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RESEARCH ARTICLE

"A Symptom of Social Disease": Newspaper framings of the 1985 Limassol anti-Arab riot

[version 1; peer review: awaiting peer review]

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Abstract

In 1985 an anti-Arab riot erupted in Limassol, Cyprus. This article examines the public response to the riot as it developed in its aftermath through Greek Cypriot newspapers. Drawing on newspaper issues collected through archival research, qualitative thematic analysis was utilised to explore discourses surrounding the riot, identifying three distinct discourses. The first attributed blame for the riot to the moral decay of Greek Cypriot youth, the second downplayed the riot, emphasising instead negatively the presence of a local Arab population, while a third, marginal discourse, attributed the riot to social dynamics internal to Greek Cypriot society. Noting in its findings that the first and second discourses did not identify xenophobia or racism as contributing factors for the riot, the article further explores, through the historical context of the period, the potential reasons for this evident absence.

Keywords

Cyprus, moral panic, racism, xenophobia, mass media

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Introduction

The 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus and the de-facto partition that followed left a lasting impact on the island's economy. Following the initial post-war recession the Republic of Cyprus experienced an extensive economic transformation in the 1980s, largely driven by the development of its tourist industry. Limassol emerged as a key tourist destination during this period. In parallel, Cyprus became a safe heaven for Lebanese refugees fleeing the Lebanese Civil War, with many settling in Cyprus during the 1980s. Following false newspaper reports about a supposed case of sexual violence committed by Lebanese men against Greek Cypriot men, an anti-Arab riot took place of August 17, 1985, in Limassol's tourist area of Germasogeia.

This article examines the Greek Cypriot media response to this riot. Drawing on data collected from archival research, the article examines 26 newspaper issues published in August 1985 across six Greek Cypriot newspapers. The analysis reveals three competing discourses that sought to explain the riot and assign responsibility for its occurrence. While the first casted the event as a symptom of the moral decay of Greek Cypriot youth, the second displaced concern onto the local Arab community, portraying it as a social problem. By contrast, a third, marginal discourse, associated with left-wing radical politics, interpreted the riot as an outcome of social processes internal to Greek Cypriot society.

The article begins by offering a brief historical contextualisation, followed by a presentation of the methodology. A timeline of the events surrounding the riot is then presented, reconstructed from the factual information available in the newspapers of the period. The subsequent three sections present the empirical component of the article, exploring the three distinct discourses identified through thematic analysis. This is followed by a discussion section which examines the findings through the concepts of the moral panic and the folk devil, before concluding with the article's final remarks.

Context

Located in the eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus has historically been ruled by several empires, most recently the Ottoman and British. When the Ottomans ceded administrative control to the British in 1878, Cypriots lacked a unified identity (Varnava 2012: 155). Under early British rule, premodern religious and local affiliations gave way to rising national identities, intensified by modernising reforms (Varnava 2012: 190). The first identity conflict emerged among Orthodox Christians as Hellenists promoted Greek nationalism, while Orthodox-centrists upheld a pre-national Christian identity (Varnava 2012: 179–180). A parallel dispute later arose among Muslims, with Young Turks and Kemalists clashing with traditional elites loyal to Ottoman structures and British rule (Nevzat 2005: 430–431).

Nationalists won both disputes, asserting dominance over communal institutions and enabling the rise of Greek and Turkish national identities with opposing aspirations (Ioannou 2020: 11). Greek Cypriot nationalism pursued *enosis* (union with Greece), opposed by Turkish Cypriot nationalists, who initially supported British rule, but eventually called for *taksim* (partition) (Loizides 2007: 174–175). The Greek Cypriot community, consisting the majority of the island's population, dominated the anti-colonial struggle, placing *enosis* at its core, putting the two nationalisms in direct conflict (Ioannou 2020: 14). The British exploited these tensions, which escalated during the 1950s with a Greek Cypriot guerrilla campaign for enosis and a Turkish Cypriot militant response, culminating in inter-communal violence by 1958 (Ioannou 2020: 15). What came to be known as the Cyprus Problem was initially 'resolved' in 1960 through a compromise between Britain, Greece, Turkey, and the two communities; leading to an independent, bi-communal Republic of Cyprus (Salem 1992: 119). The smaller Cypriot Armenian, Maronite and Latin communities were recognised as distinct 'religious groups' under the constitution (Varnava 2010: 207).

However, unresolved nationalist aims led to the Republic's collapse and intense inter-communal violence in 1963-64. Greek Cypriots retained state control while Turkish Cypriots were pushed into isolated enclaves, living in a separate parallel society (Ekici 2019: 23, Moudouros 2022: 98). Following 1964, the Greek Cypriot community increasingly supported the maintenance of an independent Cypriot state (Ioannou 2020: 26, Attalides 1979: 68, Panayiotou et al. 2022: 204). Tensions however peaked in 1974 when a Greek-backed coup against President Archbishop Makarios III was followed by a Turkish military invasion, the occupation of 38% of the island by Turkish forces, mass displacement, and the establishment of a UN-buffer zone across the island (Hughes-Wilson 2011: 86, Kliot & Mansfield 1997: 503–504).

UN-led reunification efforts have continued since 1977, envisioning a federal bi-communal state (Ker-Lindsay 2009: 16). In 1983, the Turkish-occupied north declared itself an independent Turkish Cypriot state under the name 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)', but has remained unrecognised beyond Turkey, leaving Turkish Cypriots diplomatically isolated (Ekici 2019: 50), with the Republic of Cyprus remaining the only internationally recognised state on the island. Direct communication between the two sides became possible only since 2003, with the opening and permanent establishment of checkpoints accessible to the general public, enabling the crossing of civilians across the buffer zone (Ioannou 2020: 55–56).

Following the 1974 Turkish invasion, Limassol became a key hub for the island's recovering tourism sector (Ioannides 2001: 117). Benefiting from pre-existing urban infrastructure, the city became an early focal point for tourism-linked development; in an economy where the tourist industry contributed 15.7% of the GDP by 1985 (Sharpley 2003: 252). The rise of tourism as a driver of economic growth during the 1980s was a significant shift, as tourist arrivals surged from approximately 353,000 to over 1.1 million between 1980 and 1988 (Statistical Service 2023). By 1985, the majority of tourists arriving in Cyprus came from European countries, with British visitors leading in numbers. The 1980s also saw a notable increase in arrivals from the Middle East (Wallace 1987), particularly from Lebanon and the Gulf Arab states, which together accounted for 16.7% of all tourist arrivals in 1985 (Statistical Service 2023). During the same period many Lebanese fled and settled to Cyprus as a result of the Lebanese Civil War, forming a distinct refugee community (Dayıoğlu & Hatay 2011: 138). More affluent Lebanese refugees registered business offices in Cyprus, continuing their business activities on the island (Petasis 2013: 77).

In parallel, Limassol acted as a key area where Greek Cypriot refugees were housed following their mass displacement in 1974. From 1975 to 1992 eleven housing estates were built in the broader Limassol district to house the displaced, second only to Nicosia (Kliot & Mansfield 1994: 344). In addition, the government provided low interest rate loans to support the construction of private housing for the displaced, and further renovated uninhabited Turkish Cypriot properties for the housing of Greek Cypriot refugees (Kliot & Mansfield 1994: 346). During the first post-war decade Limassol was leading in this utilisation of Turkish Cypriot property, with 10,000 refugees living in such accommodation by 1992 (Kliot & Mansfield 1994: 347). The city was thus undergoing significant social, demographic and economic changes during the 1980s.

Methodology

The article rests on archival research carried out in two Cypriot archives in May 2025, and its data consists of newspaper issues published in Cyprus in 1985. The first newspaper archive is the Press and Information Office (PIO) of the Republic of Cyprus, which holds the official newspaper archive of the Cypriot state. The archive maintains an online, open-access version, which contains Cypriot newspapers from 1878 to 2006. All issues examined here were published in August 1985. Supplementary archival research was carried out in the Cyprus Movements Archive, an independent open-access online archive which concentrates various material from the extra-parliamentary leftist, anarchist, and radical milieu of Cyprus (Charalambous 2021: 376).

The documents analysed from the archives consist of issues from six newspapers that were produced and circulated in the Republic of Cyprus in 1985. A total of 26 newspaper issues were collected and examined: seven from *Phileleftheros*, five from *Haravgi*, nine from *Simerini*, two from *Elliniki*, two from *Anexartitos*, and one from *Sosialistiki Ekfrasi.* All issues were located in the PIO archive, with the exception of the Sosialistiki Ekfrasi issue, which was found in the Cyprus Movements Archive. In addition, an anarchist leaflet commenting on the 1985 Limassol riot was also located in the Cyprus Movements Archive. To improve readability, the formatting of some newspaper excerpts quoted in this article has been adjusted. The documents were written in Greek and the presented excerpts have been translated by me. All data are publicly available on the Mendeley Data repository as a dataset (Pastellopoulos 2026).

Phileleftheros (Φιλελεύθερος, Liberal) remains one of the daily newspapers with the highest circulation in Cyprus. It has traditionally expressed centre-right views, and is formally independent from any political party affiliation. It remains the oldest newspaper in Greek Cypriot society, being in circulation since 1955 (Christophorou 2010: 236). Haravgi (Χαραυγή, Dawn) is a daily newspaper with a high circulation, linked to the Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL), the local communist party and one of the largest political parties on the island. It expresses the line of the party, and has traditionally supported progressive views on most political issues of the day. It is the second oldest newspaper in circulation, published for the first time in 1956. Simerini (Σημερινή, The Daily) is a daily independent newspaper first published in 1976. It is characterised by its right-wing political line and its rather sensationalist style.

All other newspapers examined are no longer in circulation. Elliniki (Ελληνική, The Greek One) was a right-wing weekly newspaper circulating in the 1980s (Press and Information Office n.d.). Anexartitos (Ανεξάρτητος, The Independent) was a left-leaning newspaper published between 1938 and 1989 (Polignosi n.d.). It became a weekly newspaper from the 1940s onwards. Sosialistiki Ekfrasi (Σοσιαλιστική Έκφραση, Socialist Expression) was a left-wing monthly newspaper published from 1973 to 2016. By the 1980s it became the official newspaper of the socialist group Aristeri Preriga (Αριστερή Πτέρυγα, The Left-Wing), the most active leftist extra-parliamentary political group of the period (Pastellopoulos 2025: 23).

Qualitative thematic analysis was utilized to examine the collected data. Thematic analysis is a well-recognized method in qualitative social research, commonly used for analysing interviews and textual materials (Prior 2008: 833). It involves

developing a close familiarity with the data, which allows the researcher to uncover the perspectives and meanings embedded within them (Bowen 2009: 32). Theme identification was carried out using a standard five-stage coding procedure (Ayres 2008: 867). The first step involved an initial coding phase, during which the data were evaluated and organized by identifying the articles within each newspaper linked to the research focus. This was followed by an initial engagement with each newspaper set independently, to acquire in-depth understanding of each newspaper's discourse and identify key themes. After generating a preliminary set of themes, a second round of data analysis was conducted to deepen familiarity and refine the identified themes. This deeper review led to the emergence of more defined themes, which were compared with the initial ones and reassessed in light of the data. Subsequently, the themes were further analysed to identify internal variations and inconsistencies. In the final stage, the data within each theme were independently reviewed again to support a coherent and consistent presentation.

Timeline of events

On Monday, August 12, 1985, newspapers reported that three Greek Cypriot men had been raped by four Lebanese men in Ayia Napa (Simerini 1985a: 1).[1] Although no victim had come forward to file a complaint or provide testimony, Cypriot police launched an investigation independently. It was later revealed that the allegation was unfounded, and that the journalist who first reported the alleged rape did so after hearing about it in a coffee shop (Simerini 1985d: 1). The story resurfaced in the press on Wednesday, August 14 (Anexartitos 1985a: 1. Simerini 1985b: 1) and again on Saturday, August 17 (Elliniki 1985a: 4).

At around 21:00 on Saturday, August 17, a riot erupted in Limassol's tourist area of Germasogeia, lasting until the early hours of Sunday (Philelefttheros 1985a: 1). Armed with stones, wooden sticks, and chains (Anexartitos 1985b: 1), Greek Cypriots attacked Arab tourists, rental cars, Arab-owned businesses, and buildings bearing Arabic signage. Six Arab civilians and three Greek Cypriot police officers were reportedly injured (Anexartitos 1985b: 1). While there is no evidence that rioters knew the personal identities of those they attacked, they did damage the car of the Lebanese ambassador (Haravgi 1985a: 1) and threw stones at the apartment building housing the Libyan ambassador and his family (Anexartitos 1985b: 1).

Reports indicated that National Guard conscripts[2] that were on leave that weekend also took part in the violence (Haravgi 1985a: 10, Simerini 1985c: 1, Philelefttheros 1985b: 1), and that the attack was premeditated (Simerini 1985d: 1). Interior Minister Dinos Michailides later stated that approximately 1,500 to 2,000 Greek Cypriot young men and youth had participated to some extent (Haravgi 1985d: 1). The riot was condemned by all political parties, the government, and civil society associations (Haravgi 1985c: 1, Haravgi 1985d: 1). No subsequent clashes or attacks followed, while the government reached out diplomatically to Arab states in the following weeks, to reassure the continuation of good relations with the Republic of Cyprus (Philelefttheros 1985e: 1, Haravgi 1985e: 1).

The immediate cause of the riot was widely reported to be the rape allegation that circulated in the media (Haravgi 1985b: 1). The allegation was refuted by the police, which stated that their investigation found no evidence of such an incident having occurred (Philelefttheros 1985a: 1, Haravgi 1985b: 9). The supposed victims themselves denied the claims in statements to the Simerini newspaper, attributing the rumours to falsehoods spread against them (Simerini 1985e: 3).

The police were widely criticised for their handling of the riot. It took three hours for the state to regain control, despite the deployment of the newly established anti-riot Mobile Immediate Action Unit (MADD) (Haravgi 1985a: 1). Authorities were also criticised for calling officers to report to Limassol's central police station via a public announcement on state radio, without explaining the reason, which contributed to public alarm (Haravgi 1985a: 1). In the days following the riot, the police faced further criticism for failing to prevent the attack, despite reports suggesting they had prior knowledge of a possible planned assault on Lebanese tourists and residents (Haravgi 1985b: 1, Simerini 1985d: 1).

The riot dominated newspaper reporting during the subsequent week. Two distinct discourses were dominant in mainstream newspapers. The first attributed the riot to a supposed moral decay afflicting Greek Cypriot youth. This moral decay was explicitly attributed to exogenous factors, with the riot portrayed as a phenomenon external to Greek Cypriot society itself. The second discourse, in contrast, downgraded the significance and intensity of the riot, shifting its focus on the presence of Arab permanent residents in Cyprus, which it portrayed as a social and national threat. Finally, a

[1]It should be noted, for the purposes of contextualization, that homosexuality was also both illegal and deeply stigmatized in the Republic of Cyprus until 1998 (Kamenou 2011: 156).
[2]The Republic of Cyprus maintains mandatory military service for all adult men (Efthymiou 2019: 2), who have to serve in its military force, the National Guard, usually at the age of 18.

third, counter-hegemonic discourse was identified, identifying the causes of the riot in social dynamics internal to Greek Cypriot society.

First discourse: hooliganism and moral decay

The riot was widely criticised; and the publishing of public condemnations by the government, political parties, civic society associations, municipalities and citizen's initiatives was a consistent part of newspaper content for the following week. News articles and columns further reflected this criticism, with all newspapers reporting on the riot in a critical and condemning manner. In addition, there was widespread criticism of the police (Haravgi 1985a: 1, Phileleftheros 1985g: 3 Simerini 1985e: 3), which extended to a broader representation of a collapse of law and order (Simerini 1985c: 1), accompanied by calls for a radical reform of the police force (Simerini 1985d: 1, Elliniki 1985b: 11). The riot itself was framed from the first reporting onwards as an expression of hooliganism that indicated the broader moral decay surrounding Greek Cypriot youth.

Phileleftheros reported on the riot with the front page title "THREE HOURS OF HELL", describing the perpetuators as "hooligans" (Phileleftheros 1985a: 1). While using less sensational language, Anexartitos also framed the incident as "hooliganism", further describing "hooligans" as forming a torrent that was "destroying everything in its path" (Anexartitos 1985b: 1). In its initial reporting Simerini emphasized the intensity of violence characterizing the actions of the perpetuators (Simerini 1985c: 1). Haravgi followed this pattern as well, framing the incident as a "vendetta of hooligans against the Arabs", framing the incident as "Lynch Law and three hours of terrorism", further describing the perpetuators as "youngsters, primarily vandals" (Haravgi 1985a: 1). The following day, Haravgi moved on to describe the riot in militaristic terms:

> Along with the first group of hooligans, other young people joined in and the situation escalated, as the "army" equipped themselves with stones, sticks, and other offensive objects. The "assault" continued at a more intense pace with similar targets [Arab men], as well as foreigners' cars (Haravgi 1985a: 10).

Reporting on the causes of the riot, Phileleftheros heavily attributed it to a broader pattern of moral decay afflicting Greek Cypriot youth. In a front page article titled "Shame on Us!", it framed the riot in highly moralistic terms:

> Our people are to blame for the sad events in Limassol. […] This behaviour is a disgrace to us all. Some may say what we stated in another case of rioting by young people in Nicosia: that we did not give these young people any other ideals apart from motorcycles, loitering, fighting, and… flirting. Perhaps. But this mentality of mass organized attacks against innocent people, guests of Cyprus? Let them roar around on their motorcycles, chasing and spreading death. Let them stay up all night in discos and other entertainment venues. But do not organize a mass and indiscriminate attack against defenceless foreigners, who will now leave Cyprus and "throw stones behind them" at the mention of the name of our homeland. […] Whether we can wash away the shame that weighs us down depends on the correct handling of the matter in accordance with the laws of our country, without favouritism (Phileleftheros 1985a: 1).

Shame here acts as the key lens through which the events are framed, with the riot viewed as a disgrace both as an act in-itself and for its negative consequences on the image of the country. The youth is singled out as the key demographic behind the riot. Moral decay is however here primarily emphasised not merely by linking the riot to the youth, but through the negative portrayal of activities associated with them, including partying late and riding motorcycles, the latter being a key Greek Cypriot youth subculture of the 1980s (Panayiotou 2012: 79).

Haravgi presented the position of the Limassol branch of AKEL, which noted that the riot is "a cause particular concern in our society, because it reflects corrosive tendencies that are alien to the ethos and traditions of our country" (Haravgi 1985b: 1). In another front page article titled "Hooliganism must be rooted out", it further described the riot as having caused "disgust and outrage", characterising the attacks as "barbaric" and stating that they "cause harm to our homeland, which has been renowned since ancient times for its warm hospitality" (Haravgi 1985b: 1). The newspaper moved on to argue that:

> HOOLIGANISM, which has unfortunately begun to make its presence felt on our island as well, with terrifying negative consequences for our youth and, more broadly, for our society, is a symptom of social disease[.] […] The source of hooliganism is always anarchy, which leads, as it did the day before yesterday, to organized and premeditated crimes with innocent people as victims. That is why it is a plague, a public danger to every society, especially because it is typically expressed by young people, the future of society. […] The events in Germasogeia serve as a serious warning, a bad sign, and should give everyone pause: the state, the family, the media, political parties, mass organizations, and, of course, youth organizations. The state's FOREMOST duty is to suppress and

> eradicate hooliganism at its very birth. Under no circumstances must it be allowed to take root in our society (Haravgi 1985b: 1).

Here hooliganism is explicitly described in medical terms, as a "plague" and symptom of "social disease" primarily infecting young people, with the use of the term "take root" evoking parallels between hooliganism and pests. Its source identified as "anarchy," this social disease is framed as a condition that must be treated at its origin through state repression. In the above formulation anarchy is equated with chaos and contagion, while the state is implicitly positioned as the guarantor of social health, responsible for intervening to re-establish order. Haravgi continued by stating that:

> In this regard, various political and social organizations and figures have highlighted the root causes of this surge in mass antisocial behaviour and violence, and have emphasized the role of the state, which not only tolerates, but actually encourages it by promoting the "American way of life" through television, entertainment media, reading material, etc., the disorientation and de-socialization of our youth (Haravgi 1985b: 1).

Responsibility for hooliganism and other antisocial behavior is thus attributed to the state. It is accused of tolerating and encouraging the "American way of life" through various forms of media, an accusation that reflects the anti-Americanism dominant in post-1974 Greek Cypriot society (Dalites 2022: 41). It furthers reflects, however, a broader negative reaction to the increasing availability of Western entertainment material, whose content is here deemed harmful and damaging and should therefore be contained.

Moral outcry continued throughout the week. In an article titled "Pull Out the Weeds", Philelefthеros presented the perpetuators as an economic and national danger, as a weed infestation in need of swift cleansing:

> Limassol and any other area of Cyprus must be cleansed of elements whose behaviour and actions harm us, give a distorted image of Cyprus, and slander it. […] Our police force must be ready at all times to deal with these new phenomena in our lives. The people demand well-ordered Cyprus to rediscover itself by ridding itself of the weeds that have recently sprung up. These weeds must be uprooted. This is dictated not only by the economic, but also by the national interest of the country (Philelefthеros 1985b: 1).

This mode of discourse continued in a Philelefthеros column titled "The root of the evil …", where moral decay is again perceived to be taking place amongst the youth. Describing their undesirable behavior as "evil", the column argued that the state was lacking a policy targeting specifically the youth; and that such a policy would be desirable in order that "evil would be less and hopes greater" (Philelefthеros 1985c: 2). After stating that "Evil must be eradicated before it spreads", the column moved on to argue that "All these young people, who, unfortunately, are increasing rather than decreasing in number, weren't born as hooligans, womanizers, or kamikazes… They became this way…" (Philelefthеros 1985c: 2). In attempting to identify the cause for this development, the column continued by arguing that beyond the school, the parents and the broader social environment, the key cause is:

> The system! The system is not some abstract concept… The system is that which, while spouting endless empty rhetoric, refuses to undertake even a few but meaningful projects… The system is that which says "no" to all evils, but does not dare to eliminate them itself! The system is that which peddles ideas without daring to put them into practice… Which says no to the arcades, but watches them multiply… Which says no to violence and anarchy, but teaches violence and anarchy, along with immorality, through television… Which preaches morality, but tolerates debauchery through imported publications of the utmost degradation and the pornographic films that abound… Which dispenses easy advice, without stating the necessary consequences… (Philelefthеros 1985c: 2).

Moral decay is here again attributed to modern forms of foreign entertainment, while activities associated with the youth, such as visiting arcades, are singled out. The column however further attributed this "evil" also to the circulation of pornographic material, explicitly linking it to unrestrained sex and sexuality. The column moved on to parallelise moral decay with rotten fruits, disease and roots, echoing past descriptions equating hooliganism with social disease; and unruly youth with pests:

> The police will deal with the bitter (and rotten) fruits… But the roots that nourish the trees of evil lie elsewhere and others must address them… Who and how? That is the question! Who and how… The school… The parents… The state… Because we cannot be outraged by the result while ignoring the causes… Nor can we worry about the symptoms and remain indifferent to the disease… (Philelefthеros 1985c: 2).

Sexuality takes centre stage in the discourse of another Philelefthеros column, published less than a week after the riot. Titled "The newly discovered species", the column is a polemic against the behaviour of young Greek Cypriot men, the key demographic linked to the riot:

> So, yet another problem, among all the others we face, whether serious or trivial… The "harpoon" [3] [καμάκι]… A "harpoon" is a term that's new to Cyprus and the neo-Cypriots,[4] for whom the only hook they knew was the one used by fishermen to catch seafood… But what does "harpoon" mean exactly, a word that initially had a figurative meaning, while now it tends to become a noun? One need only look more closely to realize both its nature and what it represents…
>
> Primarily, it represents: 1) The sexual hunger that pervades the island of Aphrodite… 2) The audacity of a foolish male chauvinism… 3) The absurdity of the absence of any self-awareness… 4) A shirt open down to the "belly button" … 5) Hair with a cowlick dancing a waltz on the forehead … 6) A sly, sufficiently talkative, and above all unrestrained gaze…
>
> You will encounter this newly minted breed, in areas mainly frequented by foreign women… (Philelefthero 1985f: 2).

Young Greek Cypriot men are here represented as sexually unrestrained, with improper appearance and behaviour, flirting and harassing women in the tourist areas of the island. The dismissing attitude of the column is explicitly evident, with the youth described through the derogatory term 'neo-Cypriots' as well as a new 'breed', essentially demoting them here discursively to the status of animals. Their behaviour is itself attributed to the expansion of the tourist industry and the leisure activities accompanying it:

> The "harpoon" is […] a co-evolution that goes hand in hand with the tourism boom and coexists with the broader tourism product… Young people or those acting young, kids and older kids alike, all over the streets and squares or simply in and around discos, pubs, snack bars, and other similar "hangout spaces," gathering for "flings" whether of Cypriot, Swedish, or other origins… Especially for foreign women… Because there is the established neo-Cypriot perception (or rather belief) that: Every foreign woman who comes here as a tourist is essentially looking for sexual adventures (Philelefthero 1985f: 2).

The activities and leisure venues associated with the youth are presented here again in a negative manner, while the image of youngsters painted above is one of loitering and sexual advances. The column continued by stating that:

> The problem isn't with those who come to us as guests or customers. After all, we're the ones asking them to come. And they come to us unconditionally (and often without bras or panties).
>
> The problem is ours. Because we are the ones selling. We sell earth and water [γην και ύδωρ]. And naturally, this contact has the necessary consequences. One of them is the transformation of our image. Of our character. Of our morals. Even of our space.
>
> The "harpoon" is therefore nothing more than one of many symptoms. And in this, we will discover a part of the consequences, which extend beyond the tally of pieces of silver collected annually…
>
> If you will: It is one aspect of an undesirable but not inevitable price, resulting from selling… And indeed, selling recklessly… Or liquidating… It amounts to the same thing… (Philelefthero 1985f: 2).

While the column appears to be critical of harassment targeting female tourists, it itself depicts them as sexualised objects and implicitly as sexually promiscuous, by describing them as being "without bras or panties".[5] The cause of moral decay remains here exogenous – the behaviour of Cypriot youth is not to be understood as reflective of social dynamics internal to Cyprus itself, but as the byproduct of external factors affecting the island through the development of the tourist industry, including the interaction with foreign women. Blame is attributed here to Cypriots precisely for allowing these factors to become an integral part of Cyprus following its de-facto partition.

It is worth noting here that the phrase "earth and water" refers to the Persian symbolic demand of subjugation, most notably mentioned in retellings of the narrative surrounding the Battle of Thermopylae. The phrase "pieces of silver" refer

[3]Greek slang referring to a person, usually a man, who aggressively flirts with or hits on tourists or strangers, especially during nightlife or at beach settings (Zinovief 1991: 203).
[4]Derogatory Cypriot slang term of the period (Loizides 2015: 80), most often directed towards the younger generation, implying a loosening or abandonment of national identity and morals.
[5]One may well interpret this representation of female tourists as a form of national or cultural essentialism implying that their behaviour is seen as reflecting inherent cultural norms, in this case, immodesty and sexual promiscuity.

to Judas' reward for betraying Jesus according to the account given in the Gospel of Matthew. The phraseology here does not thus merely refer the economic effects of the booming tourist industry, but alludes to a broader sense of national betrayal though the commercialisation of the island, linking moral degeneration to national degeneration.

National interest was further linked to the riot. For example, in a statement over the incident; the Limassol mayor noted that "[t]ourism is the main source of revenue for our national budget, and only those who wish to harm the country would think of ways to destroy it" (Haravgi 1985b: 1), thereby framing the perpetrators' actions not simply as criminal, but as unpatriotic acts against the country. The riot gained an additional elevated significance in matters of national interest by being connected to the Cyprus Problem early on in newspaper reporting, as was the case in the Haravgi article quoted below:

> Observers noted that there is a risk that last Saturday's events could be exploited, and in an effective manner, by the Denktaş regime[6] to undermine Cyprus' good relations with the Arab world and to facilitate the recognition of the separatist Turkish Cypriot "state" (Haravgi 1985b: 1).

This concern was also reflected in the subsequent reporting of Philelefthеros (1985d: 1) and Simerini (Simerini 1985f: 1), which focused on how the riot was reported by Turkish Cypriot media. Titled "The Turks are exploiting the riot", the Simerini article stated that:

> Under the headline "Lebanonization" the Turkish Cypriot newspaper "Bozkurt" is exploiting last Saturday's incident in Limassol in order to undermine Cyprus' relations with the Arabs. According to columnist Ahmet Tolga, the attacks against Arabs in Limassol reveal the racist, fanatical, and arrogant nature of the Greek Cypriot community. The columnist goes on to argue that the incidents in Germasogeia have sown the seeds of greater "explosions," because "blood and revenge have come between the Arab and Greek Cypriot communities" (Simerini 1985f: 1).

In addition, Philelefthеros further reported that "the government is monitoring the situation and evaluating the information it is gathering regarding Turkey's efforts to exploit the recent incidents in Limassol to create rifts in Cyprus' relations with Arab countries" (Philelefthеros 1985f: 1). The discourse surrounding the riot was thus not restricted to concerns over moral decay, but was extended to include fears over the Cyprus Problem, the potential recognition of a Turkish Cypriot state and the deterioration of diplomatic relations with Arab states for the benefit of Turkey. The young perpetuators of the riot, therefore, were not here merely perceived as criminals to be brought to justice, but also as citizens acting against the national interests of the state and of Greek Cypriot society as a whole. They were therefore presented here, in essence, as treacherous, if not by intent, then by consequence. The attribution of moral decay to the youth was thus intersected with accusations of anti-national behaviour that were in turn linked to the Cyprus Problem itself.

Second discourse: downgrading the riot and anti-Arabism

Framing the riot as the cause and the effect of moral decay afflicting the youth was the main theme dominating Greek Cypriot newspapers. Nonetheless, an alternative discourse also developed through the conservative Simerini and Elliniki newspapers. While not endorsing the riot, this discourse consistently downplayed its significance and intensity, assigning blame to the police and criticising the government for addressing it through diplomacy. For example, in its commentary on the false rape allegations, Simerini explicitly blamed the police for the riot:

> [T] he police had, from the very beginning, investigated the story from all angles and had concluded that it was FALSE. And this brings us to the question: Why didn't they make the findings public? Why did they keep it secret for so many days, allowing rumours to run rampant and comments to escalate on a pan-Cyprian scale? […] This is the original sin of the Police in this case. We believe that if the denial of the rape had been issued immediately once the police investigation disproved it, none of this would have happened. Limassol and all of Cyprus, and our relations with neighbouring countries would not have been at risk of being disrupted and poisoned (Simerini 1985e: 3).

It is worth noting that the blame here is not assigned to the spreading of unreliable or false information by the media, which first reported and spread the allegations, but exclusively to the police for not publicly disproving them earlier. The argument here is inherently counterfactual, further entailing the underlying assumption that attacks against Arabs is a logical response to the rape allegation. It is precisely through this implication that the responsibility for the violence is shifted from the perpetuators to the police.

[6]Refers to Rauf Denktaş, pro-partition Turkish Cypriot nationalist leader and then president of the TRNC.

Another example trying to shift blame for the riot can be located in the coverage of Elliniki, which quoted an unnamed government figure to insinuate that the real perpetuators were foreigners:

> A government figure, commenting on this information, stated the following: "This is sheer madness. Cyprus cannot afford to endure adventures that cost either blood or money. Everyone must realize this truth and help the authorities prevent actions that could cause irreparable damage".
>
> The same source wondered whether foreigners were hiding behind the seemingly spontaneous actions of last Saturday in Limassol, given that a well-known figure from West Germany had predicted the incidents just 24 hours in advance (Elliniki 1985b: 1).

It should be noted that as Elliniki was a weekly newspaper, the above conspiratorial statement was reported well after it had been established, both by the police and by the media, that the riot was carried out by Greek Cypriot youth as a response to the alleged rape case. Here the responsibility for the riot is removed from Greek Cypriot society altogether, transferred to an unknown foreign malicious force. In contrast, Simerini's daily reporting began to downgrade the significance and intensity of the riot, criticising the government's political response:

> Following the isolated incidents last Saturday in Limassol targeting Arabs, the Cabinet decided yesterday to send ministers to Arab countries to reaffirm the feelings of friendship and goodwill of the people and government of Cyprus toward the governments and peoples of Arab countries, as stated in an official announcement. […] Level-headed observers of developments regarding the isolated incidents involving young people against Arabs stressed that the government is acting in a state of panic and is rushing to apologize to the governments of Arab countries. The same observers also noted the following: In its panic and agitation, the government has politicized the entire issue in a dangerous manner (Simerini 1985g: 1).

This criticism was further raised in another article titled "The delegation of ministers to Arab countries is hasty and dangerous", where the newspaper, paraphrasing unnamed "prominent political observers", stated that:

> Political observers highlighted the haste with which the government rushed to implement its decision, which has been characterized as ill-advised, hasty, and dangerous. They stressed that, with this decision, the government is politicizing isolated incidents between young Greek Cypriots and Arabs, framing them as inter-state disputes (Simerini 1985h: 3).

The key element holding the discourse together is the downgrading of the importance of the riot from an unprecedented violent event to a set of "isolated incidents". The government's response is thus presented here as exaggerated, placing excessive emphasis upon a matter of secondary significance. In doing so, the government is thus accused of "politicizing" what is a non-political issue, a response presented as "dangerous". The downplaying of the riot continued in the issues of Simerini:

> The anti-Arab incidents in Limassol took place for over three hours, with the participation of hundreds of people, the mobilisation of all of the island's police force and the personal intervention of the Minster of Interior. And yet, the toll of this whole affair amounted to nothing more than a few broken noses, a few smashed shop windows, and two or three cars with their windows smashed. It is clear that there was neither anger nor hatred toward the Arabs; otherwise, the human and material damage would have been much greater (Simerini 1985h: 3).

The downgrading of the riot is here explicit. On the one hand, the severity of the violence is directly disputed, while on the other, the motives of the perpetuators are also rejected. The article moved on to criticise the police's subsequent repressive response against alleged Greek Cypriot perpetuators:

> The serious consequences lie elsewhere. […] Since the day the incidents began, unfortunately, cases of arbitrariness and brutality against citizens (mainly young people) by police officers have started to be observed. Unjustified arrests, beatings at police stations, and harassment seem to be becoming the order of the day, bringing back a nightmarish era. The police must take heed, because order and security are not achieved by violating and trampling on citizens' basic rights—especially by those entrusted to protect them (Simerini 1985h: 3).

By simultaneously downgrading the riot and elevating police repression against Greek Cypriot citizens, the latter are presented as the actual victims of the incident, burdened by the subsequent police abuse. There is thus here an inversion of victimhood. The violence inflicted upon Arab residents and tourists is downgraded and disputed, while the police violence imposed on alleged Greek Cypriot perpetuators is elevated and highlighted.

The discourse was accompanied by a parallel reporting emphasising negatively the presence of Arabs in Cyprus. Five days after the riot, Simerini's front page was covered with the title "20.000 ARABS IN CYPRUS: From them, 4.000 are permanent residents", followed by a detailing of the presence of an Arab population on the territories controlled by the Republic of Cyprus. The main article made a direct link between the Limassol riot, the presence of Arabs, and their effects on Cypriots:

> The Government, in cooperation with the House of Representatives, will examine all the issues that have arisen in Cyprus' relations with the Arab world as a result of last Saturday's disturbances in Limassol, as well as the social and economic impact on Cypriot life resulting from the presence of a large number of Arabs on the island (Simerini 1985f: 1).

The article continued by reporting the number of Arab visitors and permeant residents:

> According to data presented to the Parliamentary Committee [on Internal Affairs], between 15,000 and 20,000 Arabs of various nationalities pass through Cyprus every day, while 4,000 are permanent residents of the island. Commenting on these figures, informed sources noted that the number of Arab permanent residents in Cyprus already exceeds that of the constitutionally recognized religious groups of Armenians, Maronites, and Latins. The same sources added that it is natural and entirely justified for Arabs who reside permanently in Cyprus (most of whom have become property owners) to seek and be entitled to corresponding rights (Simerini 1985f: 1).

Under the constitution of the Republic of Cyprus religious groups can only be registered during the first three months following the Republic's independence, and must be constituted by citizens of the Republic (Emilianides 2011: 58). The official recognition of new religious groups is therefore neither an obligation of the state, nor a reserved right of any other ethnic or religious group in Cyprus. The reference to Cyprus' official religious groups is thus here legally unfounded and is utilised to create two distinct, but nonetheless interlinked effects. The first is the creation of an appearance of excessive Arab presence in Cyprus, while the second is the impression of the potential acquirement of communal rights by Arab permanent residents, presented here as the logical and natural consequence. In a subsequent article Simerini blamed the riot on the presence of Arabs in Cyprus, which it presented as a danger to Greek Cypriot society:

> FINALLY!
>
> For years now, this newspaper has been highlighting, through articles, analyses, and commentaries, the dangers posed by the uncontrolled entry and permanent settlement of Arabs in Cyprus. For years we have been calling on the government not to be so lenient, nor to be so flexible in its stance toward the Arabs. We have nothing against the Arabs. On the contrary, we like them… We understand their views, their politics, their mindset, and their behaviour. However, we believed and continue to believe that their presence here, if left unregulated and unchecked, would pose a threat to the social, economic, political, and other stability of the island. Unfortunately, our positions and views were not taken into account. Yet here we see that Simerini is proven right once again, albeit belatedly. The well-known disturbances in Limassol brought to light the government's colossal oversights (Simerini 1985g: 3).

The discourse is here blatantly xenophobic, presenting the presence of Arabs as a multileveled threat to the society of the Republic of Cyprus, while the riot is again downgraded, this time to the level of "disturbances". Commenting on the reported figures of 20,000 daily Arab visitors and 4,000 Arab permanent residents, the newspaper repeated the claim that Arab permanent residents might claim political rights:

> The number is not merely significant. It is also indicative of the scale of the problem we face, since this number already exceeds that of the constitutionally recognized religious groups—the Armenians, the Maronites, and the Latins. Most of these 4,000 Arabs have become owners of properties worth tens of thousands, perhaps millions of [Cypriot] pounds. What will the government do now? What will it do, especially if these 4,000 Arabs begin to claim rights as a minority? The government's reckless policy has led us to this situation. Now they're telling us that the issue of selling land to foreigners will be specifically discussed, and it has now been decided that this will be regulated by law. We hope and pray that it's not too late (Simerini 1985g: 3).

In the subsequent days Simerini continued to highlight the presence of Arabs on the island (Simerini 1985h: 1), reporting the official government figures regarding the number of foreign nationals purchasing private property in Cyprus (Simerini 1985i: 1). While the figures showed a sharp increase of 31.6% in purchases by foreigners from 1983 to 1984, British citizens led with 1,675 individuals, followed by Arabs of various nationalities at 1,052, and 439 individuals from other nationalities (Simerini 1985i: 1). Despite the British leading in private property acquisition, Simerini did not

articulate any concerns, fears, complains or objections targeting British permanent residents, indicating that despite its own claims, the newspaper was driven by a specifically anti-Arab, rather than a broader anti-foreign sentiment.

Lastly, Elliniki published a fiercely nationalistic article under the title "SELLING TO FOREIGNERS IS TREASON". Arguing that any selling of real estate to foreigners is a "national crime" and an "act of treason" (Elliniki 1985b: 10), it criticised heavily the government for permitting the continuation of property sales. The newspaper stated further that:

> What is imperative for us is NOT only the immediate halt to the sale of land to foreigners, but also the government's repurchase of properties that have already been sold. And if any of our own foolish and unpatriotic people are found to be acting as intermediaries to help foreigners acquire real estate in Cyprus, the Government must take them to task and, if necessary, denounce them publicly.
>
> We reiterate that selling off our land to foreigners under conditions of occupation and within the very limited area of our island is treason. The Government must immediately decide what it will do. As a newspaper that cares about and fights for the physical and national survival of our people, we stand in favour of any measure to halt this.
>
> The government bears a heavy responsibility, for we are in danger of soon having many communities claiming… territorial rights like the Turks, along with some Maronites who are now getting a boost from the presence of their fellow Lebanese (Elliniki 1985b: 10).

The selling of private property to foreigners is thus presented here as an existential threat, endangering the very national survival of Greek Cypriots. The presence of minorities is specifically highlighted as a danger linked to territoriality. Notably, the Turkish Cypriot nationalist claim of partition is here evoked in relation to the Cypriot Maronite community, portraying Maronites as a potential territorial threat whose cultural links to Lebanese permanent residents[7] could allegedly undermine the territorial integrity of the Republic of Cyprus. The existential threat is thus linked here both to foreign nationals and to non-Greek Cypriot citizens of the Republic.

Third discourse: the riot as a product of greek cypriot society

An alternative discourse, interpreting the riot as the result of social processes and dynamics internal to Greek Cypriot society, also appeared. In contrast to the other two discourses, this discourse was not articulated through mainstream newspapers, but rather through non-conventional publications of radical ideological persuasions. We can thus note here that this discourse was counter-hegemonic, to the extent that it questioned and challenged the dominant discourses surrounding the riot.

An iteration of this discourse is located in an anarchist leaflet reportedly distributed in Limassol (Philelefteros 1985g: 1). Signed simply with the word "Anarchists", the authors criticised the newspapers and political parties for attacking the youth through sensationalism, calls for excessive policing and the stigmatisation of youth subcultures (Anarchists 1985: 1). This reporting was further argued to be part of a longer pattern where youth are presented as deviant for not abiding to socially conservative norms. The leaflet further discussed the nature of the riot:

> So what happened in Germasogeia then? A mass outburst or racist hysteria? Probably both. However, these phenomena are neither foreign-imported nor as surprising as the newspapers present them. It was the explosion of contradictions produced by our bloated society. On the one hand, a youth full of anger, drifting through boredom, monotony, the fascism of the army, and the authoritarianism of the Cypriot family. On the other hand, the same youth forced to choose between puritanism and canned ideologies and ideals, between remaining a passive spectator of life and surrendering to the extreme isolation of the political party or other forms of herd mentality, between marginalization and sexual misery; in front of a Europeanized display of luxury (Anarchists 1985: 1).

In contrast to the predominant narrative found in Greek Cypriot media, which attributed the riot to a moral decay created by exogenous factors, the anarchists here interpreted the incident as the result of social processes internal to Greek Cypriot society. They moved on to argue:

> That is why what has happened, happened in Germasogeia. There, where the spectacle pushes the contradiction of a miserable, backward society and its European façade to the extremes. Within these frameworks, youth have every right to be angry and to rebel in order to claim their autonomy and their right to self-determine their lives. However, in Germasogeia there was no social uprising—or even a conflict that sought the overthrow of the old in

[7]The Cypriot Maronite community traces its origins to migrations from Lebanon beginning in the eighth century (Koumarianou 2011: 63). There has never been a political demand for territorial autonomy or succession by the Maronite Cypriot community.

> order to replace it with the new. On the contrary, ideologically it was the expression of hysterical racism and a ridiculous attempt to wash away the shame of the 'male honour' of our equally ridiculous society (Oh, of course!!! Are we supposed to let the Arabs fuck us?).
>
> The tragicomic aspect of the whole story was that the outburst of the youth came as the realization of the hidden desires of the average Cypriot. Because the racism and the degraded masculinity that gave both the trigger and the ideological direction to the outburst are born and bred within our very society (Anarchists 1985: 1).

The anarchists thus interpreted the riot as the result of the culmination of the accumulated social contradictions, repressive apparatuses and unfulfilled desires surrounding Greek Cypriot youth, which, nonetheless, materialised themselves through the dominant ideological framings of racism and patriarchal masculinity. The riot is thus here understood as a product internal to Greek Cypriot society both in its social causes and in its ideological content. The anarchists continued by arguing that the riot was initially perceived positively across the broader social and political fabric:

> On Saturday, the youth became an instrument for the materialization of the fantasies of the social whole (and of course the Arabs were the easy target). Fake toughness, thuggery, and racism. The following day, a lot of proper ladies and gentlemen, rightists and leftists, bourgeois and proletariat, young and old, said: "What they did to them was fitting". On Monday, power gritted its teeth – journalists rushed in, along with the State and the political parties, and issued the line of 'condemnation of the incidents'. It is from this point on that everyone began the search for scapegoats – and of course the easy target was the youth.
>
> Our depravity is both the cause and the result of our social order. After all, it is the MMAD that beats and arrests people, it is the newspapers and the café gossip that fuel the ideology of racist outbursts, and it is the State itself that organizes and directs the terror against the youth (Anarchists 1985: 2).

In contrast to all major newspapers, the riot is here understood as a racist attack driven by a racism entrenched within Greek Cypriot society itself. The outcry against the youth is thus interpreted as an attempt to displace society's own racism, rendered momentarily unacceptable through the intervention of centres of power. The anti-Arab riot, the media reaction and the outcry against the youth are thus here presented as parts of an interconnected social whole linked to the authoritarian structures embedded within Greek Cypriot society.

An alternative counter-hegemonic discourse emerged in the socialist newspaper Sosialistiki Ekfrasi, which discussed the riot in detail in its 1985 August-September issue. It presented the violence not as an isolated incident, but as part of a broader tendency linked to violence. Noting the riot's racist character, the newspaper criticised the response of the Greek Cypriot institutional left:

> There is no doubt that the incidents are serious and bring to the surface the problem of violence into which more and more of the youth of Europe, and now of Cyprus as well, are being drawn. Nor should there be any hesitation on the part of the labour movement in condemning such terrorist acts. And not only because of their racist nature, but also because such actions tend to justify the strengthening of the state's security forces, harming the young people who will now have to face a better organized and better equipped police force, and harming the labour movement more generally, against which repressive mechanisms may be used in the future to break strikes and other workers' mobilizations.
>
> Violence, however, is nothing more than the symptom of a deep social crisis, of which the "hooligans" themselves are also victims. If the causes that provoke violence are not identified and eliminated, no condemnation and no repressive mechanism can stop it.
>
> The leadership of the Left, instead of engaging in moralistic condemnations and calls for strengthening the police, must seriously study the issue and give young people those prospects that will draw them away from violence and direct their anger against the real enemy: the rotten capitalist system that generates violence and conflict (Sosialistiki Ekfrasi 1985: 1).

The newspaper continued by examining the social and economic conditions of Greek Cypriot youth, noting the authoritarian structure of the patriarchal family, the school system and the military, as well as the widespread unemployment, low wages, lack of welfare support and the dependence on personal connections to advance economically. Further criticizing the post-1974 economic boom, which has prioritized tourism infrastructure over the creation of affordable recreational spaces and social support for the youth, it argued that:

> Deprived of political education, organization, and prospects for class struggle, a large part of this youth "throws itself," in the words of one young man, "into entertainment, dancing, and motorcycles."
>
> Within this context of accumulated anger from oppression and exploitation, it is not difficult to understand the derailment of youth into behaviour that emphasizes freedom and independence (motorcycles, unconventional clothing, and, generally, the questioning of the established order etc) and explosions of the type we saw in Limassol (Sosialistiki Ekfrasi 1985: 2).

The newspaper thus offers a materialist reading of the social and economic context surrounding the riot by emphasizing the material conditions and power relations within which Greek Cypriot youth are situated. The preoccupation of the youth with subcultural activities is linked, for the newspaper, with their present conditions vis-à-vis an absence of leftist politicization and class struggle, leading to individualistic pursuits and behaviors. The riot is thus here to be interpreted as the outcome of the youth's material reality contrasting with the affluence of Arab tourists and permanent residents:

> According to assessments by comrades from Sosialistiki Ekfrasi who spoke with dozens of young people, it seems that what bothers them is the large number of Arabs (especially in Limassol), as well as the display of wealth they possess and especially the preferential treatment they receive in restaurants, entertainment venues, and various other services (Many specifically mentioned that tables are not given to Cypriot customers with the excuse that they are always reserved for "Arabs") (Sosialistiki Ekfrasi 1985: 2).

Sosialistiki Ekfrasi argued that this broader dissatisfaction was then mixed with existing racist stereotypes, ethnic framing of crime reporting, and xenophobic attitudes that had become entrenched as a response to foreign interventions in Cyprus by other states:

> All this is connected to the well-known racist prejudices against Arabs ("they stink," "they behave improperly in public spaces," "they are smugglers," etc., etc.).
>
> These feelings are certainly encouraged by crime reports that overemphasize nationality, or by alarmist front-page articles with huge headlines (e.g. "20,000 ARABS IN CYPRUS," Simerini newspaper, 22/8), which create a vague fear that Arabs will take our homes, our property, and … our women.
>
> Underlying these feelings against foreigners is also the history of foreign imperialist interventions in Cyprus and the problems these have caused for the Cypriot people (Sosialistiki Ekfrasi 1985: 2).

The interpretation expressed by Sosialistiki Ekfrasi here is thus a classic class-centred one. Given the material conditions of impoverishment and social repression, and in the absence of a socialist class politics, the youth are argued to be directing their attention to individualistic endeavours. Viewing affluence as unachievable through their own material conditions; and misguided by existing dominant racist and xenophobic paradigms of thinking, they (mis)directed their anger towards the Arab population, rather than capitalism and the social relations it reproduces. Sosialistiki Ekfrasi thus continued its article with an extensive criticism of the Greek Cypriot Left for calling for police repression, rather than for addressing the youth's immediate social and economic problems, followed by the promotion of a series of measures aiming to improve the youth's material conditions (Sosialistiki Ekfrasi 1985: 2).

Discussion

The first discourse surrounding the 1985 anti-Arab riot corresponds well to the concept of the 'moral panic' developed initially by Cohen (2011). As Monod notes (2017), Cohen, in his original formulation, identifies several phases in the development of a moral panic. Firstly, there is an initial act of deviance; followed by a media-driven exaggeration of the seriousness of the incident. A sense-making phase then emerges, in which the public, police, and the media reinterpret neutral behaviour as deviant, reinforcing one another's reactions and amplifying perceptions of threat (Monod 2017: 17). This ultimately leads to an overestimation of deviance leading to an escalation of control (Monod 2017: 17).

The emergence and development of a moral panic presupposes a minimum level of consensus within a society. As Goode and Ben-Yehuda highlight, the threat must be perceived as "real, serious, and caused by the wrongdoing of group members and their behaviour" (Goode & Ben-Yehuda 1994: 157). This group, in turn, acts as the moral panic's folk devil, that is, as "deviant stereotypes identifying the enemy, the source of the threat, selfish, evil wrongdoers who are responsible for the trouble" (Goode & Ben-Yehuda 1994: 156). It is in this light that we can interpret the first discourse as a classic example of a moral panic. Acting as the initial deviant event, the riot was met with a widespread social and political condemnation that quickly turned its attention, through the media, to an exaggerated response regarding the general moral decay of Greek Cypriot youth. The youth thus took the position of the folk devil,[8] and state repression and

increased police intervention were sought out as a desirable response to the "social disease" and "plague" (Haravgi 1985b: 1) of hooliganism, this "weed" that "must be uprooted" (Philelefttheros 1985b: 1), as it is an "evil" that "must be eradicated before it spreads" (Philelefttheros 1985c: 2).

The second discourse however is more attuned to a form of xenophobic scapegoating, rather than that of a fully-fledged moral panic. The significance and intensity of the riot is gradually downgraded, followed by a shift of attention away from Greek Cypriot anti-Arab violence and towards the presence of a local Arab population. This population is in turn represented in negative and threatening terms, similar to those identified by Trimithiotis and Voniati in their analysis of xenophobia in contemporary Cypriot online journalism – "a financial burden and a sociocultural, almost existential threat to Cyprus, in terms of its demography, culture, and social cohesion" (Trimithiotis & Voniati 2023: 1525). The Arab population is thus transformed from a victim group to a social and national "problem" (Van Dijk 2015: 9). The absence of concern for the presence of a larger British community further signifies the specifically anti-Arab character of this xenophobia.

The two discourses thus appear to move towards different directions. Nonetheless, both discourses converge on their refusal to acknowledge or consider the possibility that the riot was driven by xenophobia and racism. In addition, both discourses consistently dissociate the riot from causes inherent to Greek Cypriot society itself. In the second discourse this is achieved by simply refusing to view the riot as a significant event, downgrading it to the level of "isolated incidents" (Simerini 1985g: 1) that had little to do with any "anger" or "hatred toward the Arabs" (Simerini 1985h: 3). In the first discourse, however, where the riot is portrayed as a significant, violent, and shameful event, the claimed youth's moral decay is presented as the result of forces exogenous to Greek Cypriot society.

Cyprus is presented as "renowned since ancient times for its warm hospitality" (Haravgi 1985b: 1) and "well-ordered" (Philelefttheros 1985b: 1), with the riot giving a "distorted image of Cyprus" (Philelefttheros 1985b: 1), possibly influenced by "those who wish to harm the country" (Haravgi 1985b: 1). The youth are presented as having turned to hooliganism due to the promotion of the "American way of life" (Haravgi 1985b: 1) and via "imported publications of the utmost degradation" (Philelefttheros 1985c: 2), reflecting "corrosive tendencies that are alien to the ethos and traditions" of the country (Haravgi 1985b: 1). The first discourse thus portrays the youth as a folk devil driven by exogenous, foreign, and alien influences, framing the riot as the product of forces external to Greek Cypriot society and consequently absolving the latter of direct blame for its occurrence.

Notably, even when the causes of the riot are externalised, the riot itself is not acknowledged as racist or xenophobic. It is only in the third discourse, originating in marginal ideological currents, that such a recognition emerged, confirming Christophorou's observation that until the 1980s Greek Cypriot media were characterised by unanimity and consensus, sidelining public dialogue and pluralism of opinion (Christophorou 2010: 242). Nonetheless, given the widespread public condemnation of the riot, this only further raises the question as to why the refusal to acknowledge racism was so unanimously adopted. Addressing this question first requires a brief consideration of the political context in Cyprus during this period, particularly in relation to the Cyprus Problem.

The TRNC had declared its independence only two years prior. It presented itself as the culmination of the Turkish Cypriot community's right to national self-determination, reflecting the central aim of Turkish Cypriot nationalism for the island's partition (Moudouros 2018: 46). The evocation of the right to self-determination was argued for in relation to the 1963 collapse of the Republic of Cyprus' bi-communality, on the one hand, and the violence inflicted upon the Turkish Cypriot community by Greek Cypriot military and paramilitary forces, on the other (Işıksal 2024: 12). This violence, the most recent episode of which had occurred in August 1974 (Cassia 2005: 69), a mere ten years earlier, was attributed to the Greek Cypriot community as a whole, and was thus cast as indisputable evidence that inter-communal coexistence under a single state structure had failed and should not be attempted again.

In contrast, the official post-1974 Greek Cypriot narrative emphasised historical inter-communal "peaceful coexistence" (Hatay & Papadakis 2012: 37), signifying that the two communities can live together again in the future. During the 1980s, this narrative was frequently articulated alongside the claim that the Turkish Cypriots were not the enemies of the Greek Cypriots, rather, responsibility for the Cyprus Problem was attributed to Turkish expansionism (Mavratsas 1998: 83). This narrative was underpinned by a silencing discourse regarding the violence inflicted on the Turkish Cypriot community prior to the island's de facto partition, with references to or acknowledgment of this violence being taboo (Papadakis 1993: 146). The official Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot narratives were thus in direct contradiction surrounding past inter-communal co-existence (Papadakis 2003: 265).

The 1985 anti-Arab riot was the most intense and notable moment of ethicised violence in the Republic of Cyprus since 1974. Acknowledging that racism and xenophobia were contributing factors to its unfoldment presupposed recognising that racism was embedded within Greek Cypriot society, a recognition that could link present violence to the inter-communal violence of the recent past, potentially legitimising Turkish Cypriot partitionist arguments. The anxiety surrounding the effects of the riot on the Cyprus Problem are evident in all key newspapers of the period, ranging from fears of potential recognition of the TRNC by Arab states (Haravgi 1985b: 1, Phileleftheros 1985f: 1) to concerns surrounding the representation of the riot in the Turkish Cypriot press as an example of "the racist, fanatical, and arrogant nature of the Greek Cypriot community" (Simerini 1985f: 1). The discourses which emerged therefore either downplayed its significance or externalised its causes, thereby detaching the riot from any potential political implications linked to its racist dimension.

Concluding remarks

The 1985 Limassol anti-Arab riot was the first notable expression of ethicized violence in the Republic of Cyprus after 1974. While Cyprus had experienced a painful cycle of ethnic violence during the intercommunal clashes of the 1960s, the 1985 Limassol riot stands apart in significant ways. Unlike previous episodes of conflict, this incident was not rooted in internal political disputes or the island's longstanding ethnic tensions between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. Instead, it marked what appears to be the first large-scale racially motivated attack in the Republic of Cyprus, with the violence directed specifically at the Arab tourist and local population. The riot stood out as a xenophobic attack with no obvious political causes and no political leaders directing it, a pattern that sets it apart from previous outbreaks of ethicised violence.

In its aftermath, public discourse quickly gave rise to a focus on youth behaviour and moral decay. In parallel, another public discourse emerged downplaying the significance and intensity of the riot, redirecting its attention to the presence of a permanent Arab population in Cyprus, framing it as a political, social, and national threat. A third, marginal discourse associated with left-leaning radical ideologies also emerged, attributing the causes of the riot to social dynamics internal to Greek Cypriot society. This article explored the Greek Cypriot media response to the riot, as it developed in its immediate aftermath, arguing that the discourse on youth behaviour corresponds well to the characteristics of a moral panic, with the riot acting as the key deviant event and Greek Cypriot youth constructed as the accompanying folk devil. In contrast, the anti-Arab discourse was argued to reflect more appropriately a form of xenophobic scapegoating, displacing attention from the riot itself towards a perceived undesired migrant group. Nonetheless, and despite their differences, the two discourses were argued to have a common basis in their refusal to acknowledge racism and xenophobia as factors contributing to the outbreak of the riot.

An explanation for this convergence was sought in the historical and political context of the period, particularly in relation to the Cyprus Problem and the corresponding political narratives dominant within the two ethnic communities during the 1980s. It was argued that given the political context, surrounded as it was at the time by the declaration of independence of the TRNC, accompanied by narratives highlighting past Greek Cypriot violence against Turkish Cypriots, the public recognition of racism and xenophobia as part of Greek Cypriot society was possibly perceived as potentially legitimising Turkish Cypriot separatist arguments. The causes of the riot were thus either attributed to external factors, as was the case in the moral panic surrounding the youth, or the riot itself was downplayed to a mere isolated incident, therefore not requiring a deeper explanation, as was the case in the anti-Arab discourse.

Ethics and consent

Ethical approval and consent were not required.

Data availability

Mendeley Data: 1985 Limassol anti-Arab Riot Newspaper Dataset. https://data.mendeley.com/datasets/6gpvg2hrzv/1; DOI: 10.17632/6gpvg2hrzv.1 (Pastellopoulos 2026). The data used in this study consists of Greek Cypriot newspapers and a political leaflet published in 1985.

Data are available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

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