not belong in a specific group, because that group has the opinion that “the Other” fundamentally differs from the members of the group, and always a stranger is simply becoming “the Other”. “The Other” is almost always judged by the group due to their differences and perceived as being less important, intelligent and with no moral barriers compared to the group members. In addition, “the Other” may either be deprived of or have fewer legal rights in the society. Some examples of different characteristics between people that lead to the concept of “the Other” include nationality, religion, political affairs, race, sexual affairs, origin and social status. The definition of “the Other” does not necessarily refer to an individual but could also refer to a group, for example, family and society (The Other, 2009).

The concept of “othering” is highly linked with knowledge and power and therefore, with the concept of hierarchy that ensures that the power remains at the already existing hands. The concept of “othering” is inevitably strengthening the discrimination within a society (Engelund, 2011).

5.4 The concept of “taken for granted”

According to the principles of cognitive psychology, people create an individual perception of the world that derives from the experiences and the knowledge they accumulate by observing the world. Therefore, the mass of information that the world has, is handled and processed by individuals, through cognitive processes, where the world is categorized in certain ways, since it is easier for the individual to create a meaning out of the chaotic information (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). This procedure is associated with the creation of the concept of “taken for granted”, which has been criticized by scholars, supporting that the knowledge and perception we have about the world does not necessarily reflect the reality, but only derives as a discourse product. An example can be seen in the “historical and cultural specificity”, where someone’s views and perception about the world are build based on their cultural and historical background (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Through discourse analysis (see section 5.1), it can be shown that there could be different constructions of the “taken-for-granted” structures, and that the already established world’s organisation derives from political procedures and they do have social impact. Therefore, in this case,

discourse analysis could have the role of political interventor. For instance, if according to a specific discourse, immigrants are considered to be equivalent with the concept of "crime", the discourse analysis can present the background for this coupling and the impact of it on immigrant and native population (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

5.5 Antagonism and hegemony

The concept of discourse is often linked with the concept of power and ideology (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). The society consists of power relations that are linked with the concept of hegemony that hides the reality. More specifically, there is no consistency between the reality and the perception of people on how reality is, and the root cause for this inconsistency is attributed to the concept of ideology and its ability to distort the reality (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). The discourse leads to the formation of social relations (i.e. known as discourse's identity function), social identities (i.e. known as discourse's relational function), and systems of meaning and knowledge (i.e. known as discourse's ideational function) (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). According to Fairclough (1995), ideology serves the "power", and discourses can be ideological to a variable extent. The ideological discourses are the ones that contribute to production, reproduction and reconstruction or change of domination and power relations. Societies that create ideologies are the ones, where domination relations play a key role in their social structure (e.g. based on gender and class) (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

People may have several identities that do not necessarily work in an antagonistic way to one another. However, in the case that the different identities serve different interests, they may start excluding each other, leading to social antagonism. Antagonisms occur and are fruitful when discourses collide. An example of two identities becoming antagonistic is seen in a person being simultaneously a worker and a Scot, and the professional identity excludes national obligations, for instance in the case of a war, and national identity requires fighting fellow workers from other countries. Therefore, the identities serving different interests and requiring different demands unavoidably block each other, leading to antagonism (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Hegemonic practices and interventions, by means of power, may dissolve the different antagonisms. For instance, during the World War I, "workers" could be recruited as "soldiers", since the national identity was dominant against professional identity, due to a hegemonic intervention. Hence, the process taking action under antagonistic conditions is the hegemonic intervention, and the new

meaning that occurs as a result of the hegemonic intervention is the discourse (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). The role of hegemony is the contingent articulation of different elements under ambiguous non-established conditions and discourse is the result that evaluates if the hegemonic intervention is efficient or if a different combination of elements could have been more contingent (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

5.6 Group conflicts

The existence and formation of the different groups in the society (see also section 5.2), can lead to group conflicts which may be responsible for disturbance challenges for the society. The following approaches are used in order to better understand the social psychological processes responsible for creating conflicts among several groups (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002):

- People identify with a new group and start sharing the same views on social reality, from the time they become members of it.
- People consider members of their own group being better compared to other groups

Hence, stereotypes and the concept of racism and ethnocentrism are developed in the members of the different groups, implying that stereotypes lead to prejudices that are treated and spread through “information processing strategies” (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). According to social identity theory, the root cause of conflict between groups is attributed to certain historical and social circumstances. People’s identity and perception changes when they belong to a group, since when being member of a group they express a social identity instead of a personal identity, which leads to the development of stereotypes. Therefore, their evaluations and perceptions are based on shared ideas, representatives of the group (i.e. meaning of being European or Christian), and discrimination against other groups and conflict between groups may arise (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

A study was performed by Wetherell and Potter, where the aim was to deal with white New Zealanders’ of European descent (known as Pakeha) discourses regarding culture, race and nation, showed that the way that Pakehas understand the culture leads to “legal” discrimination of the indigenous Polynesian people of New Zealand (known as Maoris), implying that cultural discourses can positively encourage the concept of discrimination and racism (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

5.7 Xenophobia

The concept of xenophobia is often linked with social crisis, when people of different cultures are involved. It is relevant to be addressed for the present study that over the last few years, there has been observed an increasing xenophobic trend among Europeans, where a negative attitude toward Muslims, especially by certain demographic groups of population, is increasing. For example, people on the political right, people at the age of more than 50 years old and less educated people. Factors that lead to unfavourable attitude toward Muslims constitute the threat that comes from Islamic extremists in several European countries and the support that European Muslims show groups like al-Qaeda. In addition, there is the perception that Muslims living in Europe do not make any attempt to adapt themselves to European reality and lifestyle (Kohut & Wike, 2008).

5.8 When being in someone's shoes

It is evaluated as important to be addressed in the present study the psychological reflection behind the concept of "when being in someone's shoes", since this concept reflects one of the main references pointed out in the research question; as half of interviewees have similar background with the Syrians. According to data based on experiments, people that have experienced challenges (i.e. professional disappointment, divorce, bullying) in the past, have shown less empathy for others being in the same situation, compared to people that have never experienced alike situations (Ruttan *et al.*, 2015). More specifically, in a study where the compassion toward an unemployed individual that ended up to adopt an illegal way of life, with more than 200 participants, people having experienced unemployment appeared to show less empathy and to have more censorious attitude towards the unemployed individual, compared to people with no unemployment history. In another study, regarding a teenager that was undergoing bullying; participants with no bullying experience, showed more compassion to the bullied teenager, compared to participants that had been bullied in the past (Ruttan *et al.*, 2015).

The reason behind this phenomenon is attributed to the following psychological truths:

- It is difficult for people to accurately recall a difficult experience from the past years. Even though, people may remember a stressful and painful situation they have been through, they tend to underestimate the level of that pain, and the bad emotions they were experiencing at that time. The psychological terminology of this phenomenon is "empathy gap".

- People that have been through difficult situations and have successfully overcome them have the feeling of a strong confidence towards understanding of similar challenges.

Hence, the combination of not recalling the difficulty level of a situation and the confidence feeling that they overcame a difficult situation by themselves leads to reduced empathy towards people experiencing alike situations (Ruttan *et al.*, 2015).

It is worthy to be noted that this finding is not in alignment with people's intuitions. More specifically, 112 participants were asked to prognosticate whether a teacher that had been a bullying victim or a teacher who had never had bullying experience would show most empathy for the bullied teenager. A total of 99 out of 112 participants chose the bullied teacher, indicating that many people may seek for compassion from the less willing people to provide it (Ruttan *et al.*, 2015).

6. Analysis

This part aims to present and discuss on the collected data from interviews conducted with local Cypriots with and without refugee background during the fieldwork in Cyprus in May 2017. The main approach used for the analysis is discourse analysis, which is an important tool used for social research, as referred in chapter 5.1. Therefore, through the analysis of language and its structure when people express their views and opinions, the present chapter aims to learn and understand the people's perception in order to facilitate the procedure to answer the research question, as defined in chapter 2.1. Different strategies and analytical tools can be used during the discourse analysis, in order to deep in and investigate the discourse.

At that point, it should be noted that the researcher should present the results and the analysis in a way that they provide solid argumentation for their claims and documentation on how they made their conclusions and reached the results of analysis. In this way, the reader is able to follow the complete flow leading to results, and has the chance for personal evaluations (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

In the present study, the strategy of comparison is used in order to present and analyse the collected data. According to Jorgensen & Phillips (2002), this strategy is theoretically based on the concept that:

"A statement always gains its meaning through being different from something else which has been said or could have been said"

When this strategy is applied, questions like, which are the differences between the texts used in the study and others or which perception of the world is "taken-for-granted" or is not recognised may be used. Comparison is therefore, a simple and suitable way to facilitate the process of analysis, where the analyst keeps a distance from the material. It is of high importance that this distance is kept, as the main goal of discourse analysis is to objectively identify assumptions through the collected material, and this could be difficult if the analyst's personal assumptions interfere. When different positions arise, the comparison can help the analyst to recognise the possible social-relative aspects behind the different positions (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Hence, the comparison of the text is a useful strategy and will be used for the analysis in the present study, where comparison between interviews of the 5 respondents will be performed, for the better understanding of the ways that the collected text creates meaning. For this purpose the analysis is divided into the following parts:

- Locals' perception towards Syrian refugees- Involvement of Cypriots in Syrian refugees' settlement
- Influence of Cypriot history on formation of locals' perception towards Syrian refugees
- Influence of culture on formation of locals' perception towards Syrian refugees

6.1. Locals' perception towards Syrian refugees- Involvement of Cypriots in Syrian refugees' settlement

The first respondent was Maria, at the age of 21. She became aware of Syrian refugee crisis in 2014, during the influx of high percentage of Syrian refugees to Greek islands. According to Maria, the first wave of refugees' arrival to Cyprus was noticed recently.

Maria seems to be concerned about the social and economic impact that crisis may have throughout Europe. More specifically, Maria thinks that since the refugees do not work and do not pay taxes, but by contrast they are given high assistance, the welfare system of Cyprus could be affected. In addition, Maria is of the opinion that a state should prioritize on its own citizens and not on foreigners. Hence, she thinks that even if refugees are under law protection, the situation could go out of control easily, due to the growing numbers of refugees. It can be seen that Maria separates the locals from refugees, and a sense of identity and group formation (as referred in section 5.2), where two different groups are involved, is created. In this case, the two groups are formed based on the identification factor of being local or foreigner. The concept of "the other" (as described in section 5.3) is also relevant in this case. The refugees are seen as "the other", because of the different nationality and origin and perceived to offer less to the society and to be less important for Maria, as she states that they do not work and do not pay taxes and that the state should give priority to the needs of Cypriot citizens. In addition, the concept of antagonism that is linked with the concept of power and domination (see section 5.5) becomes obvious by the statement that a state should prioritize on their own citizens and not on foreigners. Since, the different identities serve different interests.

Maria also believes that European Union is reshaped by refugee crisis, where diversity is growing, and thus it is making a country not an ideal place to live, for example by potential increased crime rates. More specifically, Maria does not argue that all refugees are criminals, but rather that they are more likely to be violent, since they are coming from war-torn countries. Maria's opinion can be explained by the scholars Jorgensen & Phillips (2002), where they support that the existence and formation of the different groups in the society can lead to group conflicts which may be responsible for disturbance challenges for the society (see section 5.6). As a result, stereotypes and the concept of racism and ethnocentrism are developed in the members of the different groups (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). In addition, the concept of xenophobia (as described in section 5.7) is high relevant in this case, since people are often afraid or suspicious of strangers, especially when different cultures are involved.

Maria knows that approximately 5.000-6.000 Syrians arrived to Cyprus, during the two last years, but she has not been in direct interaction with Syrian refugees, as she has not even met any Syrian in person. However, Maria keeps updated on Syrian war news, as according to her it is of high importance to know what is going on close to you. Therefore, it can be concluded that Maria has created a perception on refugees and the social impact they may have in the society, only based on mass information and not on personal experience. This procedure is associated with the concept of "taken for granted" (see section 5.4). According to scholars, the knowledge and perception we have about the world does not necessarily reflect the reality, but only derives as a discourse product (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

The second respondent was Eleni, at the age of 30. Eleni was aware of the beginning of Syrian war, in 2011, and of the Syrian influx in Europe, some years later.

Eleni appears to be empathetic towards Syrian crisis, as she supports that the human cost of the Syrian civil war is huge, and even characterizes it as the biggest influx after the World War II. However, Eleni appears to be realistic as she supports that it is not possible to give asylum to all of them. She has been in direct interaction with some Syrians asylum seekers, in 2015, though a voluntary service, when they arrived at a British base in Cyprus, after being abandoned by human smugglers. By being in contact with them, Eleni was listening to their different stories, and she thinks that a person should be mentally healthy, strong and stable in order to work with that kind of humanitarian missions. Eleni also thinks that the welfare system of Cyprus would be affected in a negative way by Syrian crisis; however, it is more important for her to save a life, even if that requires high cost. The more empathetic attitude of Eleni compared to Maria may be explained by the fact

that she experienced and came closer with some Syrians, even if it was only for a short period, and according to the principles of cognitive psychology, people create an individual perception of the world that derives from the experiences and the knowledge they accumulate by observing it. Since, the mass of information that the world has, is handled and processed by individuals, through cognitive processes (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

The third respondent was Sofia at the age of 27. Sofia first heard about refugee crisis, in 2011, but started thinking more of it, approximately in 2014 to 2015, due to high Syrian influx in Cyprus and Greece and she is trying to keep updated.

She sees the Syrian crisis as a huge humanitarian crisis, since many innocent people have been trying to flee the war. According to Sofia, European governments have been ill prepared; since many European countries (e.g. eastern European countries) close the borders and make asylum seekers to feel not welcome and outsiders, in their attempt to look for basic human rights. She seems very dissatisfied and disappointed by refugee camps in Cyprus, supporting that they are only two, and function under non-hospitable conditions that remind more of jails than camps. According to her opinion, we as people and European citizens offer almost nothing to these people in need.

Sofia has met a Syrian family and discussed with them on their journey to Cyprus and their new everyday life, where they confessed that they do not have the right to work and they are running out of money day by day. Regarding Syrian crisis and its impact to welfare system of Cyprus, Sofia thinks that if other poorer countries, like Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt can manage the situation without being affected, then Cyprus that is may getting some funds from European Union (EU) can also manage it. In long terms, Sofia believes that Syrian asylum seekers would be vital for Cypriot economy. She bases this argument to the fact that Syrians are well educated and qualified population, and Europe can take advantage of their skills and not treat them in a bad way that leads them to death.

It is clearly observed that Eleni and Sofia have adopted a more positive attitude towards refugees compared to Maria, and especially Sofia seems to be even more optimistic regarding possible achievements refugees may offer. This fact could be attributed to the fact that an interaction between Cypriots and asylum seekers, even if it is small, could affect the general negative perception that dominates towards refugees.

The fourth respondent was Thanos, at the age of 24. Thanos heard of the Syrian crisis approximately two to three years ago, at the time that many Syrians started fleeing to Europe through Greek islands, Bulgaria or Italy. However, he is not totally clear on what Syrian war is about.

According to Thanos' opinion, Europe has received a huge amount of Syrians and not only, since Arabs, Middle Easterners, North Africans have been coming taking advantages of European benefits. He characterized that situation as a real chaos, and he thinks that it is very easy to cross the European borders. He actually connects the increased refugee influx and this general chaotic situation to the vulnerability that Europe (e.g. Paris, Brussels and Sweden) has shown towards the terror attacks. Thanos reveals a racial attitude towards asylum seekers, supporting that second generation Muslims that have never accepted western values and been integrated into western societies, have killed innocent Europeans. This attitude hides a xenophobic way of thinking that is often linked to social crisis, when different cultures are involved, as stated in section 5.7. This fact is also confirmed by Kohut & Wike (2008), according to whom, over the last few years, there has been observed an increasing xenophobic trend among Europeans, where a negative attitude toward Muslims, often linked with the threat that comes from Islamic extremists in several European countries and the support that European Muslims show groups like al-Qaeda. The perception that Muslims living in Europe do not make any attempt to adapt themselves to European reality and lifestyle is also confirmed by the above-mentioned. In addition, the concept of "the other" (as described in section 5.3) is relevant in this case, where Thanos categorises all asylum seekers as "the other" that differs in culture and religion from Cypriots or Europeans. As Englund (2011) stated (see section 5.3), the concept of "othering" inevitably enforces the discrimination within a society, which can be obvious in Thanos' case. Furthermore, the existence of group conflicts (as described in section 5.6) appears to be relevant here, where stereotypes and the concept of racism and ethnocentrism are developed in the members of the different groups (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). In this case, Thanos seems to have developed a racial perception toward asylum seekers.

Thanos has not been in interaction with any Syrian refugee. Therefore, like in Maria's case, the concept of "taken for granted" becomes obvious here, as well. Thanos has created a perception on refugees and the social impact they may have in the society, based on a mass perception on Muslims, for example that they constitute the threat (Kohut & Wike, 2008) and not on personal experience.

Thanos supports that in long terms, refugees may be harmful for Cypriot welfare system, since they have access to Cypriot sources, and financial resources are used for refugees instead of natives. The concept of antagonism that is linked with the concept of power and domination (see section 5.5),

where different identities serve different interests becomes apparent in the Thanos statement, about financial resources distributed to refugees instead of natives. This is similar to Maria's statement regarding the prioritization of Cypriot citizens compared to foreigners. In addition, by the statement on distribution of financial resources, Thanos gives the perception that refugees, as being "the other", are seen as less important for him compared to locals, which is in total alignment with Maria's perception.

Thanos believes that the refugee influx in Cyprus is under control, since Cyprus is not an attractive destination for refugees, due to the high distance from mainland Europe. He thinks that Cyprus can accept some but not all Syrian asylum seekers.

The fifth respondent was Kostas, at the age of 24. Kostas has been aware of the Syrian crisis from the beginning of the ongoing war, in 2011; since Syria is geographically closed Cyprus and Syrian crisis has been popular topic in media. However, he only started to pay attention on Syrian crisis, in 2015, when a high influx in Cyprus and Greek island was observed, and he keeps updated.

Even if he feels sorry about Syrians and understands their pain, Kostas is afraid of the negative social and financial impact may Syrian crisis have on Cyprus. He bases this argument due to the fact that the tourism industry has been decreased in some Greek islands (e.g. Samos and Kos), due to Syrian refugees. Kostas does not have any Syrian refugees' encounters. However, he believes that it is even impossible for them to be integrated in Cypriot society, due to their different cultural background. This statement is in alignment with the general perception that Muslims living in Europe do not make any attempt to adapt themselves to European reality (Kohut & Wike, 2008). Therefore, like in Maria's and Thanos' case, the concept of "taken for granted" is present here, as well, since Kostas has created a perception on refugees integration based on a mass perception and not based on personal experience and direct interaction with them. Kostas even proposes that it would be a better option for Syrians to flee to Gulf States or to neighboring Muslim countries, compared to Europe, due to a better chance for integration into Muslim societies, not only due to the fact that they share the same religion but also due to their culture in general. It is therefore observed that Kostas is supporting the separation of Syrians and Europeans in two different groups, due to the different cultural background. He categorises them as "the other", and proposes their fleeing to other countries that fit better to them, giving space to strengthening of discrimination within the society. In addition, Kostas is of the opinion that refugees are in need of many resources (i.e. food, accommodation, medical care, social benefits) that locals are depriving of. Therefore, with the proposal of fleeing to other countries and with the argument that Cypriots could take advantage of several social resources

instead of refugees, the concept of antagonism that is linked with the fact that different identities serve different interests becomes apparent here (see section 5.5).

Kostas thinks that the burden towards refugees would be shared between European countries, so that not only the countries in the borders (i.e. Cyprus and Greece) take the main responsibility. He points out that Cyprus is a small country with inner conflicts and it is not feasible to grant refugee status to all Syrians asylum seekers.

It can be concluded that Maria, Thanos and Kostas have adopted a more negative perception towards refugees, where concepts of xenophobia, group formation and conflicts, "the other", antagonism and "taken for granted" have been observed. The common characteristic between the three respondents is that they have not had a direct interaction with Syrian refugees, since they have never met one. By contrast, Eleni and Sofia have had an interaction, even if it was for a short period, proposing that a possible interaction between Cypriots and refugees could affect in a positive way the perception of the natives on refugees.

6.2. Influence of Cypriot history on formation of locals' perception towards Syrian refugees

Maria is admitting that she has a refugee background, through relatives from her father's side, where they were displaced from North Cyprus in 1974, and fled to Larnaca to avoid Turkish persecution. According to Maria approximately 200.000 Greek Cypriots were displaced from North Cyprus, when Turkish overtook more than 35% of the country. Maria seems to be very pragmatic and strict, by supporting that the present situation has been unfair for the European countries located in the borders, and Cyprus is only able to take under protection a certain amount of refugees. In addition, Maria thinks that some European countries have been more generous (e.g. Greece) towards refugees compared to others that have shown a more xenophobic attitude (e.g. Poland). She also supports that Germany has been opened towards refugees in order to serve their labor market, and Cyprus has not been in favor of refugees and only a small amount of Syrians has been granted refugee status, while most of Syrians fleeing to Cyprus have been granted secondary protection, with limited work opportunities. Therefore, Cyprus has been less preferable option for Syrians compared to Greece or Western European countries.

Eleni reveals that she does not have a refugee background; however, she knows Cypriots having a refugee background, since the total Cypriot population is approximately 1.200.000 and more than 200.000 do have a refugee background. Eleni seems to be very empathetic towards refugees, as she states that it would be ideal, if asylum seekers decide by themselves the place they would like to live. However, she understands that this could not be realistic, since Cyprus for example has granted refugee status to many Syrians, and it could be financially impossible to accept more. Eleni supports that she is aware of how EU deals with the Syrian refugee crisis, where she thinks that Britain and eastern European countries do not have a welcoming attitude towards refugees, Greece is not able to afford the cost of the situation and Germany has welcomed thousands of Syrians. Eleni does not feel proud of the Cypriot policy on refugees, where she finds it strict, as they do not provide full protection to refugees. For example, she supports that Syrians that have been granted the refugee status are not allowed to bring family members to Cyprus. Eleni is mainly concerned of Cypriot policy due to the fact that, some years ago, Cypriots did face persecution, and they know how it feels. However, she is trying to attribute the strict attitude of Cyprus to financial incapability.

Sofia does not have any refugee background, however many refugees from north Cyprus had fled to her hometown, in 1974, in order to escape persecution, after the Greek-Turkish conflict. Thus, according to Sofia, Cyprus has historically been a traditional refugee destination. Sofia supports that Cyprus has the obligation, under humanitarian law, to accept and give the refugee status to Syrian asylum seekers. However, she thinks that Cyprus is not a preferable destination for refugees, like other countries are (e.g. Germany and Sweden). Sofia has noticed that not all European countries are following the same common line towards refugees, as some of them are building walls, while others are being more open. Regarding Cypriot approach, Sofia feels that Cypriot government is pretty strict with refugees and asylum seekers, in its trial to control the situation, as strategies that favor restrictions related to reunification of the family, have been adapted.

Thanos does not have a direct refugee background, but many of his relatives do have, where due to the Turkish invasion, in 1974, they fled from North Cyprus to escape Turkish persecution. He describes that family members lost their properties, belongings and suddenly became refugees. He with pain narrates that there is a border control in the place called Kyrenia, where police officers control the access of Cypriots in their own country. Thanos believes that Germany is directing the way of handling the Syrian crisis. According to his opinion, Germans are inspiring for keeping the borders open, and as a result, Europe is becoming Islamic, by allowing the terrorists in. In the case that you do not agree with this policy, you are called close-minded, non-liberal, Islamo-phobic and xenophobic, and countries that call their own borders are criticized. Thanos also seems not to

embrace the concept of diversity. Regarding Cypriot way of dealing with refugees, Thanos believes that many camps and schools are built, semi-asylum is granted to Syrians and generally, he finds Cypriot government to be well-prepared.

Kostas reveals that he has a refugee background, through his parents, since they became refugees in their own country, overnight, after the invasion of 1974, where Turkish baptized the north part of Cyprus as “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus”. Kostas is informed on EU countries’ policy towards refugees, where eastern European countries have closed their borders. Regarding Cypriot approach, he thinks that it is strict towards refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, as they try to keep the situation under control. However, he acknowledges that Cyprus has built two refugee camps in order to provide food, residence, help and medicine to Syrians, even if it is not easy to handle that kind of situations.

It should be noted that all respondents seem to be aware of the way Cyprus and other European countries are dealing with Syrian refugee crisis. Kostas, Thanos and Maria seem to be more pragmatic and satisfied with the polity of their country, while Eleni and Sofia find this policy very strict. Overall, Maria, Thanos and Kostas are the respondents with refugee background through members of their family. As mentioned above, they appear to be stricter and less empathetic towards refugees compared to Eleni and Sofia, who do not have refugee background, but they have met people with refugee background. Eleni and Sofia appear to be more concerned about the strict policy that Cyprus is having towards these people. If the statements and experiences of the present section are combined with the ones presented in section 6.1, it can be concluded that the respondents with refugee background have adopted a more negative perception towards refugees, where they appear to be more concerned and less empathetic. This conclusion is fully supported by the section 5.8 and the concept of “being in someone’s shoes”. According to Ruttan *et al.* (2015), people that have experienced challenges (i.e. indirectly in this case, through family members) in the past, have shown less empathy for others being in the same situation, compared to people that have never experienced alike situations. This finding is attributed to the empathy gap, where people tend to underestimate the level of stress and pain they have been through, and to the fact that people that have overcome difficult situations have the feeling of a strong confidence towards understanding of similar challenges (Ruttan *et al.*, 2015). In this case, people have experienced similar challenges indirectly, through family members and their narrations. In addition, the fact that the respondents with refugee background seem to be less empathetic compared to the ones without refugee background, could be attributed to the fact that most of these refugees hold on to their past experiences where the Turks, Muslims by religion, mistreated them and forced them to be

displaced. Cypriots with a refugee background have a difficult time accepting and trusting the Syrian refugees because they have already set them apart as “the other” group. By contrast, Cypriots without refugee background have nothing to draw back from the past, when dealing with the Syrian-Muslim refugees.

6.3. Influence of culture on formation of locals’ perception towards Syrian refugees

Maria is coming from a family with refugee background; therefore their position towards Syrian refugee influx is a bit sensitive, since they have been through a similar situation long time ago. However, Maria differentiates her family’s situation with Syrian’s. More specifically, she supports that her family members became refugees inside their country; which refers more to being internally displaced. By contrast, Syrians are fleeing and seeking for asylum in countries outside Syria and Middle East in general. In this case, we can see again that Maria is separating Syrian and Cypriot refugees in two different groups, based on the destination they are fleeing to. Maria believes that Cypriots, appear to be more skeptical towards Syrian refugees compared to other countries (e.g. Greece), and according to her this could be attributed to the old conflict with Turkish and at the same time Muslim world. Therefore, according to Maria the factor religion, in this case Muslim Syrians, can be responsible for the negative perception of Cypriots towards refugees. Maria states that her friends are worried about Cypriot social welfare, criminality rates, and islamisation of the country, indicating that the general perception among locals is connected with the concepts of:

- xenophobia (referred at section 5.7), since stereotypes and racism are developed when different cultures are involved, seen by the fear of “islamisation of the country”
- antagonism (referred at section 5.5), since locals seem to be concerned on the consequences this crisis may have to Cypriot welfare system
- “taken for granted”, since their perception about the present crisis is influenced by their cultural and historical background, which does not necessarily reflect the reality, according to Jorgensen & Phillips (2002) (see section 5.4).
- “group conflicts”, since when different groups are formed in the society, they may lead to group conflicts (see section 5.6). In this case the groups are separated based on the different religion, since locals are afraid of the “islamisation of the country”

Regarding a question on how is the Syrian refugee crisis presented in Cyprus by media, Maria believes that media is presenting the Syrian crisis, the refugee situation and its effect on Cypriots, in an objective and informative way. However, she recognizes that there are journalists exaggerating the situation, and others that aim to make locals feel sympathy and compassion for Syrians' misfortune.

Eleni's social circle (i.e. family and friends) seems to be concerned on the impacts of Muslim influx in Cyprus. According to Eleni, this concern is attributed to the fact that most Syrian refugees are coming from different religious background than Cypriots, making Cypriots more hesitant and less empathetic towards them. In this case, we also observe the concept of xenophobia being present, as well as the concept of "taken for granted", since their perception about the present crisis is influenced by their different cultural background.

Eleni is of the opinion that media in Cyprus are not in favor of refugees, at all, they see refugees as a threat to western values. Eleni thinks that this attitude is attributed to the fact that Cyprus has had a history in exporting migrants and not in hosting them.

Sofia also supports that some friends and family members of her, have shown a hostile attitude towards refugees. She attributes that fact, to the xenophobic and conservative nature of Cypriot society, where she points out that the fact that refugees are Muslims is highly enforcing the hostile attitude. More specifically, she refers to historical events, where conflict between Muslims and Christians took place in Cyprus, about 40 years ago, that could explain Cypriots' hostility against refugees, since they memories are still fresh. However, she also supports that there are people who volunteer, provide food, clothing and accommodation to refugees. In Sofia's case, the concept of xenophobia developed among locals becomes apparent, with a negative perception against Muslims. The concept of identity and group formation, as described in section 5.2, also applies in this case. Where, all Syrians are seen to be the same with Turkish in front of Cypriots' eyes, and all belong to the group called "Muslims", based on religious beliefs. A similar example is in a case presented by Jorgensen & Phillips (2002) with the group called "blacks" in British society, which does not necessarily refers to specific population (e.g. Jamaicans, Pakistanis, women) but rather to all people that were "no whites". Therefore, Cypriots tend to ignore any other common factor they may have with refugees (e.g. gender) and see them as "the Other" due to their different religion, indicating the development of discrimination within the society (Engelund, 2011).

Sofia is of the opinion that media is presenting the Syrian refugee crisis as a threat to western values and not as humanitarian crisis. It is very common that they refer to stories, where asylum seekers are presented as “trouble makers” and they try to steal or do other illegal activities. Sofia thinks that there is a lot of propaganda, and she feels shame for media using their power in this way, since they do shape the public opinion, in many cases.

Thanos supports that some of his friends and family members are upset regarding the Muslim influx in Cyprus, while others are more tolerant. For example, there is a part of Cypriots with patriotic opinions, supporting that they care a lot about Cyprus, and they are afraid of losing their traditions and culture identity due to the refugee influx. However, he justifies them for not having the willingness to live in such a diverse society. He also supports that others are more open and sensitive towards refugees. Thanos gives the impression that he does not like the diverse society, as also referred in section 6.2. Therefore, the concept of “antagonism and hegemony” and “xenophobia” appear to be relevant here, since some people are afraid of losing their traditions and culture identity.

Thanos supports that media are having an informative role on the ongoing war in Syria and the influx in Cyprus and Europe. However, he thinks they are not totally objective, as they focus on the humanitarian aspects of the influx, and thus, they create feelings of sadness about refugees. They do not refer to side effects Syrian crisis may have on the society and on welfare system.

Kostas is of the opinion that there are many barriers, discouraging Syrians’ integration to Cypriot society, like religion, language and culture. He thinks that it would be better for Syrian refugees to flee to Muslim societies, since he thinks that they have better chance for integration into them. Kostas states that some of his family members and friends feel sorry about refugees, while others are more suspicious and afraid of the influx. His parents, having had refugee background, try to help refugees by providing food and clothing, since they have been through similar situations. However, they support that the situation is different now that the one they have come through; Kostas’ parents were forced to move in the same country, while, Syrian refugees are coming from different cultural backgrounds. In addition, his parents are concerned about the impact refugee influx may have on financial situation of Cyprus. Overall, Kostas supports that the general trend in Cyprus is that locals appear skeptical on the refugee influx. Therefore, the concept of:

- xenophobia, based on the different cultural backgrounds
- antagonism, as people are being concerned on financial impact of influx

- group formation, Cypriots with refugee background differentiate themselves from Syrian refugees, due to the different background from to the destination they are fleeing to
- “taken for granted”, based on the general trend of Cypriots being skeptical on refugee influx

Kostas thinks that the Syrian refugee crisis is presented more like a threat rather than humanitarian issue by Cypriot media, which appear to have a hostile attitude towards asylum seekers, where journalists use words like “illegal people” for them. Therefore, the perception that these people are criminals is created. He also points out that there is no distinction between the terms ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’, and the term ‘refugee’ is being misused by media.

Overall, all respondents support that the different culture and especially, the different religion does affect the locals’ perception towards Syrian refugees, as they become more concerned on and afraid of the impact their different background may have. More specifically, concepts of xenophobia, antagonism, group formation, group conflicts and “taken for granted” have been observed during the discourse analysis of the interviewees. This conclusion is in alignment with Kohut’s and Wike’s (2008) observation that there is an increasing xenophobic trend among Europeans, where they have created a negative attitude toward Muslims. In the case of Cyprus, this can be explained and “justified” by the fact that historically, Cypriots lived with Muslims until they displaced them in their country (see section 3.2), during the invasion by the Turkish army and thus, they may have difficulties accepting them back on religious grounds, which may enforces their hostile attitude towards them. More specifically, as mentioned above, all Syrians are seen to be the same with Turkish in front of Cypriots’ eyes, and all belong to the group called “Muslims”, based on religious beliefs, ignoring other factors, like origin and race. Cypriots see Syrians as “the Other” due to their different religion, where discrimination within the Cypriot society thrives. Cypriots have made a community for themselves with a national identity that want to protect. The influx of refugees, therefore, seems to be a threat to this identity as the refugees come with different religion, beliefs and culture. The Cypriots have already identified themselves as a group of “Orthodox Christians” that are guided by certain rules and values. Therefore, the coming in of Muslim refugees poses a significant threat as it may interfere with the already existing belief system.

In addition, with regard to the question on how media presents the Syrian refugee crisis in Europe, most of respondents have the perception that Syrian refugee crisis is presented as a threat to western values by media, which appear to have a hostile attitude. Thanos is the only respondent not having that perception at all, since he argues that media focuses on the humanitarian aspects of the influx, by promoting feelings of sadness about refugees and not referring to side effects it may have

on the society and on welfare system. This question and the subsequent responses can be linked with the general negative perception created by the locals and the concept of “taken for granted”, which becomes apparent during the analysis of interviews, since media is an inseparable part of our daily lives. In addition, the negative attitude of media against refugees creates an immigrant discourse with the refugees being pinned against the locals and the two groups; refugees and locals to struggle to define themselves. Hence, the media influences the ideas, values and beliefs about refugees, and thus affects their acceptance into the Cypriot community.

7. Conclusion

From the analysis of the collected data from the interviews, where two different groups of people were involved; Cypriots with and without refugee background, it can be concluded that there is a difference on how the two groups perceive the Syrian refugee influx in Cyprus. More specifically, Cypriots with refugee background appear to be less empathetic, more concerned and less tolerant towards Syrian refugee influx compared to Cypriots without refugee background that seem to have adopted a more open and positive perception. This finding is contradictory to the initial assumption of the researcher, where Cypriots with refugee background were expected to be more empathetic towards Syrians, since they have experienced displacement. Hence, the researcher's assumption is evaluated to be wrong. The research proposes also that an interaction between Cypriots and refugees affects in a positive way the perception of the natives on refugees. Finally, the different cultural background and especially the different religion between Cypriots and Syrian refugees is a factor that negatively affects the locals' perception towards refugees, where locals become more concerned and afraid of the impact their different background may have.

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Appendix

All interviews took place in Paphos, Cyprus, between 14th and 18th of May. A small introduction of the respondents is given prior to presentation of the complete interviews, where the location of the interview, the duration, a small presentation of respondents and their main thoughts are included.

The first interview was with Maria on May, 14th in Alea Café. Maria is 21 years old and is studying Law in Neapolis University of Paphos. The duration of the interview was 36 min. She is coming from a refugee background since her relatives were being displaced from North Cyprus. She is sceptical about the Syrian refugee influx and afraid that refugees will increase crime rates in Cyprus.

The second interview was with Eleni and took place in the same Café, on May, the 15th. The duration of the interview was 42 min. Eleni is 30 years old and she is working as a social worker in Paphos. Some years ago she participated in a rescue mission, where she got to know some Syrians. She appears to be empathetic towards Syrian crisis; however she thinks that Cyprus cannot really afford granting refugee status to many Syrians. She mentions that the religion of Syrians will be a problem in Cyprus and it would make their integration even harder.

The third interview was with Sofia. Sofia is 27 years old and she is working as a dentist in Kato Paphos. The interview was conducted on May, 16th, in a cozy café called Pingouino Café. The duration of it was 35 min. She is very open towards Syrian refugees. However, she mentioned that Cypriots are hostile towards Syrians because they have different religious beliefs than them.

The fourth interview was with Thanos, 24 years old and newly graduated from chemical engineering school of Athens. The interview took place on May, 17th in café bar Pingouino. The duration was 40 min. Thanos expressed his disappointment on refugee influx in Europe. He is afraid of refugees taking advantages of European welfare system and he tends to think that refugees and terrorists are somehow linked. Plus, according to him traditions and culture identity is in risk due to refugee influx.

The last interview was with Kostas, 24 years old and working as a manager in a hotel in Paphos. The interview was conducted in Alea café on May, the 18th. Kostas is afraid of Syrian refugee influx having an impact on the economy and society of Cyprus. He is coming from a refugee background. He points out that Syrians are Muslims and would be extremely difficult for them to adapt themselves in a European reality.

Interview with Maria, 21 years old

1. When did you first hear of the Syrian refugee crisis? What did you think about it? How do you perceive the refugee influx in Europe? Just your views.

Around 2014. Mainly because of the high percentage of Syrian refugees coming to Greek islands. It is only recently since the first wave of refugees arrived in Cyprus.

1a. What do you think about it?

I am sceptical about the social and economic impact of the crisis throughout Europe. Refugee crisis is reshaping EU. I don't want to exaggerate it but growing diversity makes a country not an ideal place to live.

1b. Why do you have that opinion about diversity?

I am not saying that diversity is bad. There are plus and minus. I just feel that in some cases diversity would increase crime rates. Of course not all refugees are criminals, but we should keep in mind that they are coming from war—torn countries, which makes them more likely to be violent.

2. Do you yourself have a refugee background or do you know someone from Cyprus who has? If yes what is the story behind it?

Yes, in a way i have. Not me, myself but my relatives from dad's side. They were displaced from North Cyprus in 1974. They fled to Larnaca to avoid Turkish persecution. So did 200.000 Greek Cypriots, when Turkish overtook more than 35% of the country.

3. Did you see Syrian refugees somewhere in the city since there has been an influx in Europe? Do you have any encounters with Syrian refugees?

In the city? There are many migrants, but I don't know if they are Syrian refugees / asylum seekers or just migrants. I know that 5000/6000 Syrians came to Cyprus the two last years, but I guess most of them live in the camps or hotspots. I do not have any encounters. I have not met any Syrian in person.

4. Should the refugee status be given to them and continue residing in Cyprus or should they be deported to other European countries?

I guess we should follow the Dublin regulation; even it is unfair for the external border regions of Europe. However, Cyprus is able to take under protection just a certain amount of refugees. After all is Germany which wants an open door policy on refugees not us.

5. Are you aware of how EU is dealing with the Syrian refugee crisis?

Yes. I am concerned about it. Some countries like Greece are so generous, they show good will, welcoming refugees while others, like Poland, have a xenophobic attitude. Germany, real leader of Europe, is taking in so many refugees for practical reasons.

5a. What reasons?

Germans want skilled Syrian refugees to fill the gap on their labor market.

6. Are you informed of how Cypriot government is dealing with Syrian refugee crisis?

Asylum policies of Cyprus are not in favor of refugees. Unlike Greece, Cyprus has not been used as a transit country. Just a small amount of asylum seekers has been granted refugee status. Most of them were granted secondary protection, with very limited work opportunities. I guess that is why Syrians prefer Greece or west of Europe.

7. How Media is presenting the Syrian refugee crisis in Europe? As a humanitarian crisis or as a threat to western values? How do you perceive the media debate on Syrian refugee crisis?

Media are telling us the stories of refugees, in an objective way and inform public about the refugee crisis, the on-going Syrian war and the coming effects on us. Some journalists are exaggerating, while others aim to make us feel sympathy and compassion for Syrian's misfortune. It really depends on what you are watching or what blog you are reading.

8. Do you think the Syrian refugee crisis would affect the welfare system of Cyprus in a bad way?

Cost is big. A state should look after its own citizens and not foreigners. Cyprus has a strong economy and we are in charge to keep it that way. Unemployed benefits, health insurance, pensions should be given to Cypriots at first place. Refugees are coming in, they don't work, they don't pay taxes but they are getting high assistance out of nothing. To some extent is fine cause because they are under law protection but the situation could go out of control easily, due to growing numbers of refugees.

9. Are you informed about the news of Syrian war?

Yes I am. It is of high importance to know what is going on close to you.

10. What do your friends/family think in general about Syrian refugee influx in Europe/Cyprus? Have you ever discussed about it?

Family is a bit sensitive because as I told you they have been through this long time ago, even though the situation was not the same.

10a. How was it different?

They became refugees inside their country; it was more like being internally displaced. While, Syrians are asking for asylum in countries outside Syria and Middle East.

Friends are worried about our social welfare, criminality rates, Muslimization of the country.

11. Do you think Cypriots have a hostile attitude towards refugees or not?

I do not want to generalize and I do not like the term hostile. For sure i can say that we are much more sceptical than Greeks. Maybe because Cyprus is relatively small country or because of the old conflict with Turkish/Muslim world.

Interview with Eleni, 30 years old

1. When did you first hear of the Syrian refugee crisis? What did you think about it? How do you perceive the refugee influx in Europe? Just your views.

I know Syrian war started in 2011. Some years later Syrians made their way to Europe, asking for asylum. The human cost of the Syrian civil war is huge. Some of them, the most privileged ones manage to escape and come here. It is a mass influx, the biggest one after the World War II. It is not realistic to give asylum to all of them, even if they meet the requirements to be a refugee. It is just out of the question. Even rich countries, like Sweden, tighten refugee policies, even though they have a long history of accepting refugees.

2. Do you yourself have a refugee background or do you know someone from Cyprus who has? If yes what is the story behind it?

No. However, I know Cypriots with refugee background. In total, Cypriot population is 1.200.000 people and more than 200.000 have a refugee background.

3. Did you see Syrian refugees somewhere in the city since there has been an influx in Europe? Do you have any encounters with Syrian refugees?

There are plenty of refugees and migrants in Cyprus. I met some Syrians in 2015, when they arrived at a British base in Cyprus, after being abandoned by human smugglers. I was volunteering in a rescue operation. They were in need of humanitarian assistance. I heard stories of people who were missing. It was my first and last participation in such a mission. You need to be mentally healthy, strong and stable in order to work in these missions.

4. Should the refugee status be given to them and continue residing in Cyprus or should they be deported to other European countries?

Europe has to spread the burden. The ideal would be asylum seekers to decide their own where they want to live. But it is not realistic anymore. Cyprus has already grant refugee status to many Syrians. I don't know if we can afford more. Germany, for example, is following a really open borders policy, they can bear the burden.

5. Are you aware of how EU is dealing with the Syrian refugee crisis?

Kind of. I know for example that British left EU because of refugees. Germans welcome thousands of them, Greeks cannot afford the cost, so they provide refugees with inhuman conditions, while Eastern Europeans shut the borders.

6. Are you informed of how Cypriot government is dealing with Syrian refugee crisis?

Cyprus has already provide humanitarian aid, by accepting and supporting them financially, giving them food, clothes and accommodation. However, our policies are kind of strict. Cyprus, doesn't give them fully protection, for example you are not allowed to bring family members even though you gained the refugee status. I am not proud of it, especially because some years ago, Cypriots faced persecution themselves. Maybe it is because we cannot do more, economically speaking.

7. How Media is presenting the Syrian refugee crisis in Europe? As a humanitarian crisis or as a threat to western values? How do you perceive the media debate on Syrian refugee crisis?

Media in Cyprus are not in favor of refugees. 100% not. I would say as a threat to western values. I think it is because Cyprus has a history of exporting migrants but not of hosting them.

8. Do you think the Syrian refugee crisis would affect the welfare system of Cyprus in a bad way?

It will happen. But life matters more than money. It is a human task to save a life, even though the cost is high.

9. Are you informed about the news of Syrian war?

Yes. It is important to keep yourself updated in such a topic. It seems like a never ending conflict, with many parties being involved.

10. /11. What do your friends/family think in general about Syrian refugee influx in Europe/Cyprus? Have you ever discussed about it? Do you think Cypriots have a hostile attitude towards refugees or not?

Sometimes we talk about it and they are wondering about the impacts of Muslim influx in Cyprus. I believe that the main problem is the fact that most of Syrian refugees are coming from different religious background than us. This is why Cypriots are a bit unfavorable with refugees.

Interview with Sofia, 27 years old

1. When did you first hear of the Syrian refugee crisis? What did you think about it? How do you perceive the refugee influx in Europe? Just your views.

From the time it started, at 2011. But I started thinking about the Syrian refugee influx in 2014, 2015, when high percentage of Syrian refugees started coming to Cyprus and Greece, asking for asylum. It is a huge humanitarian crisis, as many innocent people fled the war. European governments are so ill prepared.

1a. What do you mean by ill—prepared?

People are coming to our country, looking for asylum, demanding their basic human rights, but all we do is closing borders, making them feel not welcome and outsiders. Here in Cyprus we only have two refugee camps, both of them inadequate, dangerous, more like jails rather than refugee camps. Asylum seekers are living in tents. Eastern European countries are closing their borders to innocent threatened people. Such a shame! I mean a war is going on not that far away from our countries. We saw the refugee influx coming to us and we did almost nothing.

2. Do you yourself have a refugee background or do you know someone from Cyprus who has? If yes what is the story behind it?

No, I don't. Neither my parents. However, my hometown hosted many refugees. Most of them are Greek Cypriots, from North Cyprus. They came in 1974, in order to escape persecution, after the Greek-Turkish conflict. So historically speaking, Cyprus has been a traditional refugee destination.

3. Did you see Syrian refugees somewhere in the city since there has been an influx in Europe? Do you have any encounters with Syrian refugees?

There are not many refugees in Paphos. However, recently i met a Syrian family. They are renting an airbnb apartment at Kato Paphos and I was the one who gave them a second key of their room. We

talked a bit about the situation in Syria and I asked them about their journey to Cyprus and their everyday life here. Not much to do. They don't have the right to work and they are running out of money day by day. That was my only encounter with them. I sound like an awful person. Hope I get the chance to do more for them.

4. Should the refugee status be given to them and continue residing in Cyprus or should they be deported to other European countries?

Yes, if they apply to the convention relating to refugees. A developed country should meet its obligations under humanitarian law. Cyprus is forced under the law to accept refugees. But I am sure my country is not a preferable destination among refugees as we cannot offer them as much as they need. Cyprus is not like Germany or Sweden. I guess most of the coming refugees dream about prosperous European countries. Anyway i am not an expert of laws.

5. Are you aware of how EU is dealing with the Syrian refugee crisis?

More or less, I keep watching the news. In the begging of the influx I thought all European countries are communicating and having the same approach towards refugees. It is only recently that I figured out that there is no a common line. I heard about countries building walls while others are much more open.

6. Are you informed of how Cypriot government is dealing with Syrian refugee crisis?

I think so. I feel that Cypriot government is pretty strict with refugees and asylum seekers. I heard about having restrictions relating to reunification of the family. It was a case of a man who managed to be granted refugee status but without having the right to bring his family in. I think our government is trying to control the influx by setting limits.

7. How Media is presenting the Syrian refugee crisis in Europe? As a humanitarian crisis or as a threat to western values? How do you perceive the media debate on Syrian refugee crisis?

You mean Cypriot media? Definitely, as a threat to western values. There is always a story about an asylum seeker who tried to steal or to do something bad. Asylum seekers are synonymous to trouble makers according to Cypriot Media. It is a lot of propaganda. It such a shame to use their power in this way, after all, they shape the public opinion.

8. Do you think the Syrian refugee crisis would affect the welfare system of Cyprus in a bad way?

Well, it is too early to say. But poorer countries than Cyprus, like Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt host many Syrian refugees without their welfare system being affected. Plus, I guess Cyprus gets some funds from EU for hosting refugees. In the long run, refugees would be vital and balsam for Cypriot economy. Syrians are well educated, full of qualifications. Europe should use their skills in a proper way instead of letting them die.

9. Are you informed about the news of Syrian war?

It is not that I'm following every single battle but I'm trying to be informed. A solution should be given as soon as possible.

10. /11. What do your friends/family think in general about Syrian refugee influx in Europe/Cyprus? Have you ever discussed about it? Do you think Cypriots have a hostile attitude towards refugees or not?

Yes many times. Unfortunately, some friends and family members are so close minded and full of hate. Sometimes i believe our society is a bit xenophobic and conservative. It is just the fear of the unknown and maybe the fact that most of the Syrian refugees are Muslims. It is a thing for Cyprus. Reasonable. The conflict between Muslims and Christians took place 40 years ago in this country. The memories are still fresh. Maybe this explains why Cypriots are a bit hostile towards refugees. But i don't want to generalize. There are also people who volunteer, provide food, cloths, even accommodation.

Interview with Thanos, 24 years old

1. When did you first hear of the Syrian refugee crisis? What did you think about it? How do you perceive the refugee influx in Europe? Just your views.

Approximately two to three years ago, at the time that many Syrians started fleeing to Europe through Greek islands, Bulgaria or Italy. Europe has already received a huge amount of Syrians. Not only Syrians. Arabs, Middle Easterners, North Africans coming here and taking advantages of European benefits. It is a real chaos. Seems like everyone can just cross the borders and make it to Europe. No wonder why Europe has been so vulnerable to terror attacks recently.

1a. So do you think that terror attacks in Europe are somehow linked with the refugee influx?

Refugee influx raises terror attacks. It is a fact. What happened to Paris, Brussels, or Sweden? Innocent Europeans were killed by second generation Muslims, who never managed to accept western values and to be integrated into western societies, even though they were born or raised in Europe. I am not saying that this is the case, but when you don't know who is entering your country threat will take place.

4. Should the refugee status be given to them and continue residing in Cyprus or should they be deported to other European countries?

At least in Cyprus, the refugee influx is under control. Cyprus, even though is really close to Syrian and North Africa, is not a preferable destination for refugees. We are far from mainland Europe, so we cannot be used as a transit country. It does not mean that we don't have refugees at all, but the procedures to become one are tough. Of course, we can accept some of them as we did, but it is impossible for a small country like Cyprus to grant refugee status to all Syrian asylum seekers. Countries like Germany, with a really open border policy, can take the responsibility for them.

3. Did you see Syrian refugees somewhere in the city since there has been an influx in Europe? Do you have any encounters with Syrian refugees?

Cyprus is full of migrants and foreigners who came here the last years and reside at the city center. I guess some of them are Syrians. I don't have any encounters.

4a. Do they look suspicious to you?

Not suspicious, but different. Different way of living compared to natives.

2. Do you yourself have a refugee background or do you know someone from Cyprus who has? If yes what is the story behind it?

Not me. I was born and raised here in Paphos. But many relatives do. It happened in 1974, after the Turkish invasion. They fled from North Cyprus to escape Turkish persecution. Family members lost their properties, belongings and became refugees overnight. I took a ride to Kyrenia the other day. There is a border control to your own country. Police officers are asking for your ID. It is like a state in the state. I don't feel like doing it again. Kind of painful.

5. Are you aware of how EU is dealing with the Syrian refugee crisis?

We do as Germans do. Keep borders open to make Europe Islamic. Let the terrorists in, otherwise you will be called close minded, non-liberal Islamo-phobic, conservative and xenophobic. We blame countries like Hungary or Slovenia for calling their own borders. We embrace diversity as the best thing could happen to us.

6. Are you informed of how Cypriot government is dealing with Syrian refugee crisis?

Yes. Government departments are mobilized to deal with the refugee influx, they built up camps and schools, they grant semi—asylum to Syrians. In general Cypriot government was well prepared.

7. How Media is presenting the Syrian refugee crisis in Europe? As a humanitarian crisis or as a threat to Western values? How do you perceive the media debate on Syrian refugee crisis?

Media informs us about the ongoing war in Syria and the comers in Cyprus and Europe. However, i think they are not so objective. They present only the humanitarian aspects of the influx. They make us feel pity about refugees without informing us about the side effects on the society and welfare system.

8. So you think refugees harm Cypriot welfare system?

Maybe we cannot see it now but in the long run they will. They have access to our sources without being part of our society. Financial resources used for refugees instead of natives.

9. Are you informed about the news of Syrian war?

I do not know what the Syrian war is about. It is complicated and many parties are involved. I should be better informed about it.

10. What do your friends/family think in general about Syrian refugee influx in Europe/Cyprus? Have you ever discussed about it?

Well, it really depends on the person. Some family members are upset about the Muslim influx in Cyprus and Greece while others are more tolerant. Regarding my friends, i really think most of them confuse refugees and migrants.

11. Do you think Cypriots have a hostile attitude towards refugees or not?

There is a part of Cypriots with patriotic opinions. They want what is best for our country, they are afraid of losing their traditions and culture identity in favor of refugees. It would be unfair to call

them racist or hostile just because they don't want to live in such a diverse society. Others are more open and sensitive especially when it comes to real refugees.

Interview with Kostas, 24 years old

1. When did you first hear of the Syrian refugee crisis? What did you think about it? How do you perceive the refugee influx in Europe? Just your views.

From the beginning of the ongoing war, 2011, it was such a popular topic among our media and between casual people's conversations. Syria is geographically close to Cyprus and in general with the Arabic world. To be honest I did not pay much attention till 2015, when migrants and asylum seekers started arriving in Cyprus and in Greek islands. From that point on I realized that the Syrian war is becoming a humanitarian problem for Cyprus, Greece, and Europe.

1a. So do you think that Syrian refugee influx in Cyprus is a problem?

Yes, don't you think so? I mean of course I felt very sorry for innocent people who are fleeing the war but I am afraid that their influx will have a negative social and economic impact on us. For example, some Greek islands like Samos and Kos are already in trouble as their sources from tourism decreased way too much last summer, due to refugees.

2. Do you yourself have a refugee background or do you know someone from Cyprus who has? If yes what is the story behind it?

My parents are coming from Famagusta and they became refugees overnight after the invasion of 1974. They became refugees in their own country. There is nothing to be surprised about. It is a common story. About 200,000 Greek Cypriots became refugees. Turkish took 37% of the country, baptizing it "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus". International community and UN have not provided a fair solution. The new reality has been accepted by them.

3. Did you see Syrian refugees somewhere in the city since there has been an influx in Europe? Do you have any encounters with Syrian refugees?

They are everywhere. According to Media approximately 5000 Syrians came here the last years, asking for asylum. Most of them live in Kofinou Center. I don't have any encounters yet. I am so sorry about them, I guess most of them are nice innocent people who are asking for a second opportunity in life. I understand their pain and I wish I could do something about it. But to be honest I don't think there is a way for them to be integrated in our society. It feels that they represent different values, they practice and believe different things, they are coming from different backgrounds. It is not

always easy to build a bridge and connect different things. Maybe it would be better for Syrian refugees to flee to Gulf States or to neighboring Muslim countries, rather than Europe. It would be a better chance for integration into Muslim societies.

3a. So, you think that their religion discourages their integration into Cypriot/European society?

Well there are many barriers, like language/culture. Religion could be one of them, as well.

4. Should the refugee status be given to them and continue residing in Cyprus or should they be deported to other European countries?

I think that Europe should share the burden towards refugees. Countries in the border, like Greece and Cyprus are taking the responsibility for the asylum seekers. It is not fair. Cyprus has already granted refugee status to many of Syrians. After all Cyprus is a small country, not at peace with itself due to its history. It is not possible the refugee status to be granted in every Syrian asylum seeker.

5. Are you aware of how EU is dealing with the Syrian refugee crisis?

Yes I do follow the news regarding EU's policies towards refugees. I know about EU-Turkish agreement and about the fact that many eastern European countries, like Hungary, closed their borders. It is important to be aware on such a topic. It could affect our lives.

6. Are you informed of how Cypriot government is dealing with Syrian refugee crisis?

Yes, I know that the refugee status has be given to more than 100 Syrians. I also know that Cypriot policies towards refugees, asylum seekers and migrants are strict. We are afraid that we will end up as Greeks. So we are trying to control it. However our government built up two refugee camps in order to provide food, residence, help and medicine to Syrians. Of course the conditions are not ideal, but it is not easy to handle situations like this.

7. How Media is presenting the Syrian refugee crisis in Europe? As a humanitarian crisis or as a threat to western values? How do you perceive the media debate on Syrian refugee crisis?

Well, Syrian refugee crisis is a humanitarian crisis and is represented as this from left wing/liberal media. However, I have the feeling that the right left media, which are dominant in my country, present a different reality. They have a hostile attitude towards refugees. One thing that i have noticed is that there is no distinction between the terms 'migrant' and 'refugee'. The term 'refugee' has been misused by media. Many Cypriots don't know that refugees are protected under national and international law. Another thing is that media language is negative loaded regarding refugees. Journalists, for example use words such as 'illegal people' as a result Cypriots associate

undocumented asylum seekers with criminals. So I would say that Syrian refugee crisis is presented more like a threat rather than humanitarian issue.

8. Do you think the Syrian refugee crisis would affect the welfare system of Cyprus in a bad way?

For sure I will. Those people are in need of many resources. They need food, accommodation, medical care, social benefits, which otherwise would be given to Cypriots. Plus I'm afraid that tourism, one of the main income sources for Cyprus will be decreased. It happened to Greek islands. I know that we receive financial help from EU in order to cope with the situation but this amount of money is not enough to cover the expenses. So it is our government's task.

9. Are you informed about the news of Syrian war?

Yes I am. As I told you is a popular topic so it is difficult not to be updated. UN and world leaders should give an end to it.

10. What do your friends/family think in general about Syrian refugee influx in Europe/Cyprus? Have you ever discussed about it?

Yes, we did. Well, some of family/friends feel sorry about them, while others are a bit suspicious and kind of afraid of the influx. Well, my parents have been refugees themselves and they would like to help in terms of providing food or clothes. They know better than anyone else how harsh is to be refugee. But at the same time, they are sceptical because the situation now is totally different from their own. I mean my parents were forced to move from North Cyprus to West Cyprus. Now it is more like people with so different culture and mentality entering our country. I don't know. Plus they are a bit afraid that refugees will deteriorate the financial situation of Cyprus.

11. Do you think Cypriots have a hostile attitude towards refugees or not?

I think that the general trend is that we could accept only some of them and provide them and their families with the refugee status, following the international law. I don't want to use such a strong word as "hostile" but we are a bit sceptical.