'The Poor have been Raped': An Analysis of Politicised Collective Identity in Facebook Groups against the Financial Crisis in Cyprus

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Abstract

This paper investigates the content of collective identities as constructed in Facebook groups created in protest against the haircut in 2013 in Cyprus. Given its supplementary role to offline social action, we use Facebook as a research domain and data gathering tool. Drawing on the concept of politicised collective identity we undertake a qualitative content analysis of the posts in three Facebook groups. The analysis reveals two main forms of collective identification. The first presents a rather common form of collective identity that is informed ideologically by nationalism. The second is built upon a strong anti-president rhetoric, echoing the arguments of the opposition parties. The 'banal' nature of such identities probably go a long way in accounting for the limited potential for collective action – unlike some of the other European crisis countries.

Introduction

The objective of this paper is to explore how online social media contributed to the protest actions in Cyprus against the austerity measures and the haircut in 2013, and in particular, how members of protest groups in Facebook constructed their collective identities. Facebook, or rather any online social media is perceived as a new space of protest action which might, according to the literature, constitute another parallel or supplementary way of protest (Valenzuela *et al.*, 2012). Focusing on the study of social protest in Cyprus is intriguing for two main reasons: The first one relates to the financial crisis and the wave of protests triggered in a context which does not have a legacy in social action but is contrarily characterised by apathy and abstention from political activism (Katsourides, 2013). Since April 2012 when Cyprus signed a bailout agreement (Memorandum) with the Troika (European Commission, European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund), the island officially took its place among the group of

'crisis countries' in the Eurozone (together with Greece, Spain, Portugal and Ireland). Despite the fact that Cyprus was the last among the Eurozone countries to sign a memorandum agreement with the Troika, it had to implement an unprecedented rescue plan that until that moment no one could have anticipated. As expected, this has triggered protest actions by citizens who demonstrated against the austerity measures and the rescue plan in an effort to prevent an abrupt change to their financial situation.

The second reason that makes the study of social protest in Cyprus so thought-provoking is linked to the fact that for the first time in the Cyprus context, protests did not only take place offline but also online with the use of online social media. Even though the field of social movements and protest action online is new, there are a considerable number of studies which explain the connection between new media and protest along with the different forms of identities and actions that are constructed online.

Drawing mainly on social psychological theories of collective action such as collective identity theory and, more specifically, the concept of politicised collective identities (Simon and Klandermans, 2001), the study addresses identity issues as they are negotiated in the posts by members in selected Facebook groups. The analytical goal initially is to locate and identify the meaning of politicised collective identities adopted by the group members as they are constructed and elaborated in the Facebook posts. Secondly, the study focuses on the ways in which the constructed online politicised collective identities represent the protest actions mainly in terms of shared grievances that define the categories of 'us' and 'others' as well as calls for offline action. To end, the study places emphasis on interpreting the accounts regarding online politicised collective identities vis-à-vis their link to the offline protest movement against the crisis.

In the next section the role played by online social media will be briefly addressed together with their use in protest actions based on the emerging literature on social movements and collective identities. Subsequently the theoretical framework of politicised collective identities will be discussed as well as the way it is operationalised in order to explore this area too in the present study. The section on methodology is undertaken next, followed by the results of the analysis which are presented before concluding the paper with remarks and suggestions for future research.

Social Protest through Online Social Media

While the emergence of new and transnational social movements such as the 'Arab Spring', the Indignados, 'the Occupy Movement' and, more recently, the Gezi park uprisings (in May 2013) have been examined in relation to the use of online media, their connection is less clear in the literature. For example, Castells (2012) in his recent work explores the relation between social movements like 'The Indignados movement' and 'The Occupy

movement' with online social media. While the emphasis is on the power of networks as spaces par excellence, which facilitate new forms of political participation, Castells leaves aside the complex dynamics between participation, identity transformation, autonomy and continuity of social movements within online social media. At the empirical level, researchers in the wider field of media and internet studies claim that online media and in particular social media have progressively become an integral tool for social protest action since they have transformed 'political action and long established mechanisms of social movements organisation, communication and mobilisation in various ways' (Theocharis *et al.*, 2015, p. 204). For the purposes of the present study, the existing literature that elaborates on the association between online social media and collective identities is discussed below.

Concentrating on the study of collective identities in online social media, researchers have procured mixed results. Departing from Bennett and Segerberg (2012), we encounter their concept of 'connective action', which opposes the traditional notion of collective action. They argue that digitally networked social action 'that relies on mediated networks for substantial aspects of their organisation' entails an openness, which allows for the spread of personal frames that 'overshadow collective frames' (*ibid.*, p. 765). So, 'connective action' can be seen as the outcome of the newly established structure of communication set by online social media which can require higher personal involvement from individuals in terms of input (Anduiza *et al.*, 2014). Hence, if connective action is what explains social action in online social media, which is enabled by constant individual or collective content production (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012) then this insinuates a transformed notion of collective identity. Studies have shown that social media use for social action is associated with the construction of weaker identity ties which facilitate the multilateral interactivity of users as well as the extension and management of their social networks (Bennett, 2008; Valenzuela *et al.*, 2012). Yet while collective identities being constructed or reconstructed through online social media may be weaker, there is evidence that online social media that hold together collective narratives, which incorporate the diversity of personalised action frames, may accelerate the identity formation processes (Anduiza *et al.*, 2014). To illustrate this, Baym (2010) discusses a new phenomenon called 'networked collectivism' where individuals can construct a shared but at the same time distributed group identity, sometimes less coherent than previous forms of unified collective identities. In a complementary point of view, Kavada (2009) argues that the available communication tools in online social media allow for both reciprocity and interactivity, which are significant not only for bonding but also for the construction of collective identities online. Having a different focus, Jasper (2011) in his recent work highlighted the importance of 'an emotional energy', defined as a 'mood of excitement and enthusiasm' around a common identity, as another explanation for protest participation. In the same vein, Gerbaudo (2012) contends that within online social media individuals indeed can construct collective identities.

The brief discussion of the existing literature on online social media and its impact on social protest and collective identities leads to the conclusion that social media is central for political activism (Howard, 2011). In addition, social media is positively correlated with protest, though not for all types of protest. Demonstrations are one type of protest that is closely linked to the use of social media in contrast to petitions, which seem not to be affected by social media use (Valenzuela, 2013). This argument raises the question regarding the actual role of online social media in relation to social movements and actions that take place offline. Providing an answer to this question is crucial since it elicits the theoretical premises on which the present study is based. In order to answer this question we draw upon recent empirical studies, which consider online social media as amplifiers of traditional forms of protest rather than new forms of protest (Valenzuela *et al.*, 2012). In this sense the connection of online social media with offline actions is strong (Caren and Gaby, 2011; Earl *et al.*, 2014) but supplementary (Valenzuela, 2013). More explicitly online social media is conceived as technology or as space where people mediate their political interests, so it is considered as a tool rather than a cause for social action (Bond *et al.*, 2012; Kroh and Neiss, 2012). Along these lines, we have pursued Valenzuela's view that 'Facebook is a resource for creating collective identity' (Valenzuela *et al.*, 2012, p. 311).

As a final point, another important conclusion that emerges from the existing literature is that although the number of studies on protest is progressively increasing, more content-based approaches will provide a better account of the dynamics and impact of online social media particularly in the construction of online collective identities – a necessary constituent of social protest. That said, the present study attempts to contribute in this regard by concentrating on unfolding the meanings of politicised collective identities that were constructed in Facebook groups as part of the protest movement against the financial crisis in Cyprus.

The Concept of 'Politicised Collective Identities'

Identity constitutes a basic concept in social movement studies (Azzi *et al.*, 2011) since, according to the literature, people's identification with a social group increases their inclination to protest as regards defending the rights or claims of this group (Klandermans *et al.*, 2002). In particular, the concept of collective identity is directly linked with almost every theoretical perspective and empirical study focusing on protest action (Hunt and Benford, 2004). Due to its popularity, defining collective identity can be a laborious task and this is why there is a high number of similar definitions but not a consensual one (Snow, 2001). Nevertheless, adopting a definition is a fundamental step in building the theoretical framework of the present study. In order to select the appropriate definition, we have turned to the disciplinary distinction that van Stekelenburg (2013) emphasises

between sociologists and psychologists. While the sociological elaboration of collective identities is more macroscopic, we have sought to adopt the psychological explanation given the research goal of our study. The psychological understanding of collective identity has its roots in a long tradition of research in social psychology, starting from the classic social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978). The latter treats collective actions as the results of the strategies adopted by minority groups in the process of social change. Even so, identification with the group determines the individuals' perceptions of socio-structural characteristics and predicts the likelihood of individuals' participation in social change processes. Social identity: a) underlines group-based emotions and brings together the perception of injustice and collective action; b) politicises and, thus, motivates collective action by channelling broader social identities into more specific protest organisations; and c) predicts both structural and incidental types of collective disadvantage. Based on this theory, social identity is understood as a well-defined entity rather than a socially constructed category or a social strategy that can be prone to change in the course of action. This means that social identity fails to explain social change although it describes the transition from 'I' to 'we' at an individual level. To attend this weakness, Simon and Klandermans (2001) developed another theory of collective identity in accordance with collective identification, which is built gradually within a series of events that politicise the individuals and transform their interactions with the social environment. Such events, like protests, are the collective actions that principally contribute to collective identification. The latter arises as a result of the salience, intensity and internalisation of the group's norm of participation into action (van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, 2009).

By linking group identification to participation in political protest, Simon and Klandermans (2001) introduced the concept of 'politicised collective identity'. Here the emphasis is on the notion of power and, more specifically, the struggle for power between social groups within society, which is represented in terms of political group activity (*ibid*., p. 323). In other words, members of a group intentionally engage themselves in a struggle for compensating the group's claims, sharing common goals, values, identifications and an understanding that their social action takes place in a wider social context. This means that the group's identity 'breeds' and is 'bred' by the wider dilemmas, dynamics and discourses involved in the power struggle between various social groups. According to Klandermans (2014, p. 1), collective identity becomes politicised when people who share a specific identity take part in political action on behalf of that collectivity. Politicised identities are in constant change since their meaning is contingent upon the context in which they are constructed, such as the power struggle in which the movement is involved (Polletta, 2009; Klandermans, 2014).

Operationalising Politicised Collective Identities

This paper draws on the concept of 'politicised collective identity' in order to answer the following research question:

> *What is the meaning of politicised collective identities as these are constructed by the members of Facebook protest groups which are engaged in political action against the financial crisis in Cyprus?*

To address this research question it is necessary to operationalise 'politicised collective identity' so that its meaning(s) can be unravelled. We focus on the three constituent components that are often proposed to occur in a sequence departing from a) awareness of shared grievances, through b) adversarial attributions to c) the involvement of society. Below, we discuss these three components since the aim of the present study is to explore the meanings attributed to each one of them in the selected Facebook posts but without considering importance in relation to their sequence. This is because the major analytical emphasis is on the meaning of politicised identities rather than the process of their construction.

a) *Raised Awareness of Shared Grievances*: This component refers to a common feeling of deprivation, insult, or violation of rights, values, an injustice or a moral indignation that unites individuals in a group which acts against this perceived injustice (Tajfel and Turner, 1986; Smith *et al.*, 1994 Klandermans, 1997). This feeling, which is conceived as a psychological status is considered a necessary condition for the emergence of politicised collective identity (Klandermans, 1997). This concept has been very influential and has led to the emergence of one of the core theories in social movements, namely the Relative Deprivation Theory (Walker and Pettigrew, 1984). In order to clarify politicised collective identities, we should concentrate on identifying the raised awareness about shared grievances, which means the degree to which members of a group are conscious of what they consider collectively as a grievance. Shared grievances can be detected in various forms, such as: i) injustice or illegitimate inequality usually vis-à-vis other social groups (Klandermans, 1997). The shared grievance in this case is attributed to some sort of violation of equality that should apply in respect to the social groups compared, such as North and South, poor and rich; ii) suddenly imposed grievances (Walsh, 1988), which describe grievances that are caused by accidents or shocking events; iii) violation of values or principles that are associated with the emergence of new social movements (Kriesi, 1993) and iv) privileges under threat (Simon and Klandermans, 2001). In the present study, by analysing the written posts of the selected Facebook groups configured against the financial crisis in Cyprus our aim is to identify the shared grievances and the forms in which they are presented as discussed here.

b) *Adversarial Attributions*: The second distinct component concerns defining intergroup relations and, more specifically, the 'others' against whom the actions of a group (e.g. social movement) are directed as well as the 'us' group. Defining the 'in-group' and the 'out-group' is a basic premise of classic social identity theory that brings to the fore the emphasis on similarities and commonalities characterising the in-group and the differences that diversify the in-group from the out-group (Tajfel and Turner, 1986).

In politicised collective identities the meaning of the 'others' takes a rather intense form since it is conceived in very antagonistic terms, usually in terms of 'enemy'. This means that we observe high intergroup polarisation, in which the categories of 'us' and 'others' serve as powerful tools for interpreting social reality and adopt positions regarding all social and political matters (van Stekelenburg, 2013). The usual form of an enemy can be a specific out-group, an authority, or more generally the 'system' (Simon and Klandermans, 2001). The analysis centres on identifying the categories constructing the 'us' and 'others' in the posts of the members of the selected Facebook groups.

c) *Involvement of Society (Action)*: The third characteristic of politicised collective identities points to the form of action promoted or undertaken by the members of the group. In other words, it refers to a need to take punitive action or compensation from the identified 'enemy' (Simon and Klandermans, 2001). The type of action that is advanced (or the plea for it) is normally confrontational, directed against the government or similar actors with political power. Actions are also directed toward the general public to exercise pressure to take-up a position or mobilise it to participate in the group's social actions. As Simon and Klandermans put it, actions aim to 'transform the confrontation into a more comprehensive power struggle forcing society at large to take sides either with their in-group or with their opponent' (2001, p. 326). Politicisation of the action takes place once the power struggle triangulates and this happens with the involvement of society at large.

Methodology

The bedrock of this study centres on studying material which is contained in the most popular online social media, namely Facebook. Facebook is increasingly used for social research purposes. Two strands of empirical research using Facebook are identified in the literature. The first strand uses Facebook as a variable to be tested or explored, hence advancing research questions such as 'why people use Facebook' and so on (Wilson *et al.*, 2012). The second conceives Facebook as a useful and ongoing database of social activity where information is constantly added (*ibid.*, 2012, p. 204), a fact that makes it an accessible research tool. In this second strand of research, Facebook is not under exploration *per se* but it is perceived as an online media site that facilitates other social phenomena. By looking at the research question that guides the present study, it becomes

evident that the second strand of research is adopted. This is because Facebook is utilised as an online sphere of social behaviour (*ibid*., 2012), which hosts the interactions and views of members of protest groups against the financial crisis in Cyprus: Such interactions and views are what we consider to be the data of this study. Given the increasing popularity of Facebook as a research tool, and despite the considerable volume of research dedicated to it, there is fragmentation regarding the research methodologies employed. That said, our methodological strategy has been developed in order to tackle our research question. Explained in detail below is the type of data collected plus the data mining technique along with the analytical procedure.

Data and Process

The study is based on data collected and extracted from the written material published online in selected Facebook groups – one of the most popular Facebook functionalities. Any Facebook user can create a group by inviting other users to join it based on shared preferences or goals on which the group is constructed. Facebook users, by choosing to join a specific group, declare their orientation on the 'mission' of the group, goals and claims and express their membership. Although joining an online protest group in Facebook may be considered as a thinner form of collective identification, it nevertheless entails a degree of responsibility since the Facebook user declares among her/his friends her/his collective identity knowing that there might be opposite opinions or objections on behalf of some of them (Triga, 2011). In other words, joining a Facebook group on political issues might have repercussions for a Facebook user because it automatically reveals ideological and political positions. As mentioned in previous sections, the selected Facebook groups that were analysed in the present study are seen as supplementary to the wider social movement that was formed against the financial crisis in Cyprus and made its presence visible in the demonstrations that took place mainly during March 2013. Based on this rationale, the assumption is that the common point of reference among the selected groups' members is their interest in the Cyprus crisis, the intervention of Troika and the haircut of bank deposits.

 The groups were selected as a research sample after using the search function in Facebook's webpage to identify those that contained in their title the following keywords in Greek: 'Haircut Deposits' [Κούρεμα Καταθέσεων'], 'Cyprus Haircut Deposits' [Κύπρος Κούρεμα Καταθέσεων'], or 'No Haircut Deposits' ['Οχι Κούρεμα Καταθέσεων']. Groups were probed that were operational during the crucial ten-day bail-in period from 16 March to 26 March 2013, when offline protest action demonstrations were also taking place. A list of Facebook groups and pages appeared which contained the respective terms in their title but not all of them were included in the analysis. In order to select the groups for the analysis a series of criteria was applied. The first criterion was to determine the length of time that groups had been in existence. Facebook groups that were created after the ten-day bail-in

period of analysis were excluded from the final sample. The second criterion concerned structural characteristics in relation to the Facebook platform. It was necessary for groups to express a description in their profile; a feature that verifies the goals of the group and its relevance to the specific issue (e.g. the financial crisis in Cyprus and nationwide demonstrations). Moreover, groups had to exhibit a certain number of 'likes' or members participating in the group. With respect to the latter, our criterion was to identify groups with more than 50 members and 50 likes, a number that is considered a benchmark, since it facilitates the group's appearance in the newsfeed. As a final criterion, groups had to be 'public' otherwise the material generated by the group's members could not be accessed. A public Facebook group allows for all published material attached to the group's 'wall' to be accessible by all Facebook users without the necessity of being members of the group.[1] Three groups met the criteria and are presented in table 1.

In order to investigate the politicised collective identities, we concentrated on the comments posted by the three groups, which form the analytical material of the study. The comments were of two types: a) comments posted by members on the wall of the group and b) hyperlinks that were posted by members on the wall which could either be accompanied by comments or not. Both types of comments were subsequently analysed. The total number of posts examined from the three selected Facebook groups was 205, which also included hyperlinks or posts containing comments and hyperlinks.

Given that the selection of posts took place some time after they had been published on the group's wall a data mining technique was needed to collect them. To perform this task a data mining technique was used based on NodeXL, an open source network analysis and visualisation software, used primarily for network analysis, discovery and exploration of a particular social media (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Additionally, this tool can be used for data mining as an add-in function for Excel 2007 appending network analysis and visualisation features to the spreadsheet. The data entered into the NodeXL template workbook can be converted into a directed graph chart or explored further for the purpose of content analysis (*ibid*). NodeXL has a modular architecture that allows network data to be extracted and imported from specific dates and specific Facebook pages or groups.

Analysis

Following the collection of all respective posts, a qualitative content analysis was used in order to evaluate them (Smith, 1995; Ahuvia, 2008; George, 2008). In qualitative content

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1   The use of material produced by the selected groups' members can be used for research purposes, therefore, no ethical issues are raised because this material is considered to be public based on Facebook regulations (for more detailed information, see 'Privacy Options for Groups' at: [https://www.facebook.com/help/220336891328465], accessed on 29 April 2015.

analysis, the interest, as in traditional content analysis, lies in highlighting the themes that appear in selected texts as well as the interpretation of these themes. The main objective was to search for the various issues that constitute the content of politicised collective identities and proceed with their deciphering. The major analytical strategy involved the identification of 'commonplace' aspects of the accounting practice (Condor and Gibson, 2007, p. 121). This process entails the repeated readings of all the posts that lead to the identification of their themes. Based on the identified themes, all posts were subsequently classified in the three main components of the concept of politicised collective identity – namely those which concerned the raised awareness of shared grievance(s), the definitions of the 'in-group' and 'out-group(s)', and the forms of actions against what was considered to be the group's 'enemy'. The next step involved repetitive readings of the content of each of the three components, which led to a thick description of them.

Table 1: Description of Facebook Groups

GROUP TITLE	MEMBERS	POSTS	HYPERLINKS	HYPERLINKS AND POSTS
1. NO TO THE CATASTROPHIC PLAN OF TROIKA [ΟΧΙ ΣΤΙΣ ΚΑΤΑΣΤΡΟΦΙΚΕΣ ΠΡΟΤΑΣΕΙΣ ΤΗΣ ΤΡΟΙΚΑΣ]	1177	36	16	9
2. NO TO THE HAIRCUT DEPOSITS BY THE PARLIAMENT [ΟΧΙ ΤΗΣ ΒΟΥΛΗΣ ΣΤΟ ΚΟΥΡΕΜΑ ΚΑΤΑΘΕΣΕΩΝ]	749	27	5	7
3. NO TO THE ECONOMIC SELL OUT [ΟΧΙ ΣΤΟ ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΚΟ ΞΕΠΟΥΛΗΜΑ]	137	64	28	13
TOTAL	2063	127	49	29

Results

In this section the constructed meanings of the three basic components of politicised collective identities are deliberated for the selected posts of the three Facebook groups. We endeavoured to present posts from all three groups based on the common meanings attributed to the components of politicised identities rather than to differentiate the posts between the three groups. This choice is justified by the fact that no distinctive discursive

elements were found that differentiate one group from the others. After continuous readings of the material, we concluded that the collected posts from the three groups constitute a single volume of material that may be analysed based on the different lines of argumentation contained therein which impart meaning to politicised identities. Below we discuss the content attributed by the members of Facebook groups to the three components – shared grievances, intergroup relations and the call for action. To make the discussion more vivid we provide characteristic extracts from the posts.

A.   *Raised Awareness of Shared Grievances*

Shared grievances, which are considered to be the glue that binds the members of the groups, have been expressed in five diverse ways. Each one of them emphasises different crucial elements without any conflict existing between them.

A1.   *The Haircut as an Illegitimate Violation of Cyprus Assets*

In the first category shared grievances are expressed as a shared feeling of illegitimate violation against Cyprus. Two main lines of argumentation were encountered. The first constructs the violation as an illegitimate loss of material goods. The illegitimacy is uttered in strong terms, for instance, attributions of 'theft' or 'robbery' that cannot be disputed regarding their negative connotation. Victims are represented as the 'people and their money', or the 'banks and their deposits'. To underline the illegitimacy, vivid metaphors are detected in various posts such as 'steal the bread from our mouth(s)'. Interestingly the 'Russians' or other people's money are described as victims too, a reference that demonstrates the large scale of illegitimacy.

> 'The decision for the haircut was already taken before. The public denials of this fact 1 day before the haircut, was made on purpose so people cannot take [out] their deposits. So banks closed on Friday and until they open[ed] on Tuesday they would have stolen from our accounts our money at the rate agreed last night by the leader of robbery!!'

Nonetheless, the ultimate goal of this robbery is claimed to be the catastrophe and collapse of the Cyprus economy. The latter is built upon logical sequences and effects which derive from the haircut such as 'terrorising people' and the resulting loss of trust in banks. The attribution of blame is directed against a list of actors, including the government and corrupted elites, the banks and the Troika, although Germany is also mentioned as a 'greedy' actor.

> 'My biggest worry at the moment is this Troika haircut that our useless government is about to impose by law, next week and rob our bank accounts up to 10% of our savings and without our approval simply to bail out the crooked banks.'

What distinguishes this first line of argumentation from the second one below is that the illegitimate loss in material goods is represented mostly in assets that were 'stolen' from individuals. Hence, accountability is pointed at the level of the 'agency' rather than as a collective harm. Although it can be represented as 'collective' it is reflected in fewer posts as the majority of them draw emphasis on personal damage. That said; the second line of argumentation constructs the violation as an illegitimate loss of collective goods. The material aspect is typified in terms of the country's 'wealth', which is linked to people's lives and the country's future. To make this even more convincing, the main victims affected by the illegitimacy are sensitive social groups such as young people and the unemployed.

> 'My heart goes [out] to all those young people who live by the day without hope ... and also to the old and vulnerable citizens of our society who are in the middle of this chaos and no-one thinks about the repercussions that this cold Troika robbery will have on their lives... and the 60,000 unemployed what can one say about those families?'

> 'Cyprus is doomed and [it is] time to rethink ways to protect the future of our children and the future generations: where there is no Justice ... there is no legal wrong ...! All is permissible in such a country, robbery included!'

The loss of collective wealth is represented in dramatic terms as a domino process of deprivation affecting social policies and deeds such as the collapse of the health system, the implementation of privatisations, besides salary and pension cuts which will unavoidably affect negatively the social cohesion of Cyprus society. The lists of austerity policies recorded by the groups' members show a high degree of specialised knowledge in the field that is reinforced via the device of footing. This is clarified by providing examples of other crisis cases (i.e. a rhetorical device that aims to add veracity to the current accounts):

> 'If we succumb now by signing the memorandum and mortgage our wealth to these speculators, the result will be for people to be without medicine in the future: privatisation [deals], wage cuts, tax hikes, pension cuts, our society will be hurt. We have the example of Greece. Let them not fool us.'

The austerity measures implemented as a remedy for the financial crisis are constructed as a source of violation. They are rejected not simply as unfair but also as useless policies that have been rejected in the past by the same political actors currently supporting the measures. This behaviour undermines the effectiveness of the proposed measures. To emphasise this, a catalogue of past public announcements and declarations by politicians who were condemning such measures is juxtaposed with their present

actions. The illegitimacy of the proposed measures is given further prominence by portraying them as part of an experiment taking place in Cyprus; hence the effectiveness of the process is still to be tested.

A2. *The Haircut as a Suddenly Imposed Calamity*

The second category of meaning attributed to the shared grievance focuses largely on the way the haircut has been imposed. What is contended is its sudden imposition, a dimension which has also been supported in the literature as a common trait in the way that shared grievances are rationalised in politicised collective identities (Walsh, 1988). In this case grievance is represented in terms of a calamity that violated the people's rights. The fact that it was unexpected, and thus sudden, is deployed in the accounts as a way to foreground the severity of the consequences it has provoked. This is represented through various metaphors which serve to make the descriptions more vivid and create solid, tangible images of calamities in order to strengthen their effect on other members of the group. More specifically, the haircut is parallelised with the 'explosion in Mari',[2] 'the Annan Plan', as well as a 'shocking but predetermined plan', and 'a death penalty'. These metaphors also imply the lack of alternative choices on the part of Cyprus.

> 'Don't you think that the "explosion" caused by the Eurogroup's "initiative" is less painful to our economy than the explosion at Mari? For those who will argue that now we don't have any "dead people", I want to tell them that the dead will start to get stacked, when the suicides appear. Let's find out some statistical info's from the Motherland.'

> 'We are condemned to the death penalty and now they give us the right to choose how we want to die: from the haircut or by direct execution which means exit from the Eurozone. I prefer the second choice. If it is to die I do not want to be tortured first. It is better if they pull the trigger.'

It is interesting to note that the argumentation for constructing shared grievance as a calamity is defended by resorting to emotion and intense images that enforce a specific negative representation of the grievance.

A3. *The Crisis and the Haircut as Part of a Conspiracy against Cyprus*

In the posts of the three Facebook groups a third category of shared grievance has also been identified which is built upon conspiracy rhetoric. According to the literature,

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2   The Evangelos Florakis Naval Base explosion was one of the worst military accidents ever recorded in Cyprus. The incident occurred on 11 July 2011, when 98 containers of military explosive material that had been stored for 2½ years outside in the sun on the Naval Base near the village of Zygi in Limassol, exploded, killing 13 people from military personnel to fire-fighters.

conspiratorial thinking is actually common in social movements in Europe and America (Lipset and Raab, 1970; Groh, 1987). The conspiracy against Cyprus is structured upon two main lines of argumentation. The first represents the haircut as an effective means to inflict harm on Cyprus in order to weaken its position so that the responsible actors gain power in the area and exploit the natural resources of the island. In this sense the true reason for the haircut is insinuated to be geopolitical.

> 'Troika through the EU have both cunningly tried to subjugate economically our little island for geopolitical reasons and steal its new wealth – the natural gas.'

The second line of argumentation represents the conspiracy as a more generalised plot, which is linked to the Cyprus problem. The conspiracy lies in epitomising the haircut as a covert way of conquering Cyprus. Thus, the causal links provided in the posts to justify the veracity of the arguments are informed by the provision of historical events and other causal mechanisms between the past and the present. Historical events are allied with current actions with the intention of drawing similarities and therefore the hidden 'plan' is verified.

A common element in both lines of argumentation is the attribution of extraordinary powers to certain agents to act and control others (i.e. the Troika, Germany), for instance, to design a secret plan, which is an accepted logic in conspiracy theories (Sunstein and Vermeule, 2009). At the same time a process of victimisation is also observed in which the 'weak Cypriots' are associated with a sense of alienation and disaffection from the system; unable to react against the 'enemies' plots. This too is characteristic in conspiratorial thinking according to the literature (Citrin *et al.*, 1975; Graumann, 1987; Berlet, 1992; Goertzel, 1994).

The shared grievance that is constructed by the use of conspiracy theories is explained by the attribution of otherwise inexplicable events (i.e. 'stealing people's money') to intentional action (i.e. 'the Troika' plan to exploit Cyprus' natural resources) due to the unwillingness to accept the possibility that significant negative consequences may be a product of specific system mechanisms (such as market forces) or of simple chance rather than of anyone's plans. This kind of logic seems successful in creating a unifying power among members of the groups in their perceptions of injustice caused by the financial crisis and insecurity (Goertzel, 1994). Overall, constructing a shared grievance in terms of a conspiracy actually evidences what Volkan (1988) suggests: that people often feel a need for a tangible enemy on which to externalise their angry feelings.

> 'Is it over? Or not? We lost a battle but not the war. After this defeat other battles will follow, and other memoranda and haircuts. More pseudo-dilemmas creating fake panic and Asia-minor's disasters, and more Annan-type of Plans for Cyprus will also come. Maybe the name will not be Annan, or Ban Ki-moon or even an idea of our friend, Merkel. Whatever will be discussed it [will] not be for [our] good.'

Although in this category the major characteristic is that the shared grievance is constructed upon a conspiracy, the actual grievance is expressed in terms of threatening existing market opportunities (i.e. the exploitation of national resources). This representation fits with one of the forms of grievances usually described in the literature on politicised collective identities (Simon and Klandermans, 2001).

A4. *Crisis as a Manifestation of Colonial Capitalism*

The fourth category constructs shared grievances among the members of the Facebook groups as a violation of values and ideological principles. The latter is represented mainly as a national injustice but at the same time it is hostile towards capitalism. Such conviction is informed by the ideological resources of what is known as ethno-socialist rhetoric (Hobsbawm, 1991). More specifically, what unites the members who share this construction is their belief that the haircut along with all related decisions adopted by the political elites, domestic and international, are actions which represent 'an invasion' that violated Cyprus as a nation and signify why every act of resistance against such measures is described as an act of 'pride'. Simultaneously, these policies are represented as dangerous outcomes of capitalism, which aim at the destruction of weaker countries by the financially strong ones. A list of vivid expressions depicts this, for example, 'colonial capitalism', 'debtocracy', 'colonies of debt', and so on.

> 'The MPs did the right thing and cast away for good Germany's (EU) Colonial Capitalism – Bravo my little nation, and Bravo MPs who have united against an evil that was about to swallow our country into oblivion! You made us proud and have shown the world a real lesson in democracy, which has been nibbled away like cheese by ravenous rats. The principle of "Right & Just" is been eroded by an international new dark movement and Cyprus was their test case firstly by creating debtocracy and then [to] rob the wealth of nations for absolute control; that, my dear friends is the real New Face of Colonial Capitalism on the rise.'

> 'Our effort should be to change the attempt to stop us from being the next Financial Centre, to become the colony of debt to get their hand[s] on our Natural Gas in the future. Also, to stop the social role of the state in terms of public services, health, education etc. No to the colony of debt, debtocracy to neoliberal system.'

According to the theory of politicised identities, those grievances that are the result of violating values also express a moral outrage against the political actors who dishonoured those values. Such feelings are verbally expressed through individual's indignation or disappointment, which leads to identification with other participants who share the same grievances. Such description correlates with the accounts in Facebook groups that express users' indignation against any political actor who is identified as

responsible for the present situation. It is characteristic that in most relevant posts the justification for the haircut as a national and financial threat for Cyprus is remedied through recourse to emotion, which makes the accounts more convincing.

> 'The struggles of our nation are leading us [like] a lighthouse. Long live March 25th, 1821. Long live Cyprus. Long live the Nation !!!!!'

In order to add objectivity and veracity to the accounts, the users invoke other crisis cases as examples that confirm their fears, which in fact verify that the proposed anti-crisis measures result in 'enslaving' the countries without curing the financial crisis. By recalling other examples in crisis countries, like Greece, Ireland, Iceland and the European South more generally, the users also attempt to derive legitimacy for the instrumental positions they adopt and the radical solutions they propose in order to change the situation. Such solutions refer to the exit of the Eurozone which is purported to be a 'heroic exit' that will lead to the collapse of the EU.

> 'The Troika Group (same actors) tried to apply the same trap on the Irish people and the attached video shows how they refuse NOT to disclose their hidden agenda. They have tried the same on us'.

> 'PEOPLE SAY NO, you saw that your enemies have not realised any of their threats, do not let them fool you now with their propaganda and lies! We have experienced the same in Greece which is today enslaved and people live in hunger and unbearable poverty. WE WILL SAY NO AND WE WILL SEND BACK OUR ASPIRING CONQUERORS!'

> 'An exit by a member state and an exit from the Euro, will be the detonator of dissolution and financial collapse of Europe. Firstly all depositors owing big capitals in Europe will immediately take their money from all European banks FEARING of a haircut in other European countries. Simultaneously, countries likes Spain, Italy will react with backlash since they will go completely bankrupt after the transfer of the capital outside their boundaries. We have to understand. We are the detonator for the end of Europe.'

The way shared grievances are constructed in this category is in accord with one representation of intergroup relations that is described below and personifies the in-group as Cypriots and the out-group as enemies of the nation.

B. *Adversarial Attributions*

In this section the effort to unpack the meaning of the politicised collective identities in the posts of the selected Facebook groups is concentrated on the construction of the in-group and out-group. The logic, on which the categories of 'us' and 'others' are constructed, is rationalised by identifying the common characteristics that people who are

members in a Facebook group share (in-group) as opposed to others (out-group), which are normally represented in negative terms.

The analysis brought to the fore three main versions of intergroup relations that are discussed in detail below. In all versions the in-group is attributed with similar qualifications and with a basic reference to 'the people of Cyprus'. The out-group is symbolised in more intense terms such as an 'enemy'; an aspect that concurs with the concept of politicised collective identities.

B1. *The Cunning Troika and the EU against Cypriots*

In this line of argumentation users define the in-group as the Cypriots. In particular, the unifying element is identified in relation to two attributes: a) the nation and the danger of losing the national sovereignty and b) the difficult financial situation of the nation rather than that of its individuals. These two characteristics become apparent in accounts such as 'us – brothers of a proud nation Cypriots' and 'us – as debtors' ('we are currently slaves suffering from hunger').

> 'A PROUD NATION of Cypriots shows once again that during times of adversity and national hardships, they are a united proud nation. With dignity, maturity and solidarity, they have shown the world and all the others who seek the destruction of the Republic that Cypriots will never submit to injustice. The young, the old, housewives and business persons have behaved with the utmost civilised manner on the very first day of bank re-opening ... Calm and composed they lined up in silence to show Troika and those international bankers that they will never be able to break down this nation['s] spirit of defiance ...'

> 'Our Cyprus should not be left in the hands of our supposed European allies!! The Cypriot parliament should not vote in favour of the Eurogroup measures!!! If Cyprus gets into this international game of opportunists (see George Soros), there will be no way back!!!! Don't let the last Greek bastion be lost!!! Brothers we are with you!!!'

Cypriots are opposed to a common enemy, which is mainly chronicled as the Troika. The latter is represented in strong negative language, often using an ironic tone such as: 'the gang of the TROIKA', or '*Troika, driven by a cold and brutal hidden agenda*'. Thus, the Troika is constructed as an actor whose behaviour conforms to a hidden political and economic agenda, which has only recently been revealed to Cyprus, and under whose authority a new world system is now being imposed where nations lose their sovereignty. This is clarified by the deployment of the attribute 'conquerors' to the Troika. In addition, the EU is equally represented as a negative 'other' since it is perceived as part of the Troika, consisting purely of 'Brussels' bankers'. So the role of the EU is limited to a negative economic representation of being 'financially evil'. There is also an indirect attribution of

blame to the national leadership, which is rendered responsible for its surrender to the enemies or for having assimilated with the enemies in terms of common principles and ideologies.

> 'The coward give-in to Troika means loss of national sovereignty, concession of national wealth and a total destruction of Cyprus the way we know it. PEOPLE SAY NO – you saw that your enemies were not able to materialise any of their threats, do not get caught now with their propaganda and lies. We have lived the same in Greece and we saw the results – we are currently slaves suffering from hunger and unbearable poverty. We will say no and send back our conquerors!'

To protect Cyprus as a nation from the 'enemies' and to ultimately end the financial crisis, the users proposed the exit from the Eurozone as the proclaimed salvage that is shared by the in-group. Exit from the Eurozone is thus represented as a liberating solution that would allow Cyprus and its people to decide on their own fate. Again, this euroscepticist rhetoric is grounded on nationalism, which has been observed in other crisis contexts (Serricchio *et al.*, 2013; Clements *et al.*, 2014).

> 'What Troika has done to Cyprus, is a strong reminder why we should get out of the Euro, regain our right to decide our own destiny and the sooner the better!'

> 'Since Europe is failing its people, let's get our freedom back and drop the EU for it has been an absolute failure for the people of Europe and for us ... let's drop those Brussels' bankers once and for all ... and clean out this place from corruption and regain our dignity as a nation for the people ... . BUT sadly we have puppets and NOT leaders, that is a problem!'

B2. *The President and National Political Elites against the People*

Another construction of the category of 'us' is described with more abstract and less defined characteristics such as 'people' without any other specific common denominator. The unifying element of the in-group is mostly its opposition to the out-group. The latter refers to the political elites, namely, the Cyprus President, ministers, MPs and parties. So the reasoning upon which the opposition is built is not the bailout *per se*, but instead the inadequacies of the political elites to pursue their assigned tasks. Starting with the president, who is at the centre of the attribution of blame, the main representation is: a) unreliable vis-à-vis his electoral promises; b) a traitor, since he betrayed his people's needs and behind their backs he opted to serve others' interests; c) incompetent since he was not capable of resistance against other actors who were responsible for the unwanted policies; d) powerless, since he failed to stand up and face the political situation, and e) arrogant because he failed to show empathy with poor people – he is wealthy, having secured his

own deposits. Such representations are present in many accounts and can be detected in a series of phrases, for instance; 'Mr President, you try to justify the unjustifiable', 'we need a real and responsible president', 'traitors of the nation', 'thief of the national pride', 'we need politicians with guts to face their European "friends"', 'we have incompetent people governing our nation', 'immediate resignation of all [of] them' and 'the crisis need[s] a leader – we don't have him', or 'petty politician'. Some of these phrases are uttered in an ironic tone or even loudly bellowed to undermine even more the adequacy of the President for his position, 'Master Anastasiades', 'he negotiated hard!', 'the crisis needs a leader!!!!',[3] and 'he almost said We Won'.

> 'With sadness we attend the declaration of President Anastasiades (the President whose main slogan in the recent election campaign, was "The crisis needs a leader"). For a president who receives instructions from technocrats of Troika and his "friend" Wolfgang Schaeuble, he is doing well President Nikos Anastasiades. The only thing they did not tell us is that "We won"! He does not lack the Presidential allure required, despite the storm that the country is facing, especially after his "initiative" to accept the haircut of depositors last Friday (which was the beginning of the end for Cyprus Banks and the Economy). He doesn't even consider potential resignation that would be the most honourable act after a series of amateur handlings regarding the financial crisis.'

While the President is the central actor to blame for the crisis, there is certainly animosity expressed against other political actors, domestic ('the politicians sold out the country') or international ('Troika's technocrats', 'Schaeuble', and others). The major incident that is deployed as an example in order to vividly portray the deficiency of the political elites is the first Eurogroup meeting in Brussels, in which the Cyprus leadership accepted the haircut. Users, by constructing the out-group as the political elites, deploy a common device in politicised collective identities that contrives to make those who hold the power to be the main enemy of the people. On balance, in this specific line of argumentation, the representations of 'us' and 'other' is informed by a strong anti-governmental rhetoric that has also been used by other parties in the opposition. The users, however, do not make direct reference to other parties with whom they share their views.

> 'Mr. President the agreement was not for the benefit of the people and you know this very well! It was for the benefit of the bankers, the IMF and the euro that gets an extension of life. Generally it was for the benefit of anyone else apart from the people! People demand a solution without the Troika! You insisted with the Troika and you betrayed us. My only

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3   This slogan was the central one of the Presidential electoral campaign (January – February 2013) that was considered successful for the election of President Anastasiades.

hope is that the present situation is temporary due to the critical circumstances and soon we will be able to be released gradually not just from the memorandum but also from the evil euro!'

'You are supposed to protect the people and our nation and not the banks or the EU hyenas that will rip our souls apart for profits. That is the mandate the people of Cyprus have bestowed upon you and your government ...'

While the in-group is defined in loose terms and the common denominator for its members is the identification against the out-group, a more detailed look at the accounts discloses another commonality, which refers to a common plea for resistance and action against the out-group.

'The MPs who will vote in favour of the Memorandum should know that with their positive vote they automatically become ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE.'

B3. *Rich Powerful Elites against Poor People*

In the last construction of intergroup relations, the in-group is described as consisting of victims of the crisis, which represents emphatically the category of 'us' as oppositional to the out-group, which is recounted as the political authorities, the President of Cyprus, the EU and Troika. In contrast to the two aforementioned lines of argumentation, the emphasis of this opinion is drawn on the unifying element of the in-group, which is the sentiment of victim. The in-group, which includes 'the Cyprus debtors', the 'ordinary citizens who had their money stolen', the 'workers' and the 'poor', are all victims of the extreme financial measures imposed on them. In the respected accounts of the selected posts, the haircut – constructed as the act that rendered them victims – is further qualified as unjustified, illogical and unethical. By representing the in-group as 'victims', the responsibility and the blame is transferred to the out-group. In order to provide evidence for this argumentation, a list of personal stories regarding the users' financial situation is provided – although this is not a detailed account. Nonetheless, the use of personal statements is intended to add objectivity to their accounts. Finally, to draw attention to the reasons why the in-group is represented as victims of illegitimate actions of the out-group, the users deploy repetition and vivid description such as 'us' – the poor victims, and 'us' – the raped citizens.

Although the in-group is constructed as inclusive, those who are included in it are defined quite solidly. In contrast, however, the out-group is described to include specific political actors, yet they are mentioned in more vague terms. In particular, the denunciation against the out-group is directed against political authorities, the Troika, the EU and capitalism. Clearly, the responsibility of the difficult financial situation of the in-

group is placed squarely on the out-group, which is epitomised undoubtedly by negative attributions and illegitimate actions through the use of metaphors such as rape. The unifying element of the out-group is the intention to harm normal citizens. Capitalism seems to be the overriding factor that guides the policy and actions of these actors, yet this attribution is not absolutely clear in all accounts.

> 'They've been accusing communism because they say it eliminates the right to property. And they brought capitalism, which is a more fair system. More fair for whom sirs?; Why do they to need to privatise the profits and make the damages collective? Let's do the opposite. To make the profits collective and privatise the damage. Make a list of those who have in their possession more than €500,000 and nationalise the rest of their property. Why do you want to get the employee'[s] social welfare funds? Take from those who have profits.'

> 'THE POOR HAVE BEEN RAPED!' I am sure that the Anastasiades government and all the rest of the clowns and economists had an EU Troika plan already agreed and kept it hidden away as a top-secret in their closets so the public do not hear about it. They now presented it to us on a fait-accompli basis and to rob our accounts (by law) of up-to 10% to bailout the crooked banks. They will raise 6 billion from robbing the poor citizens who had no hand in this situation – if that's the case, why do we need the Troika?'

C. *Action and Call for Participation in Actions*

Politicised collective identities can be detected at the level of the engagement in collective action. Engagement in collective action can be considered the mobilisation to any action such as demonstrations usually against a political actor. These actors are more likely to be the government or the general public (van Zomeren *et al*., 2008). Drawing on the concept of politicised collective identities' understanding of action, we investigate whether accounts that mobilise for action can be identified. The analysis brings to the fore two main lines of argumentation.

C1. *Action as Resistance against the Imposed Measures*

The first type of action that is promoted in the posts of the selected Facebook groups is represented in terms of a call for adopting a position to deal with the crisis. This position is specified as a form of resistance either against the EU and the Euro, or against the Troika and the proposed measures. Resistance is suggested to take the form of an exit from the Eurozone or default of the Cyprus economy. Such actions are qualified positively through the use of metaphors that express them as the regaining of the power by the people. The rhetorical form in which the action of resistance is presented is often by the use of the word 'No'.

'We have to demand NOW our exit from the EU and the euro, we also demand a default, bankruptcy. We can go bankrupt with absolute safety and soon the world that we will create in Europe will turn for our benefit and our currency. It is our chance to make Cyprus return to the golden era of the past!'

'Let's be the leaders of ourselves and say again a sound NO!!!'

The resistance that people need to adopt as the most effective form of action is also directed against the President and to a lesser extent against the government. The President is constructed as the main responsible agent for the people's grievances. The predominant reason that emerges for the president's position is his political motives and agenda to which the adjective, 'traitor', frequently refers to in the posts. The proposed remedies for this situation take different forms which all target the removal of the President from power. Such forms are a plea to the President to resign, call a referendum in order to re-establish democracy, or early elections. It is noteworthy that the posts that promote such actions are uttered in rather intense forms using direct reference to 'the President'. Such rhetorical formation accentuates the urgency and the necessity of the proposed actions.

'THEY WONT PUT OUR FUTURE IN MORTGAGE.
TRAITOR RESIGN!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!'

'They proved unworthy of our trust. To re-establish [the] people's and foreign investors' trust in the country, the president and its party should resign and we should be led to early elections.'

'REFERENDUM NOW!!!!'

This type of proposed action is constructed on the capitulation of common interests of a wider group, which pronounces the instrumental motivation of the subjects to participate in action so as to improve the situation of the in-group.

C2. *Action as Participation in Politicised Events*

The second type of action that is constructed as important among the members of the selected Facebook groups concerns a call for spontaneous mobilisation, collective participation and immediate action through a series of politicised events in order to prevent harmful decisions, such as the haircut or cuts in salaries and pensions. The call is addressed to everyone by the use of an inclusive rhetoric. This is achieved by assembling the goal of the politicised action, as undisputable and superior from any other potential issue. In other words, the goal is defined as being able to bring all the people together to fight for it as it overcomes differences that may be caused by demographic characteristics (i.e. age), partisan support, ideological orientation, personal and practical issues (i.e. busy

schedules, physical state). Such differences may create obstacles for some people to embrace the goal but they can be transcended by the overall goal which is unifying. Very often the goal declared is 'to save our country' or to save everyone's future and dignity. The relevant accounts are framed in rather dramatic tones, using a personal sensibilisation (such as 'you' or 'your 'friend'), uttering the second person in order to make the call for action more direct and effective.

> 'We all have jobs, classes and things to do! You need to leave everything aside as we will ALL BE THERE! Because if YOU do not come my friend, do not expect the other[s] to come too.'

> 'We all without exception from all parts of Cyprus have to meet in the parliament and demand back our life, our future and we should [not] leave unless [it is given] back to us. There is a need for citizens' mobilisation, independently of their age, physical condition; we are all citizens of this country. The live[s] of all of us depends from the next day, even the life of a handicap, patient, elder, blind or deaf, nobody has the right to be absent.'

In contrast to the use of an inclusive rhetorical strategy, we came across posts in which the call for action was framed in ideological terms, clearly indicating a left-wing leaning ('companions', 'red colour of change'). Such accounts were built through recourse to previous social struggles and victories, for instance, resistance to G8, university student movements or anti-war marches. Such references help as successful examples of fights in order to both increase the motivation of potential participants and to function as empowerment mechanisms.

> 'Today outside the Parliament I wait to see you all, comrades and fellows from my childhood, my teenage years, that we made together dreams for struggles to change the world. Even if years have passed since I last saw you, even if now you are middle-aged, most of you with families facing the problems of everyday life (with some more kilos), even if you have not participated in similar activities, even if you feel disappointed from many facts. You comrades who fought together in Cyprus, Athens, England, everywhere. In the summits of G8, the war in Afghanistan, Iraq. I hope to see you all today, I will put on my nice clothes, the red colour of change.'

In this study various forms have been identified in which action is constructed. The most common one concerns participation in demonstrations and the provision of practical information regarding the time and place of the events, plus bus timetables and so on. Demonstrations outside the President's building and the Parliament are the most frequent events mentioned. In addition, boycotting German products is framed as another crucial form of action, which is targeted against Germany – indirectly constructed as one of the responsible actors of the crisis. Participation in action is

promoted through the provision of constant news and updates from traditional media – national and international – regarding the Parliament's vote or other related news stories. Moreover, lists of the email accounts of the MPs are provided in an effort to mobilise people to make contact and exercise pressure on them. In this way a readiness for action is built up in a less direct manner. This information is provided mostly through hyperlinks to news websites. As an alternative method of promoting action, hyperlinks, to online petitions are also employed in relation to action against the crisis. Another interesting account is built around the use of Facebook. While the latter is practically used by the groups' members as a way of advertising and disseminating action along with promoting the politicisation of the organised events, at the same time the use of Facebook is undermined and constructed as an 'inadequate' form of protest.

> 'We watch constantly the developments and we act accordingly. If eventually the Parliamentary meeting will be held tonight we will be there. If the declaration of the president does not satisfy us, we will be there. It is necessary to be organised, but let's not wait for someone to create an event in Facebook in order to get in the streets. You need to be mobilised spontaneously and immediately, and if we want them to take us in[to] consideration while they're deciding.'

> 'Let's unite again, as we did in the past in difficult situations. Let's not leave the revolution in a Like and a Comment in Facebook.'

> '18/3 time 15:00 everybody outside the parliament in the demonstration against the catastrophic proposals of Troika – haircut, privatisation, etc.'

Discussion

The focus of the present paper has been the analysis of posts by Facebook users who are also members in Facebook protest groups against the haircut imposed on Cyprus banks. The analysis has concentrated on untangling the meanings that construct politicised collective identities online. The investigation of politicised collective identities constitutes a crucial area in social movement studies since it has been linked to levels of participation in protest actions, and the longevity as well as the effectiveness of social movements. In this case we have aimed at the exploration of the meanings attributed to the politicised collective identities shared by members of a new movement in a context in which protest actions have been rare (Katsourides, 2013). The nucleus of a protest movement against the financial crisis in Cyprus can be viewed as part of the rise of crisis movements throughout Europe and beyond in a compelling area of research in social movements. In conclusion, the fact that the study involved online Facebook groups in order to investigate primarily a social movement that was active offline, is justified by the relevant literature's postulation that online social media serve as a resource for collective

identities and are perceived as supplementary tools of offline social action (Valenzuela, 2013). Presented in the results section are the various categories of meanings attributed to the three constituent components of politicised collective identities, namely shared grievances, adversarial attributions and the call for action. Two major forms of collective identification among the members of the selected group were verified when bringing together the various lines of argumentation contained in the three components.

The first presents a rather classic form of collective identity that is informed ideologically by nationalism. Its manifestations may vary from the deployment of conspiracy theories and hidden agendas regarding the 'Cyprus issue' for constructing as illegitimate the proposed measures to face the crisis, to representations of the enemies as 'conquerors' and calls for radical solutions such as exiting the Eurozone. This form of politicised collective identity is not uncommon in crisis contexts for it has been observed in other cases too. Theodossopoulos (2014), for example, uncovers the use of an anti-hegemonic and defensive nationalistic discourse against the crisis in the Greek case. More crucially, however, this form of collective identity is not uncommon at all in the case of Cyprus. The 'Cyprus issue', a deeply national concern, has been a stable source of political activism in the country (Christoforou, 2007). Although the Cyprus issue *per se* is not the actual theme around which the members of the groups unite, it is still a source of unity for the members of the group against the crisis.

The second form of collective identity to emerge from the analysis is oppositional to the government or, more specifically, the President, since the blame is frequently personified in President Anastasiades. This form of collective identity is apparent either through the portrayal of the haircut as a capitalist project that fits the President's values and beliefs, or via a high degree of intergroup polarisation, which constructs the President as an enemy of the people of Cyprus. This anti-president identification becomes ever more politicised through the direct call for the president's resignation and early elections. Though the degree of animosity directed against the president is steep, this is not uncommon. Such negative meanings attributed to the out-group are expected to be found generally in politicised collective identities, especially where the actions of the movements are directed against the government or the leading political elites (Simon and Klandermans, 2001). Moreover, the emergence of a strong collective identity against the political elites has also been diagnosed in other social movements against the crisis, as witnessed with the Indignados. In particular, in the case of the Indignados and the 15M movement in Spain, the collective identity that was constructed among the members of this movement was further consolidated through increased membership and continued politicisation to an extent that it led to the formation of a political party 'Podemos' that challenges the dominant bi-polar party system.

The anti-president collective identity that is shared among the members of the groups against the crisis on the island is not even unique for Cyprus. Initially, this collective

identity echoes the voices of some of the opposition parties but without a direct or indirect reference to the parties by the members of the groups. To have linked some of the basic arguments to specific parties by the group members would have definitely limited the openness of the group; the in-group would have been represented as less inclusive by being confined purely to the opponents of the President. Secondly, an anti-president collective identity emerges and becomes more politicised in times of crisis. A vivid example of this is the Mari explosion, which led to the movement of some indignant or outraged citizens demonstrating against the then president Christofias. In that case, as probably is the case for the movement against the crisis, the collective identity against the president had not been built on a rhetoric that transcended party lines, which is why the movement itself was characterised as predominantly supported by DISY – the major opposition party.

To summarise, the two forms of politicised collective identities that we encountered in online groups against the crisis are neither new for the context of Cyprus nor for the other social movements against the crisis in Europe. But then an inevitable question emerges: Why did the anti-crisis movement in Cyprus not manage to last for more than a month and why did it not become as influential as in other crisis cases? Was it a matter of collective identities of the group? The present analysis has determined that the collective identities were pre-existing, informed ideologically by past dividing mechanisms (e.g. nationalistic values, partisanship), which may have impeded the openness of the movement and its embracement by the critical mass. An alternative explanation might be that it was rather more an issue of political opportunities. The President had been elected only one month before the outburst of the crisis, a fact that may have played a role in the degree of politicisation of the movement's claims. What is so striking in the Cyprus case is that given the unprecedented nature of the bail-in of depositors – which has not occurred in any other bailout country – there have been such apparently minimal effects. This includes, for instance, the effects of the protest actions on party dynamics, the pressure exercised on the government, or the absence of an emergence of a new political organisation; phenomena that were common in other crisis cases. And, finally, another assumption might link the social protest events to specific characteristics of the Cypriot civil society. If this is the answer then the Cypriot anti-austerity protests would challenge a well-embraced and prominent argument in the literature, in accordance with the spirit of online social media which transforms political activism by facilitating and increasing citizens' participation and engagement. Certainly these are open questions for future research in order to unravel the puzzle regarding the stoicism with which the Cypriot protesters dealt with the most unprecedented shock to the Cypriot economy.

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