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DEVELOPING EVIDENCE BASED MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS IN INDIA-EU MIGRATION AND PARTNERSHIP (DEMO: INDIA-EU MAP)

Report on the media representation of the Indian community in Cyprus: a case of invisibility

Vera Pavlou

DEMO-India Research Report 2015/03

DEMO-India
Developing Evidence based Management and Operations in
India-EU Migration and Partnership

Research Report
Thematic Report
DEMO-India RR 2015/03

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a case of invisibility

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DEMO-India – Developing Evidence based Management and Operations in India-EU Migration and Partnership (DEMO: India-EU MaP)

The Demo: India-EU MaP project, co-funded by the European Commission, is a continuation of the Carim India project (www.india-eu-migration.eu) and it examines the multiple facets of Indian migration to the EU. Its overall aim is to improve migration management between India and the EU, strengthen EU-India relations, and produce in-depth empirical knowledge about the different migration streams and pathways of Indian nationals in the EU. Its specific goals include providing:

1. Evidence based research for more informed policy making and state intervention.
2. Improved source country capacity in managing migration.
3. Raising awareness among potential migrants of the risks of irregular migration.
4. Collaboration with civil society groups.
5. Empirical research and analysis of Indian communities across the EU, and their impact.

The project is led by the Indian Centre for Migration in Delhi with the partnership of the Migration Policy Centre, RSCAS, EUI.

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Abstract

This report gives an overview of the depiction of the Indian community in Cyprus based on qualitative content analysis in local media. The themes discussed are education, business and investment activities, the insertion and experiences of Indian nationals in the labour market, culture, gender relations and integration initiatives. The analysis is based on a selection of articles published between April 2012 and April 2015 in Cypriot online and printed newspapers, news portals and blogs. A theme that emerges from the analysis is that of the invisibility of the local Indian community in Cypriot media. The analysis shows that local media demonstrates a very limited interest in the Indian community and Indian culture(s) as part of Cypriot society. The Indian community in Cyprus is not particularly numerous, nor consolidated and this explains, to a certain extent, why there are not many explicit references to the community in the local media. Another reason for the partial invisibility of the Indian community is the general lack of debate and engagement of the local media with migrant communities in Cyprus.

Key words: media representation, Indian community, Cyprus, invisibility

Table of contents

1. Introduction	7
2. Education.....	9
3. Business and investment activities	12
4. Labour market	13
5. Culture.....	14
6. Crime reporting	15
7. Integration initiatives.....	15
8. Religion	16
9. Conclusion.....	16
References	17
Newspaper sources	17
Appendix. Newspapers, magazines and news portals consulted.....	19

1. Introduction

This report gives an overview of the depiction of the Indian community in Cyprus based on qualitative content analysis in local media. The themes discussed are education, business and investment activities, the insertion and experiences of Indian nationals in the labour market, culture, gender relations and integration initiatives. The analysis is based on selected articles published between April 2012 and April 2015 in Cypriot online and printed newspapers, news portals and blogs. A total of twenty three articles have been consulted. The Indian community in Cyprus is not particularly numerous, nor consolidated and this explains, to a certain extent, why there are not many explicit references to the community in the local media. Another reason for the partial invisibility of the Indian community is the general lack of debate and engagement of the local media with migrant communities in Cyprus.

Overall, Cyprus has a restrictive immigration regime. Until the beginning of the 1990s the state had an almost closed-doors approach to labour immigrants: visas for employment were granted in only very limited situations, e.g. to exceptionally highly-skilled technical or managerial staff (Trimikliniotis 1999). As a result, very few migrants came to live and work in Cyprus. The state policy towards labour immigration changed in the late 1980s and the early 1990s with the opening of immigration routes for foreign workers. The rationale behind the policy change was to cover labour shortages in the then flourishing economy. But policy makers perceived the needs for foreign labour to be temporary and, as a result, created restrictive immigration paths which were based on temporariness; thus, migrant workers coming to Cyprus could only work on a short-term basis without routes to permanent residence and in specific semi- or low-skilled employment sectors such as agriculture, care/domestic work (Trimikliniotis and Demetriou 2011), and until recently, in the sex industry.¹ This model persists to a large extent until today; migrant workers are normally granted fixed-term, non renewable permits for four or six years, their permits are attached to the employer who acts as a sponsor and they may not change sector of employment. More favourable provisions are in place for key personnel managers employed in foreign companies registered in Cyprus; permits are granted without a prior labour market test and there are no temporary restrictions on their residence in Cyprus.

The Aliens and Migration Law sets the conditions of entry, stay and employment of Third-Country Nationals (TCN) in Cyprus.² There are various types of non-visitor permits a TCN may hold: student permits, research permits, business permits, general employment permits, permits for employees at international companies, permits as a permanent resident (long-term resident status), permits for family members of EU or Cypriot nationals, and permits for family members of TCNs.³

The Indian community in Cyprus is relatively small and includes mainly temporary residents. They reside in Cyprus on the basis of different types of residence permits: as permanent residents, as temporary employees for international companies, as students, as temporary workers under the general labour immigration scheme, as domestic workers in private households and as family members of Cypriot, EU or non-EU nationals. Cyprus transposed the EU Blue Card Directive for the recruitment of highly-skilled workers, however, the volumes of admission was set at zero: highly-skilled Indians

¹ Until 2008 Cyprus had a visa scheme known as “artiste visas” for the recruitment of immigrant women as dancers in cabaret clubs. It was widely known that the scheme was structuring the sexual exploitation of migrant women who were very often trafficked through this route. The scheme was reformed in 2008 and was finally abolished in 2010 following the condemnation of Cyprus by the European Court of Human Rights in the *Rantsev v. Cyprus and Russia* case.

² Chapter 105, Aliens and Immigration Law.

³ An overview in English is available on: <http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/crmd/crmd.nsf/All/3970FC0B8741575AC2257D1F001EFF59?OpenDocument> [Accessed 23 August 2015].

are, instead, recruited under national immigration rules (Pavlou 2013). The Migration Department of the Ministry of Interior, the competent authority for the granting of residence and work permits, does not publish disaggregate data on the number and type of permits granted each year and the nationality of permit-holders. It is thus not possible to give the exact number of Indians residing in Cyprus and the type of permit they hold.

According to the latest estimations provided by the High Commission of India in Cyprus there are presently around 4000 Indians living in the country.⁴ The same authority reports that most Indian nationals in Cyprus are employed as computer engineers and software programmers in foreign companies and multinational corporations. There is also a fluctuating number of students enrolled in Higher Education Institutions, followed by a smaller group of semi-skilled agricultural workers and domestic workers in private households.⁵ Very few Indians hold a permanent residence in Cyprus.⁶ No data is provided regarding the gender breakdown of the Indian community. However, we can safely say that the majority of those working in foreign companies and multinational corporations, of agricultural workers and of students is predominantly male, while domestic workers are almost exclusively females. There is no published data on the number of people of Indian origin in Cyprus, i.e. Cypriot nationals who have Indian ethnic background.

Given that the vast majority of Indians in Cyprus hold temporary work or student permits, the size of the community is sensitive to changes of national immigration and employment policies; hence it may fluctuate considerably each year. It should be noted at the outset that there is no well established Indian community in Cyprus which explains why there are not many press articles discussing issues of concern to the community. Immigration is a relatively recent phenomenon in Cyprus and national immigration policy is strongly focused on the temporariness of stay, which is why there are very limited state-led integration projects and initiatives. The local media depicts this temporariness as well and tends to focus on issues concerning migrants as temporary residents instead of actual or prospective permanent members of the society. For example, there are no media accounts regarding the experience of Indian pupils in schools, while reporting on issues such as religion or integration is scarce. In relation to those themes which have received no media attention, I look instead at media accounts which discuss migrants more broadly. These accounts, despite the fact that they do not focus specifically on Indians living in Cyprus, give an idea of how migrants are depicted and portrayed in general, which can have an impact on the local Indian community as well.

⁴ See High Commission of India Nicosia, Cyprus, available on: <http://hci.gov.in/nicosia/?0700?000> [Accessed 9 September 2015].

⁵ Cyprus has a specific visa scheme to attract and recruit domestic workers in private households. At the moment there are approximately 30,000 TCNs on a domestic worker visa. This amounts to 50% of all TCN workers in Cyprus, making domestic work by far the largest sector of employment for non-EU nationals. Female migrants from South Asian predominate in the domestic work sector with Filipinos being the most numerous nationality group, followed by Vietnamese, Sri Lankans and Indians.

⁶ See High Commission of India Nicosia, Cyprus, available on: <http://hci.gov.in/nicosia/?0700?000> [Accessed 9 September 2015].

2. Education

When it comes to educational issues, the topics local media predominantly engage with are the student visa policy and policies to attract international students to private higher educational institutions. There are no media reports discussing the experiences of Indian students at primary and secondary schools, or cases of bullying against Indian or migrant students in general.

Overall, international students enrolled in tertiary education in Cyprus are considered as an important part of the business of private education institutions. Therefore, it has been the policy of the state, during the last few decades, to attract overseas students in tertiary education. The aim of attracting international students, however, often runs against the parallel aim of controlling immigration flows. Concerns about the misuse of the student immigration route by non-EU students as disguised labour immigration, have resulted in more restrictive administrative controls and these cause considerable fluctuations in the numbers of student visas granted each year. Despite these fluctuations, India is one of the main countries of origin for non-EU students enrolled in tertiary education institutions in Cyprus (EMN 2013). There are no data combining the nationality and gender breakdown of overseas students in Cyprus. However, given that they are predominantly male, we can assume that most Indian students are also male.

Currently there are three public universities in Cyprus: the University of Cyprus, the Open University and the University of Technology. Undergraduate studies in public universities are free for Cypriot and EU students, but non-EU students pay fees of 8000 Euros per year.⁷ A good knowledge of Greek is usually required for undergraduate studies. All students pay fees to attend postgraduate studies in public universities. The fees vary depending on the programme and the university. As an indication, the University of Technology charges EU and national students about 4000 Euros annually for most of its postgraduate programmes; the fees for international students are nearly double that. At postgraduate level public universities offer a range of study programmes in English.

There are also four private universities: the European University of Cyprus, Frederick University, Neapolis University and the University of Nicosia. These universities offer a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes of study in English. On average, private universities charge international students (non-EU) around 10,000 Euros per year for undergraduate programmes and approximately 6000 to 10,000 Euros per year for postgraduate programmes.

Apart from public and private universities there are also 40 private institutions of tertiary education, usually referred to as colleges.⁸ Colleges have no university status but offer academic and/or vocational training at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The duration of the undergraduate programmes offered range from one to four years. The fees private colleges charge non-EU students vary depending on the college and the programme of study; fees range from 2500 to 7000 Euros per year for undergraduate programmes and from 7,500 to 15,000 per year for postgraduate courses. The vast majority of non-EU students in Cyprus pursue their studies in colleges, predominantly in business and related studies (EMN 2013).

As we can see, non-EU students have to pay steep tuition fees and cover relatively high-living expenses to attend tertiary education in Cyprus. Thus, the right to work while pursuing their studies, has been a crucial demand of international students in the country. Cyprus transposed the provisions of the EU Directive 2004/114⁹ in 2007 with the enactment of Law N. 184 (I) 2007. The EU Directive

⁷ An overview available on: http://www.nrcg.dl.mlsi.gov.cy/english/studying_in_cyprus.php [Accessed 7 September 2015].

⁸ A full list available on: <http://www.highereducation.ac.cy/en/private-institutions-tertiary-education.html> [Accessed 7 September 2015].

⁹ Council Directive 2004/114/EC of 13 December 2004 on the conditions of admission of TCNs for the purposes of studies, pupil exchange, unremunerated training or voluntary service, OJ L375/12, 23 December 2004.

stipulates that TCNs admitted as students must be allowed to work for a minimum of ten hours per week, while it is the discretion of Member States to determine the maximum hours of work and to carry out a labour market test when granting work permits. Member States may also determine in which sectors international students may be employed. The Cypriot law which implements the Directive sets a maximum of twenty hours per week during term time and a thirty eight hours limit per week during holidays. During the first six months of stay international students are not allowed to work, with the exception of working as domestic workers in private households. With the Administrative Act N. 425/2009 the employment of foreign students is allowed only in certain low and medium skill occupations such as care work for the elderly, domestic work, agricultural work, cleaning and food delivery provided that the Community Preference Rule is satisfied.

Law N. 29(I)2009 transposed the provisions of the EU Directive on the admission of TCNs for the purposes of research.¹⁰ According to a Ministerial Decree, in order to qualify for a research visa, non-EU researchers, must have secured funds of 2000 Euro per month if they are pursuing Masters or PhD studies and 2500 Euro per month for studies at post-Doctorate level. Given the current economic crisis and high unemployment rates in Cyprus, these salary thresholds are particularly high and do not seem feasible; it, indeed, seems more likely that international researchers would need to have secured external funding or to rely on their own resources to meet these thresholds and to obtain a researcher visa.

Occasionally the media mentions the problems international students encounter in Cyprus. These include complex and cumbersome administrative procedures regarding the granting and renewal of visas, difficulties in covering tuition fees and living expenses and problems with the recognition of diplomas in countries of origin.¹¹ These issues are framed primarily as barriers to the development of the private sector of higher education, a sector which depends on international students to a large extent. Against this background, the perspective of the students themselves is more often than not neglected in media reports. For example, two important problems faced by non-EU national students at the moment is the twenty hours per week limit on the hours they can work and the restriction to work only in specific, low paid sectors which are irrelevant to the academic degrees they are pursuing. These two restrictions create significant barriers for foreign students when they seek suitable jobs to cover steep tuition fees and significant living expenses. The High Commission of India in Cyprus reports that the restrictions on the employment of non-EU students and the ongoing economic crisis have resulted in a drastic decline in the numbers of Indian students enrolled in Cypriot colleges and universities during the last few years.¹² The Cypriot Equality Body also notes that the more stringent immigration controls exercised since 2011 have particularly affected Indian students.¹³ Nonetheless, there are no recent media accounts documenting this issue, while those articles that do engage with the debate on international students tend not to give space to foreign students' associations to voice their concerns or to raise awareness. There is no established Indian students' association in Cyprus and Indian students, in general, do not seem to be particularly visible in media accounts. There is, however, an international student's association (ISAC – International Students Association of Cyprus) where Indian students may participate as well. ISAC has no institutional role in the decision making concerning state policies on international students; it functions more as a platform for overseas

¹⁰ Council Directive 2005/71/EC of October 2005 on a specific visa procedure for admitting TCNs for the purposes of scientific research, OJ L289/15.

¹¹ *Simerini*, 11.06.2014: Plight for international students.

¹² High Commission of India Nicosia, Cyprus <http://hci.gov.in/nicosia/?0700?000> [Accessed 7 September 2015].

¹³ Report of the Equality Body in relation to the substantive and procedural guarantees avoiding the risk of exploitation of students from third-countries, Nicosia, 23 July 2014 (in Greek).

students to meet, discuss issues concerning their stay in Cyprus and receive information on their rights and obligations.¹⁴

The media have the tendency to place economic considerations at the heart of the debate on international students. An indicative example of this tendency is the title a popular newspaper chose for an article discussing the national policy on international students: “A student equals 18 tourists” to convey the message that foreign students can be highly beneficial for the national economy.¹⁵ In the same spirit however, an interview of the president of a private institute suggests that policy makers should stop trying to attract students from Asia who are “poor” and who need to work in order to cover their tuition fees, and turn instead to more prosperous countries such as Russia in their attempts to attract new students.¹⁶ While these media reports do not focus exclusively on Indian students, they are relevant in understanding how local media frame this debate as a purely economic one; the message communicated to the readers is that the state should attract those international students who have financial means as they are the ones who can be beneficial to the national economy.

In another media account, it was reported that some private educational institutions from Cyprus make use of fraudulent practices to “recruit” international students in their countries of origin. According to the same source, students from Asia and Africa are approached in their countries of origin by representatives of private colleges who promise them that they will have ample employment opportunities in Cyprus in order to fund their studies. Given the visa restrictions on foreign students’ employment, the source reports, once in Cyprus the students find themselves in a dire economic situation and as a result “they are forced into prostitution or crime”. The article is long, detailed and it employs a sensationalist and ambiguous tone to describe the allegations. For example, the journalist refers to foreign students as being “trapped in a society which cannot offer them the minimum for their subsistence”.¹⁷ We might note, an attempt to associate Asian and African students to prostitution and criminality with vague allegations that are not supported by any evidence and, yet also a tendency to present them as victims. What is essentially missing from the article is a discussion of the restrictive immigration rules and high tuition fees for foreign students, which create the conditions for such incidents to take place. Despite the seriousness of the allegations, there has been no follow up of the story in the media which shows that the article was more of an attempt to sell a good story than to engage meaningfully and critically with the debate on international students.¹⁸

¹⁴ ISAC has no website but only a Facebook account where events are announced, available on: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/International-Students-Association-of-Cyprus/659545674064500> [Accessed 7 September 2015].

¹⁵ *Phileleftheros*, 18.2.2015: A student equals 18 tourists: strategic plan to attract foreign students to Cyprus.

¹⁶ *Paideia news*, 14.04.2013: This is how we will attract international students for the Cypriot colleges.

¹⁷ *Simerini*, 15.12.2012: They cheat foreign students.

¹⁸ The issue was brought to the attention of the Cyprus Equality Body by an anti-trafficking NGO. The Equality Body issued a detailed report which highlights the problematic aspects of the immigration law and policy framework on foreign students and proposes policy changes. However, the reports of the Equality Body do not have a binding legal force.

3. Business and investment activities

Concerning the theme of business and investment, the media have not reported at all on small business creation by Indian nationals or on any other activities of Indian entrepreneurs established in Cyprus; the media has instead focused on investment issues between the two countries. Due to the current crisis in the Cypriot economy, local media present any efforts to attract investments from India through a very positive lens. Under the title “Marriage between India and Cyprus?” a popular news portal reports on an official meeting between the Cypriot foreign affairs minister and the Indian vice minister of foreign affairs minister. The aim of the meeting was to strengthen the economic relations between the two countries and to explore possibilities for further cooperation. Both the title and the language used in the body of the text convey a positive attitude towards the strengthening of economic relations between India and Cyprus.¹⁹

In December 2014 the Paphos Chamber of Commerce and Industry, a local organisation of businesses and companies, signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the All India Association of Industries. The aim of the Memorandum was to explore cooperation in the fields of health and wellness, tourism, real estate development, information and technology. The signing of the agreement was reproduced by the media which depicted it positively as a part of “continuous efforts to support local economy, to attract investments and to demonstrate extroversion”.²⁰ Earlier the Ambassador of India had formal visits with the Paphos Chamber of Commerce and Industry to discuss opportunities to strengthen cooperation in the fields of trade, business and tourism. Media reports on the meeting described the Indian market as a “grand opportunity” for Cypriot businesses and underlined the historical ties between Cyprus and India.²¹ Another article reported on a visit of members of the Cyprus Investment Promotion Association to different cities in India. The aim of the visit was to promote Cyprus as an investment destination for Indian enterprises. The article quoted Cypriot and Indian officials stating that good political relations between the two countries should lead to closer cooperation in the field of business and trade.²²

Overall, articles discussing prospects of cooperation between Cyprus and India in the field of business and investment receive very positive coverage in the local media. The historical ties between the two countries, their common trajectories from British colonies to independent states and their mutual support in political issues are often invoked. There is the idea that strengthening economic relations is both viable and important.

¹⁹ *Sigmalive*, 11.4.2013: Marriage between Cyprus and India?.

²⁰ *Sigmalive*, 11.12.2014, Memorandum of Cooperation between the Paphos Chamber of Industry and Indian businesspeople.

²¹ *Kathimerini*, 29.09.2014, The Paphos Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Indian Ambassador discussed the development of business relations.

²² *Phileleftheros*, 16.10.2013: The aim is to reinstate the good image of Cyprus.

4. Labour market

Cyprus grants three types of work permits to non-EU nationals: a) domestic work permits b) permits for employment at a foreign company registered in Cyprus and c) general employment permits.²³ All permits except the one for the personnel of foreign companies are subject to a labour market test and are granted for a maximum of four years. Until 2012 Cyprus did not have a comprehensive scheme for attracting and recruiting highly-skilled migrant workers. All migrant workers had to apply through the general labour migration scheme and their stay was in principle on a short-term basis (up to four years). An exception had been the case of professionals employed by foreign companies.²⁴ Foreign companies with activities in Cyprus have been allowed to recruit or transfer to Cyprus certain categories of highly-paid personnel for an unlimited number of years.²⁵

In 2012 Cyprus transposed the 2009 Blue Card Directive by incorporating its provisions in the Aliens and Immigration Law.²⁶ This was the first time that a legislative framework regulating the recruitment of highly-skilled migrants was set.²⁷ Even though the Blue Card Directive is formally transposed, its provisions have never been applied in practice; following a Parliamentary decision Cyprus has set the volumes of admission under the Blue Card Directive to zero and therefore does not grant any permits for highly-skilled employment. This issue of the non application of the Blue Card has not received any attention in the local media.

According to the High Commission of India in Cyprus, a significant portion of Indian nationals working in Cyprus hold a residence and work permit as professionals in multinational companies. The largest share of Indian workers are computer engineers and software programmers in foreign companies and multinational corporations. For example, one large corporation alone, AMDPCS, employs over 360 Indians in the Information Technology sector. The labour market experience of this group of Indians, however, has not attracted any media attention.

Recently a case of trafficking for the purposes of labour exploitation of a group of eight Punjabi agricultural workers received considerable and detailed media attention. Allegedly, the recruitment and entry of the migrants in Cyprus took place legally and via agents who registered them as domestic workers to bogus employers. Upon their arrival in Cyprus they were transferred to farms in various rural areas across the country where they had to work under exploitative conditions to pay back the debt they had incurred from the agents. One of the articles reporting on the case employed a dramatic tone with the title: "Indian slaves in animal barns". The article then presents the personal stories of some of the migrant workers involved in the case, narrates the exploitation and abuse they were subjected to and uses metaphors such as "they were treated like animals" to describe their

²³ The third type essentially refers to any other type of work except for domestic work and work at a foreign company registered in Cyprus. See generally the website of the Migration Department, available on: http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/CRMD/crmd.nsf/page07_en/page07_en?OpenDocument [Accessed 7 September 2015].

²⁴ Foreign companies or multinational corporations that fulfill certain requirements in relation to the nationality of their shareholders and their investment capital are eligible to recruit TCNs under special conditions set in the Council of Ministers decision n.64.693 of 29 November 2006.

²⁵ These categories are: a) Directors, partners, general and departmental managers with a minimum annual salary of 41,006 Euro (up to five persons per company), b) other key personnel with a minimum annual salary between 20,503 and 41,005 Euro (there are no temporary restrictions for the residence permits of this group) and c) assistant personnel (for this category a labour market test applies and there can be temporary restrictions to their residence permits).

²⁶ Law 41(I)/2012, 27 April 2012.

²⁷ Along with Austria and Greece, Cyprus was late in transposing the Directive and received warnings (reasoned opinions under Art. 258 Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union) from the European Commission to bring national law into line with EU legislation.

experience.²⁸ In the next days the case was reported in all major media, which, in a similar tone and spirit discussed how the migrant workers were deceived by an international network of smugglers.²⁹

While all the media reports on the case expressed sympathy for the plight of the Indian workers, the accountability of abusive employers was not discussed. What is really remarkable, however, is that the discussion of the event appears to be detached from the systemic problems of the Cypriot labour immigration regime which makes independent entry for low-skilled workers particularly onerous. In this way, the media avoided looking at those state policies which open the door to the forms of abuse and exploitation all articles condemned. Against this background, the case of labour exploitation and abuse of the Punjabi workers is depicted as a set of appalling, shockingly sad but nonetheless, personal stories, instead of the product of a problematic labour immigration regime. Some media sources mention that the workers were granted the status of victim of trafficking which entitles them to protection from deportation. However, as the incident is recent it is difficult to give a follow up to the case.

5. Culture

Currently, there is an emerging interest in familiarising Cypriot society with some aspects of Indian culture. Under the auspices of a local cultural and research foundation and of the High Commission of India in Cyprus the “NAMASTE INDIA: Festival of Indian culture in Cyprus” was organised in early April 2015. The festival included a photography exhibition, an exhibition of textiles and saris and the projection of a film. Local media, especially those targeting a youth audience, informed about the organisation of the event. In these articles Indian culture is described with adjectives such as “fascinating”, “rich”, “exotic”, “fragrant”, “mystifying” and “interesting”, all of which convey a positive attitude towards the event.³⁰ Prior to this, other Indian music, art and gastronomy happenings were portrayed positively in the local media, something which tends to underline the exoticness of Indian culture.³¹

It is interesting to note that while these festivals and cultural events could provide an opportunity for integration and genuine cultural exchange, in reality they seem detached from the Indian community actually living in Cyprus. Apart from officials such as Indian diplomats at the High Commission of India in Cyprus, no other members of the local Indian community seem to participate in the festivals. The media when reporting on the organisation of the events do not discuss the absence of the local Indian community: it is taken for granted.

In an article reporting a Bollywood night by the Indian High Commission, the author lightly mocks the fact that the event while cultural in its nature it mostly targeted at Russian business people based in Cyprus. The author states: “200 people mainly from...Russian business circles were invited by the Indian Commissioner as an expression of friendship but also of business cooperation with Cyprus in the background”.³²

Overall, we can say that the message conveyed is that India and Indian culture are fascinating and worthy of exploration, but at the same time distant and alien to Cypriot society.

²⁸ *Sigmalive*, 24.2.2015: Indian slaves in animal barns.

²⁹ *Simerini*, 30.3.2015: Network exploiting Indians; *Politis Newspaper*, 7.4.2015: Network with bogus employers exploiting Indians; *Phileleftheros*, 9.4.2015: Mayor and doctors involved in the network with the Indians.

³⁰ *City Free Press*, 16.3.2015: India in Cyprus for 7 days; *Time Out Cyprus*, 16.3.2015: The culture of India invades Cyprus for 7 days.

³¹ *Kathimerini*, 26.12.2014: Music from India by excellent musicians; *City Free Press*, 26.3.2014: Indian Food and Culture Festival at Hilton Cyprus.

³² *Sigmalive News*, 8.6.2014: Bollywood Night in Cyprus.

6. Crime reporting

Given that the Indian community is small, media reporting on crimes committed by or against Indian nationals is limited. Nonetheless in the few examples of such media reporting we can observe a pattern referring to the alleged perpetrator or to the victim as “Indian” even though the nationality was not in any way related to the committed crime. When reporting on a robbery committed in the city of Larnaca, the newspaper apart from emphasising that the perpetrators were Indians, further mentions that they are married to Europeans, even though this fact was irrelevant to the crime.³³ Thus there is a double xenophobic message conveyed which encompasses both Indian and European migrant identity. Referring to the nationality of foreign perpetrators or victims is a tendency in Cypriot media in relation to various migrant communities. On the other hand, indigenous nationality is rarely considered relevant in crime reporting and is often omitted.

7. Integration initiatives

Recently several projects co-funded by the EU aimed at the integration of migrants have been implemented in all cities in Cyprus. The projects target TCNs in general and have no specific focus on the Indian community. The projects, some of which have been completed and others are currently being implemented, aim at providing services to migrants in order to facilitate their integration into Cypriot society and to foster intercultural dialogue between migrant communities and the indigenous population. Some of the services offered for free to TCNs through the integration projects are: English and computer classes; organisation of intercultural events; psychological support; workshops on Cyprus’ history and culture; and information desks in some cities. Major media published short informative reports on the projects and described these initiatives as tools to create open societies and fight racism.³⁴ Most of the articles, however, highlight the fact that the initiatives are targeting “legally resident migrants” thus establishing an unnecessary binary between legal/illegal migrants. One blog post had a particularly positive stance on the integration project being implemented in the city of Limassol. The post went beyond stating details about the project to mention that migrant communities are numerous and diverse, form an integral part of the local society and offer vital services to the community through their work. The text was also accompanied by photos of multicultural events taking place in the framework of the integration project.³⁵

Apart from the courses and services offered in the context of the abovementioned projects, the Ministry of Education and Culture through its Adult Education Centres, offers a range of courses to promote life-long learning and vocational training. Participation in the courses, which take place in all cities and in various rural areas, is subject to a small fee. The Adult Education Centres offer Greek language classes to migrants and non-Greek speakers living in Cyprus for free. Unlike the aforementioned projects aiming specifically at migrants’ integration, the classes offered in the Centres are open to all regardless of immigration status.³⁶

³³ *Sigmalive News*, 1.12.2014: Four days detention to two Indians for robbery in Larnaca.

³⁴ *Phileleftheros*, 30.6.2014: The goal is the effective integration of migrants; *Sigmalive News*, 21.1.2015: The municipalities of Nicosia are open to the integration of migrants; *Sigmalive News*, 9.3.2015: Information Desk for Migrants in Nicosia; *Paphos Press*, 27.1.2015: Building an open society in Paphos.

³⁵ *I foni tis Lemesou*, 13.3.2014: Limassol: A city, the whole world.

³⁶ See http://www.moec.gov.cy/epimorfotika/en/learn_greek.html [Accessed 7 September 2015].

8. Religion

The Cypriot media shows very limited interest to report on religious matters that concern the local Indian community, or in fact, any migrant community. A high percentage of the indigenous population belongs to the Greek Orthodox Church and there is not much interest in exploring other religions beyond Christianity. The general indifference or lack of awareness of the society towards other religions is also reflected in the way the media approach issues related to non-dominant religions in Cyprus. There is no information in the media regarding Indian religious festivals taking place in Cyprus or places of worship frequented by Indians living in the country. This lack of information could lead one to believe that there are no religious practices related to Hinduism or Sikhism taking place in Cyprus. But this is clearly not the case.

In November 2014 the holy book of the Sikh religion (Grand Sahib) was transferred to Cyprus following the petition of the local Sikh community. The event was without doubt very important for the local Sikh community which had lobbied for about eleven years to achieve the arrival of the holy book. Nonetheless, the event received barely any attention from the local media; there is only a very brief account in one of the daily nationwide newspapers. The five-line article firstly states that the holy book was received at the airport by hundreds of Sikh believers who were accompanied by police forces. The writer then gave some general information on the Sikh religion practised by 30 million people in India.³⁷ It is remarkable that the article gives no further information regarding the Sikh community in Cyprus despite mentioning that the holy book was received by a large group of Sikhs living in the country. This was in fact the only recent media report on a religion-related issue concerning the local Indian community.

9. Conclusion

A theme that emerges from the analysis is that of the invisibility of the local Indian community in Cypriot media. The analysis shows that local media demonstrates a very limited interest in the Indian community and Indian culture(s) as part of Cypriot society. When the media does engage it is often on the occasion of a very dramatic and negative event such as in the recent case of trafficking and exploitation of the Punjabi workers. This tendency is not only reflected in the way the local media engages with the Indian community but extends to all migrant communities living in the country.

The problematic approach of Cypriot media towards immigration and migrant communities has been highlighted in a recent study on media and migration coordinated by the Cyprus University of Technology and two civil society organisations. The study found that the discourse of the mainstream media in Cyprus tends to frame migration and migrants primarily as a problem and to overemphasize irregular migration and trafficking. Against this background, the media tends to present migrants either as a problem or as victims or to disregard them altogether. The study identified two main reasons for the invisibility of migrants in local media: the top-bottom approach in the way the Cypriot media operates, which makes changing attitudes particularly difficult and the lack of knowledge and training of journalists on migration issues and pluralism.³⁸

The media seems to be much keener to look at certain aspects of Indian culture such as gastronomy, music and art while framing them as something exotic and distant.

In contrast, when the media reports on issues related to business and investment the difference in the approach is notable. In these cases the coverage is extensive, the tone of the articles is particularly

³⁷ *Politis Newspaper*, 14.11.2014: In Cyprus the “Bible” of the Sikh: hundreds welcome it in Larnaca.

³⁸ Migration in the Media, Study on the approach of the media on issues concerning immigration and TCNs, Press Release available (in Greek) on: <http://migrationinthemedia.eu/news/41-in-the-news> [Accessed 23 June 2015].

positive and the authors always highlight the fact that the two countries have historical ties and amicable relations. Given the context of the current crisis in the Cypriot economy there is a celebratory spirit when the media report on the prospect of investment by Indian companies in Cyprus. The idea of the traditionally amicable relations between India and Cyprus is always reflected and emphasized in media reports when they refer to efforts the two countries are making in order to revitalize their economic relations.

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Appendix. Newspapers, magazines and news portals consulted

City Free Press: popular online news portal (in Greek) focusing on youth culture.

I foni tis Lemesou: weekly newspaper with a regional focus on the city of Limassol and blog (in Greek).

Ikypros: online news portal (in Greek).

Kathimerini: daily national newspaper in printed and online version (in Greek).

Phileleftheros: daily national newspaper in printed and online version (in Greek). It is the most widely circulated and oldest newspaper in Greek in Cyprus.

Pafos press: online news portal with a regional focus on the city of Paphos (in Greek).

Paideia news: online news portal focusing on education issues (in Greek).

Politis Newspaper: daily national newspaper in printed and online version (in Greek).

Sigmalive News: Popular online news portal (in Greek).

Simerini: daily national newspaper in printed and online version (in Greek). It tends to have a right-wing political orientation.

www.24h.com.cy: online news portal (in Greek).