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**Arabs in Europe: Arguments for and against integration**

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### **Abstract**

The recent wave of immigration across European countries has precipitated an unprecedented political crisis in many Western countries. This is compounded by the fact that the large majority of these migrants originate from Arab countries. Research has demonstrated that Arabs are devalued relative to other socioethnic groups. The present study sought to investigate representations of Arabs and their integration. Twenty-one interviews conducted in Malta were used to analyse the logic and structure of argumentation supporting both favourable and unfavourable positions relative to Arabs. The findings demonstrate a variety of perspectives founded on six major themes, namely cultural, sociopolitical, psychological, religious, stigma and economic issues. All views were elaborated and warranted, and served to justify particular forms of social relations that make the integration of Arabs possible but highly difficult. In particular, findings demonstrate a lack of positive appraisals of Islam. These findings suggest that breaking the spiral of conflict between Europeans and the Arab communities they host requires affirmative action to redress the negative representational climate that Arab immigrants need to negotiate. Our study also introduces an innovative method for unpacking argumentation structures that mark representational fields. This serves to understand the ways by which social representations form and transform in everyday social interaction. This understanding is essential in designing smart policy that can cater to the logic of ordinary citizens.

**Keywords:** immigration;Islamophobia;integration;argumentation;Arabs

**Public significance statement:** This study presents different arguments about Arabs and their integration. It does this through an innovative research method looking specifically at argumentation. Its importance lies in studying lay logic and the justificatory backbone of

positive, mixed/ambivalent and negative arguments towards Arabs that enable smarter policy-making.

**Ethical compliance statement:** We have complied with APA ethical standards in the treatment of our human sample.

### **Introduction**

The migration issue is at present firmly entrenched in the European political agenda. The most recent Eurobarometer (European Commission, 2016) shows that migration has become the primary concern amongst European citizens in general, and amongst the residents of Malta in particular, where the present study is located. The predominant challenge facing European societies remains that of turning cultural diversity into added value. Addressing this challenge requires a concerted effort to map the states and strategies of acculturation between various sociocultural groups.

Acculturation research in Malta, which constitutes Europe's southernmost border, is relatively recent. Whilst the history of Malta is highly diverse, its population is relatively homogenous. Out of a total population of 417,432 inhabitants, only 20,289 are non-Maltese, representing 4.86% of total inhabitants (NSO, 2014). British migrants constitute the largest group of non-Maltese inhabitants at 6,652, representing 33% of all migrants. A further 5,563 inhabitants hail from various other EU countries, bringing the total proportion of migrants from within the EU to just over 60% of total migrants (NSO, 2014). Aside from EU migrants, Malta hosts a sizeable Arab community, estimated at around 4,000 inhabitants, or 20% of total migrants (Sammut & Lauri, in press). This adds up to less than 1% of the total population.

Despite this slight presence, and in spite of Malta's longstanding economic and political relations with a number of Arab countries, most notably Libya and Tunisia, recent research has reported widespread negative attitudes towards Arabs in Malta, with various socioethnic groups converging in their antipathy towards Arabs (Sammut & Lauri, in press). This, as we discuss later in this paper, is in line with Islamophobic attitudes levelled at Arabs in many European countries. Whilst the motivations of irregular migrants fleeing conflict zones may hold promise of peace, solidarity and integration, their actual reception takes place in a sociocultural environment marked by pre-existing social representations that circulate amongst the host community. In the present case, this environment holds Arabs in negative regard (Sammut & Lauri, in press). This scenario provides fertile grounds for a spiral of conflict (Sammut, Bezzina & Sartawi, 2015) between the Arab community and the rest of the population, as Arab immigrants strive to legitimate their place in society. In an effort to understand the reasoning underlying the antipathy towards Arabs, the present paper looks at argumentation structures that typify Arabs and their integration in Maltese society.

We argue that unpacking arguments is required to take the study of process and content of social representations further. For the present purpose, we define social representations as constellations of points of view (Sammut, 2015) that coherently objectify some elements in social reality and according to which individuals position themselves relative to others in everyday social relations. Articulated points of view provide the semiotic resources (Zittoun, 2006) required for individuals to fashion their own views and assume a meaningful position in social life. In other words, individuals draw on a range of argued perspectives that circulate in their social environment to develop their own distinct point of view relative to some social issue that makes sense to them and others, given their own experiences. In doing so they take up a position, agreeing with some and disagreeing with others. The unpacking of social representations in terms of the arguments sustaining them

serves in understanding the justification grounds supporting different positions. We propose that the same position can be occupied by different individuals who provide different argumentative justifications for that same position. In other words, arguments in social space are fashioned *across* individuals sharing a similar point of view. Taken in their diverse totality, the ensemble of points of view serves to map out a social representation in its heterogeneity. The process of social re-presentation entails the incorporation of some novel content into the representation, providing a new point of view concerning the object of representation. The study of argumentation illuminates the micro-processes of social representations as they are enacted in speech as well as the symbolic content drawn upon by social actors to make-sense and justify their understanding of the world (Uzelgun, Mohammed, Lewiński & Castro, 2015).

We believe this understanding to be critical in combating the sources of stigma and anti-Arab prejudice that fuel desperate, antagonistic reactions on the part of Arabs. These include the segregation and marginalization of Arab communities in Europe as well as extremist and terrorist activities carried out by individuals who radicalize in response (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011). The case of Arabs in Malta offers an empirical opportunity to examine the reasoning and social thinking behind everyday practices of integration and social exclusion. The study we report in this paper is part of a broader inquiry (Re.Cri.Re) looking at changing representations in Europe following the economic and migration crises experienced in recent years. The project involved the analysis of points of view concerning the integration of Arabs in Europe and their subsequent study in focused discussions and over the media. In this paper we present the argumentation structure of diverse points of view, with special focus on sociopolitical arguments, to elucidate how these provide justification for supporting or opposing the integration of Arabs.



### **Arabs & Islam in the West**

When migrants move to another country, they establish relations with a host population that already holds preconceived ideas and beliefs about them and what their place within the host society should be. Some expatriates may well be warmly received, if prestige is conferred on their national identity of origin. Others may be devalued due to negative stereotypes that already exist about them prior to their migration. Faced with social representations that objectify them, migrants may accept their place, potentially accommodating to the newfound social order by confining certain practices to the personal domain. Alternatively, they may strive to stand against it.

Kinvall & Nesbitt-Larking (2011) note that many Arab migrants have been forced to live a double life, one outside the home that conforms to social expectations and one at home that preserves their original cultural ways. Arab nationals have typically been categorized as a homogenous group on religious grounds, despite the fact that Arab culture is in itself highly diverse. Islam is perceived as a unifying criterion for Arabs in general, and reactions and attitudes levelled in their regard have been confounded by reactions and attitudes to Islam (Helbling, 2012). Consequently, much social and psychological research has resorted to the study of attitudes towards Muslims as a proxy for the study of attitudes towards Arabs.

**Islamophobia.** In the present inquiry, we have focused on representations of Arabs rather than Muslims as we believe this affords a better focus on contemporary migration patterns, in particular the migration crisis that has swept Europe following unrest in many Arab countries. However, we believe that research concerning Islamophobia also speaks to Arab concerns. As Helbling (2012, p. 5) argues, it is unclear whether representations and attitudes towards Muslims reported in the psychological literature are about Muslims in general or about immigrants from Arab countries. Consequently, findings concerning Muslim migrants can be considered synonymous with Arab migrants. The widespread negative

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attitudes towards Muslims in various Western countries have led to the emergence of the term Islamophobia, meant to express this overall negative orientation. The term was originally proposed by The Runnymede Trust report in 1997 in Britain, in which Islamophobia is defined as a fear of or aversion to Islam and Muslims. Public fears of Muslims and Islam concern issues of secularization and how Muslims in Western countries have increasingly demanded religious and cultural rights as a consequence of their settlement (Helbling, 2012). These include demands for the construction of new mosques, the liberty to wear religious attire, the provision and subsidization of Islamic religious education, gender-segregation in sports lessons, as well as legal protection for cultural practices such as gender inequality, forced marriages, female circumcision, and Sharia law. Moreover, Islam is commonly regarded as a backward or violent religion. These widespread concerns have fuelled a fear of Islam in Western countries, where many consider Muslims to be religious fundamentalists or potential terrorists. The true problem of Islamophobia, according to Helbling (2012), lies in its essentializing and universalizing quality, propagated by conspiracy theories according to which Europe will soon be taken over by Islam.

In this general context, many believe that the culture and lifestyle of Muslims are incompatible with the Western way of life (Pew Research Center, 2006). These beliefs have provided an impetus to radical right parties in many countries in Western Europe that remain deeply embedded in the Christian tradition (Helbling, 2012). The only seeming exception to this negative portrayal is the 'good Muslim', who is peaceful, politically moderated, pluralist, highly educated and in favour of gender equality (Shryock, 2010). In other words, the good Muslim is one who fully internalizes Western values and practices.

It is little wonder that such migrants resort to living parallel lives, over the relentless probing and discrimination they experience on a day to day basis. According to Kaya (2009), the parallel Islamic societies that have taken shape in some European countries in recent

times are not the result of conservatism on the part of Muslims, but a result of migrants' reactions to structural and political exclusion that is in place in many countries. In this light, we argue that the study of representations concerning Arab integration is critical inasmuch as it constitutes a core explanatory factor driving negative behaviour toward Arabs and, at the same time, Arab responses to their host populations. As Dekker & van der Noll (2012) eloquently argue, increasing negative attitudes toward Muslims among non-Muslims may result in increased social exclusion and discrimination, which may then serve to increase radicalization among Muslims that in turn further increase negative attitudes among non-Muslims, and so forth. In essence, social representations of Arabs are a key component in the conflict spiral (Sammut, Bezzina & Sartawi, 2015) that is taking place in many Western societies. In this paper, we investigate some of these representations in an effort to understand their legitimacy and structure. We proceed by presenting the conceptual framework and methodological approach we have adopted. Central to our effort in this paper is the development of an interview protocol focused on argumentation, which serves in understanding the justification basis of diverse points of view.

### **Thinking Arabs: Argumentation and Representation**

Billig (1987), who has pioneered the study of argumentation in psychology, claims that as individuals articulate a point of view they develop a chain of reasoning that justifies their perspective. Argumentation, per necessity, involves an interactive conversation that aims at communication and persuasion. In everyday life, human subjects are frequently caught in disputes and controversies which challenge and shape their thinking (Farr, 1984). Divergent perspectives are settled through the practice of argumentation, where interlocutors give reasons for and against the claims they make and co-construct the validity of their speech acts (Jovchelovitch, 2011). In essence, interlocutors use reasons and justifications to

settle differences in opinion and achieve mutual understanding. We believe that these structural components of arguments are of critical importance. One achieves genuine understanding of another's point of view when one is able to not only cite another's views, but also substantiate these with validity claims that make those views reasonable and sensible given the conditions of their existence and production.

In the present paper, we propose an interview protocol based directly on Liakopoulos's (2000) argumentation analysis that serves to elicit the various structural components that make up a justified and legitimated argument. This involves more than a central claim that conveys the essence of the subject's position. The argumentation structure reveals how and why the point of view adopted is tenable in a given cultural milieu. Extending the study of argumentation to the research interview enables such contextualization and a better understanding of the arguments employed, as detailed hereunder.

**Argumentation analysis.** Liakopoulos (2000) draws on Toulmin's (1958) model of the argument to develop a protocol for argumentation analysis for the social sciences. The point of departure is to recognize that every debate evolves around an argument that represents some central idea upon which the to and fro of conversation is based. Argumentation refers to the communicative act that proposes a series of statements to justify or refute a certain opinion and persuade the interlocutor accordingly. The aim of argumentation analysis is to deconstruct the argument structure for the purposes of understanding and assessing the validity claims of an opinion. This analytical procedure is thus particularly suited to social psychological work that aims at gaining an understanding of respondents' perspectives, experiences, meanings, and so on, which constitute in large measure the data furnished by the interviewing process.

In Liakopoulos's (2000) model, an argument is made up of a structure of six components (see Figure 1). The central message conveyed by the argument is a *claim*, or conclusion. This represents the take-home message argued by the respondent, that is, the position the respondent is taking for or against the issue. The argument itself is a structure that is put in place to validate the argument's claim. Thus, a claim may be preceded by facts, or *data*, supporting it. Qualifying statements, or *warrants*, are used to legitimize the claim. These serve to establish the validity of the argument and justify the step from data to claim, describing why this step can be made. At other times, other statements are used to explain why warrants have authority. These are termed *backings*, categorical statements that legitimate a warrant when its use is not straightforward. At times there is a requirement for a specific reference to the force of the process from warrant to claim. Such statements are termed *qualifiers*. They serve to detail the conditions under which the justification of the process from warrant to claim holds. In other instances, the circumstances under which the claim does not hold are detailed. These are known as *rebuttals*. Figure 1 summarizes this underlying conceptual model of the argument.

[Insert Figure 1 approximately here]

*Figure 1.* Argument structure adapted from Liakopoulos's (2000) portrayal of Toulmin's model (1958). An argument can advance multiple claims, that are in turn supported by the other components.

Argumentation analysis provides thus an anatomical structure of individuals' perspectives. Such a structured portrayal of respondents' points of view evinces the way by which individuals make sense of social psychological events. This sense may vary both across individuals or groups. What justifies a claim for some individual may be poor

justification for another. Similarly, different sociocultural groups may draw on different social representations to sustain the particular perspectives that they adopt (Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernandez, 2015). Consequently, the piecing together of arguments in terms of their constituent components across a number of respondents enables the effective study of social representations (Sammut, 2015), inasmuch as this provides an understanding of how the social phenomenon is perceived, understood and interacted with given its historical context of production.

Argumentation analysis can be applied to any piece of discourse or speech with the aim of mapping the argumentation structure that inheres in conversation. Typically, however, the analysis also involves an inferential exercise on the part of the researcher to identify certain components of the argument that might have not been explicitly articulated by the speaker. This omission is typically made up for by the researcher's inferring the missing components, given the broad gist of the argument. Moreover, no research interviewing protocols have, to our knowledge, outlined procedures for gathering data that fits the various components of argumentation analysis in face-to-face interviews. Consequently, standard interviewing procedures typically overlook the justification grounds an interviewee charts in regarding their own perspective as valid, due to the fact that these justifications are typically left unexplored. We have sought to address these shortcomings by gathering data during face-to-face interviews that are purposely designed to explore argumentation features. In essence, our interviews afforded the possibility of probing respondents to elicit the various structural components of an argument. We proceed to present our adopted interview protocol along with further details concerning our study.

## **Method**

### **The Interview Protocol**

Following introductions, the interview proper started with a direct question aimed at soliciting the central claim/s featuring in the respondent's point of view about the issue. Interviews started by asking respondents the following question: 'What is your opinion regarding the integration of Arabs?'. Subsequently, we revisited claims during the course of the interview by periodically asking respondents the following questions: 'So what is your point in a nutshell?', and 'So, to sum it up, what is your conclusion?'. Interviews were terminated by the interviewer reciting a summary of the main claims to the respondent and verifying whether these were correctly understood.

Further to the elicitation of claims, the protocol included probes aimed at eliciting the various other structural components of an argument. To elicit data, whenever respondents recounted some event, we asked: 'What happened?' or requested participants to elaborate further with 'Could you tell me more?'. To elicit warrants, following the articulation of claims, we asked respondents to provide a justificatory account by asking: 'Why do you say that?', or 'How do you know that?'. In turn, backings provide a meta-level justification that enables respondents to infer validity claims for the warrants that justify their claims. We adopted the following questions to elicit backings: 'Why did you conclude that?', or 'How is this justified?'. These questions enabled respondents to move from the particular to the general in articulating their opinions. Finally, having probed the respondent's accounts in sufficient depth, we proceeded to explore exceptional cases to the claims respondents expressed. We asked respondents: 'Are there any exceptions to these conclusions?', with the aim of exploring rebuttals.

This set of questions targeted the various structural components of an argument, as detailed above. The adoption of this interview protocol enabled the researchers to elicit the various data during the interview without the need for inferring certain components independently and without verification with the respondent. The interview protocol was

adopted to ensure that respondents' opinions were argumentatively structured during the course of the interview and that the necessary justification and validation grounds sustaining respondents' points of view were comprehensively explored.

### **Participants & Procedure**

Twenty-one participants from Malta were recruited through snowball sampling. Fourteen respondents were male and seven were female. The youngest respondent was 26 years of age, whilst the oldest was 40. All respondents held Maltese nationality, one respondent reported a mixed background and another respondent held dual nationality. Respondents reported varying levels of education, though all reported at least a secondary level of education. 13 respondents reported a belief in the Roman Catholic faith, of whom 8 were practising members. 8 respondents reported they did not subscribe to an organised faith. 14 respondents reported they were in a committed relationship, with the rest being single. All respondents reported being gainfully employed.

The interviews took place at convenient locations chosen by respondents, mostly at respondents' homes. Interviews were carried out between December 2015 and January 2016. Their duration varied between a maximum of 1.5 hours and a minimum of 40 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and translated into English for data analysis purposes. Respondents were notified about their rights of participation in advance, and informed consent was obtained prior to every interview. Individual interviews were terminated when the respondents agreed with the final summary presented by the interviewer and stated that they felt they had been understood and that there was nothing further to add. Data gathering was terminated following theoretical saturation, that is, when further interviews failed to elicit any new arguments that had not been elicited in prior interviews.



## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was undertaken on the transcribed texts, in line with Liakopoulos's (2000) argumentation structure detailed above. The analysis was collaboratively undertaken by two of the authors following a coding frame designed after careful coding of a single interview for the purposes of defining the argumentation components (coding frame available on request). Analysis started by coding the various claims made by each respondent. Following this initial coding, similar claims that emerged across different respondents were grouped together to identify the various arguments articulated by the entire set of respondents. A total of 31 claims were identified at this stage.

In the second step, we conducted a thematic categorization exercise on these claims to bring together those that represented similar arguments. The thematic analysis of arguments thus followed the argumentation analysis undertaken on the raw data in step one above, that was gathered in the first place following an argumentation protocol adopted during interviewing. This ensured that arguments were elicited in the first place, as opposed to mere themes which would have not provided the various structural components to understand how each argument is justifiably articulated by respondents. Consequently, this enabled us to identify different arguments that discussed the same theme to advance different claims. The identified themes were sociopolitical, cultural, psychological, religious, stigma and economic themes. Standard thematic analysis alone would have precluded such level of argumentation detail. For the purposes of the present paper, we present three distinct arguments hereunder that addressed the sociopolitical theme regarding the integration of Arabs.

Following this thematic organisation, the third step involved analysing the rest of the data, already grouped by thematic argument, to code the various warrants, backings, data, qualifiers and rebuttals that justified each claim and that provided structural support for each argument. To summarize, data analysis yielded a distinct set of arguments in the first step that

were thematically organised in the second step and structurally supported in the third. The resulting set of findings, therefore, does not only present the thematically salient issues that concern respondents with regards to the integration of Arabs. These, in themselves, may already be useful in understanding certain aspects of the situation. However, our method also serves to present these concerns in a way that justifies a stand for or against the integration of Arabs, alongside a comprehensive structure that provides the necessary justification grounds for the arguments elaborated. We believe that such a comprehensive argumentation structure is requisite to fully understand the lay logic (i.e. the underlying rationale justifying the drawing of conclusions in lay speech) of citizens' points of view relative to elements in their social environment.

### **Findings**

A total of 15 arguments were identified across the data set, drawing on sociopolitical, cultural, psychological, religious, stigma and economic themes. Five arguments articulated views that favoured the integration of Arabs, six arguments opposed Arab integration, whilst another four arguments presented mixed views. Selected findings are presented hereunder along with accompanying illustrative excerpts of respondents' speech. We include further schematic illustrations of the three sociopolitical arguments, one from each category, that detail these arguments' various structural components.

**Arguments for integration.** A number of arguments were advanced in support of Arab integration. Respondents argued that whilst some European countries were experiencing problems in their dealings with Arabs, this was not inevitable as Malta's long history of trade with Arab countries demonstrates.

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“I think that the advantage of always having had an Arab community among us, we’re observing them today, in my opinion. Because when we think that we’ve always had Arabs here [...] I don’t think that it affected us as much as, ehm, and I think they always were accepted, as well, these people, because if they weren’t accepted, there would have been fighting between Arabs and Maltese [...] We can integrate and they can integrate with us, just as we did for a period of time even before entering the EU” (Sean, male, 39 years old, director)

Respondents argued that cultural diversity in itself is a strength, that it is interesting, intriguing and welcome. They further argued that there is no reason why people from different cultures should not get along. Rather, different people benefit from such encounters as they broaden their horizons through learning about each other and experiencing different ways of life.

“I think, kind of, you look beyond what you’re normally used to. Because it’s something different, that if you don’t know about it. In general, the more things you know about, the more different things you can experience, so that’s good. It forces you to realise, as well, you realise that there could be other things that for you aren’t normal, but then what defines normal? So the fact that you can, there’s this certain movement, it makes you question certain things, that listen, there are other things, that I might have never heard of” (Kristina, female, 28 years old, marketing executive)

“I’m not against, ehm, I think there are more benefits to immigration or emigration, ehm, and the mixture of cultures [...] you have the, the culture, the,

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kind of, the integration of different cultures. You always meet with new things  
[...] you get exposed to more things than, than just remaining closed in a bubble”  
(Frederick, male, 26 years old, online marketer)

A number of respondents recounted positive personal experiences of interactions with Arabs, mostly at work. Moreover, respondents argued that the integration of Arabs also saw a transfer of wealth that had boosted the local economy, and that this was for everyone’s benefit. Respondents further argued that Arabs are stigmatized and that their negative reputation makes integration difficult on a day to day basis. The marginalisation of Arabs in European societies is attributable to stigma in their regard, as good Arabs are not given a chance. Respondents argued that this precipitates negative counter-reactions and perpetuates the notoriety cycle.

“I think they, a lot of them are misunderstood, I think a lot of them are maybe a bit mistreated [...] They’re being singled out, you know [...] [They are] over-represented in the media such that then the general public develops a negative attitude and they dish out this negative attitude towards Arabs and then Arabs might end up reacting to it in even, ehm, negative ways” (Silvana, female, 36 years old, human resources assistant)

We present a selected illustration of the positive sociopolitical argument for integration hereunder (see Figure 2):

[insert Figure 2 approximately here]

*Figure 2. Positive sociopolitical argument concerning Arab integration.*

The argument above illustrates how an argumentation claim is supported by an extensive validity structure that can recognise as well as manage the implications posed by the claim. For instance, in the present argument, the issue of racism is managed by denying that the Maltese are generally racist, whilst at the same time an acknowledgement that certain Arab traits preclude integration is posed as a rebuttal. Similarly, the popular association between Arabs and Islam is managed by denying that the Arab community in Malta harbours fundamentalist elements. On the other hand, the argument presents a qualification that Arabs with strong Muslim views integrate less. The argument clearly manages the grounds for discord with the claim being advanced in such a way that despite qualifications and reservations, the claim that Arabs integrate well still holds.

**Arguments against integration.** Other respondents articulated arguments against the integration of Arabs. Whilst respondents did not dismiss culture contact outright, an argument that Arab culture is dissimilar to other cultures and presents a set of potentially insurmountable challenges was elaborated. Arab culture was argued to be backwards and underdeveloped, and culture contact with Arabs should be avoided as it holds the Maltese back:

“if you tell me, do you want your country to be run by Arabs? I’d tell you no. Because I want to move forward not backwards” (Edward, male, 33 years old, self-employed)

“they contrast more because their culture is somewhat more extreme than others [...] it’s a slightly savage culture, I don’t see it as, it bothers me, it bothers me.

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The, the way of living is different from ours [...] Islamic culture, on the other hand, it's very powerful and it's very closed and it's very narrow-minded" (Chris, male, 38 years old, sales executive)

"they still get stuck in their own style of mentality [...] it's his culture, that's why I don't agree with their culture, when I see a culture full of madness and chaos" (Eric, male, 32 years old, contractor)

Another argument proposed that Arabs insisted on preserving their dysfunctional cultural practices and accused locals who oppose certain elements in their culture of racism:

"They have a bad reputation. Now instead of trying to change it, they're trying to, get cut off for themselves and they don't let anyone change this reputation that they have" (Mikhail, male, 31 years old, aircraft engineer)

"if I oppose a different culture from mine, or to say, I don't agree with it and it bothers me, whatever, that's because I'm racist" (Chris male, 38 years old, sales executive)

An argument that any large proportion of foreigners provides a sociopolitical challenge was advanced. Respondents argued that immigrants needed to be managed and that they should strive to adhere to local codes rather than change them to accommodate themselves. With regards to Arabs, due to stark cultural differences, respondents argued that even good,

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upright and law-abiding Arabs end up being problematic due to the fact that they had grown up in totalitarian, dictatorial and violent cultures and they consequently knew no better:

“Arabs developed a culture that has certain violent ingredients, so that once a person grows up in it, ehm, it will lead them to view the world in a certain way, live according to certain principles that could be more violent than certain people of other cultures are used to living with, when they emigrate and go trying to find a better life, they take that culture with them, and because they participate in that culture, both good and bad, whether because he is dominant and the woman is like that, this will cause problems” (Mia, female, 39 years old, director)

We present hereunder a selected portrayal of the sociopolitical argument against the integration of Arabs (see Figure 3):

[insert Figure 3 approximately here]

*Figure 3.* Negative sociopolitical argument concerning Arab integration.

Similar to the positive sociopolitical argument, the present argument also caters for a counter-argument that would narrow down the issue of Arab integration to stigmatization on the part of locals, as detailed above. In the present argument, this counter-claim is managed by arguing that the accusation of racism and stigma is used to either justify preferential treatment or to introduce alien practices that are unwelcome and incompatible with local ways.

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A further argument proposed that the central issue regarding the integration of Arabs was their dogmatic subscription to Islam, where certain Muslim practices, such as gender inequality, were incommensurable with Western values:

“the issues all stem from, ehm, that the Muslim religion, and that in a general way, this is pushing the, Muslims so that either they take over Europe because they multiply and grow, and then they introduce their methods, or else they fight Europe directly using terrorism so as to make it unstable and continue growing in their ranks. Whatever it is, you have the Muslim religion, right?” (Amanda, female, 36 years old, senior relationship officer)

Respondents claimed that Arabs had earned their negative reputation over the years and this said something about who they are as a people. Furthermore, the contribution Arab business was making to society, a qualification that also featured in the sociopolitical argument for Arab integration, is questioned in this argument and perceived as being generated illicitly under corrupt and despotic regimes.

**Mixed arguments.** A set of other arguments articulated ambivalent perspectives that were noncommittal regarding the issue of Arab integration. Some respondents, for instance, argued that culture contact could be an asset at times, but that it could also lead to difficulties in reconciling certain practices. Respondents further argued that not all Arabs are the same and that some Arabs get along very well with the local population whilst others seemingly do not. Characterological traits cannot be generalised to an entire socioethnic group. Consequently, the integration of Arabs was possible but not straightforward. Respondents argued that integration required also a commitment on the part of migrant Arabs to not



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threaten local ways with their own practices. The arguments in favour of integration provided a similarly qualified claim regarding the dual burden of integration that requires compromise on the part of both migrants and hosts. According to the present argument, diversity should be respected only insofar as it did not interfere with local practices in any way. Respondents recognised that this qualified valuing of diversity could prove problematic for some. They argued that some Arabs might therefore be incapable of integration. Arab immigrants whose ways and values conformed to European practices were better able to integrate than those who upheld their own cultural ways.

“In the case of Arabs, ehm, how exposed they are to, to this European culture, to, to this different way of life, ehm, and not, eh, in ghettos, in enclaves, in sub-groups, where you might have a person who has lived his whole life in London but because he lived in certain parts of London, he could have been in the middle of Iraq, [...] because it wouldn't have made a difference [...] You'd have those that would be slightly more, ehm, cultured, more, how do I say it, they have a bit of exposure” (Jacob, male, 35 years old, human resource manager)

We present hereunder a selected schematic illustration of the ambivalent sociopolitical argument concerning Arab integration (see Figure 4):

[insert Figure 4 approximately here]

*Figure 4.* Ambivalent sociopolitical argument concerning Arab integration.

This argument negotiates a similar socio-political ground to the other two arguments. However, the claims that this argument advances are inherently ambivalent. It suggests that

stigma causes problems in integration but that Arabs who immerse in European ways should be able to integrate anyway. Similarly, it suggests that migrants are free to practice their beliefs, but that this freedom is contingent on the preferences of others. Taken together, these three arguments present semiotic resources of a sociopolitical nature regarding the integration of Arabs in Europe. We proceed to discuss the general implications of our structured argumentation analysis hereunder.

### **Discussion**

In this paper we proposed that argumentation processes give rise to structured arguments that circulate in the public sphere and that furnish the semiotic resources required for individuals to negotiate their own points of view and position themselves meaningfully in social relations. We have elaborated a method for eliciting these structured arguments in research interviews that we believe could complement other forms of data analysis (e.g. thematic or content analysis) in mapping the diversified content of social representations. We recommend the use of argumentation analysis to identify instances where certain semiotic resources might be absent in certain social representations. For instance, no positive view of Islam emerged in the course of this inquiry. Alternatively, argumentation analysis could help identify an over-abundance of certain claims that could suggest a central focus in the social representation. For instance, in the present analysis, the issue concerning the existence and consequence of stigma in society seems to be a salient issue for the Maltese as this issue is treated in various arguments. These analytic insights could provide scholars with the necessary building blocks for undertaking social marketing interventions. For instance, dispelling a particular claim might require an intervention focused on misconstrued data or warrants that justify the claim, rather than targeting the claim explicitly (see Lauri, 2015).

We would also argue that a focus on argumentation structures allows researchers to understand how certain claims serve in managing expectations imposed by alternative arguments. These counter-warrants serve in keeping alternative views at bay and prevent a challenge to one's adopted position. The method we have proposed serves to identify these clearly with reference to specific alternative arguments. In the arguments detailed above, this strategy is evident in participants' claims countering accusations of racism (within the negative sociopolitical argument). The racism counter-claim serves in warding off a challenge to the argument based on presumed attributions of racism. By managing the counter-claim in this way, respondents ward off the challenge and successfully preserve their own position. Once again, we argue that this could prove to be a critical insight in designing social marketing interventions. Moreover, this method further helps in understanding the validity structure that supports these counter-claims. For instance, the issue of whether Arab investment is good for the Maltese economy depends on whether one considers this in light of Arab societal features or whether one considers this in light of historical trade patterns and social demographics in Malta. Both claim and counter-claim are supported by a validation structure, which our method can make explicit. The benefit of argumentation analysis lies in providing knowledge regarding how an argument is justified and negotiated at any point of its advancement. Combined with the interviewing protocol outlined in this study, it provides a powerful tool for studying arguments inductively at the level of individual participants, minimising the need for post hoc interpretation. At the same time, it helps uncover social representations operating across participants, as seen in the schematic illustrations above.

We are aware that our proposed method suggests that there are no views from ignorance (see Sammut, Bezzina & Sartawi, 2005) but that all views are treated as valid in their own right. We contend that validity concerns can and should be addressed and deconstructed for analytical purposes. Recent sociopolitical events in Europe, such as the

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Brexit vote, should serve as a reminder to scholars that no view should be dismissed as faulty a priori due to its potential social consequences. Rather, these events remind us that every argument counts in the public sphere and that every argument is potentially persuasive regardless of subscription to principles of formal logic or factuality of content. We take the view that perspectives are ecological, that is, logical by the cultural standards of their production. In this paper, we have presented a method for eliciting and analysing the ecology of points of view in terms of their argumentation structure. Finally, our case study of Arabs in Malta has provided an empirical ground to examine these theoretical issues. This has served to shed light on this pressing social issue inasmuch as it has furthered our understanding of the reasoning behind integration and social exclusion. We propose that such inquiry serves to design policy that is smart and that communicates with the logic of ordinary people.

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