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## Mediating a compromised solidarity

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### Abstract

*This article explores popular media as resources for judgment in how settled migrants in Europe imagine solidarities toward newer arrivals seeking entry into the region. It discusses the news and entertainment consumption of Filipino nurses in London and how this figures in their imaginary of social and political bonds with refugees. Drawing on ethnographic interviews, I argue that these Filipino migrants can only articulate a compromised solidarity: one fractured between empathy with refugees and concern about what these newer arrivals might mean for settled migrants in the city. I then explain how the media contribute to this fracturing. One way is that the xenophobia in popular media content on social media leads the Filipinos to assert their difference with other migrants, including refugees. A second is that the Filipinos deploy popular media content, especially on British television, to assert that they belong to UK society more than other migrants, again including refugees.*

### Keywords

*migrants, refugees, solidarity, global city, social media, British television*

### Introduction

Recent public opinion polls indicate that many in Europe are taking a hardening stance against the influx of migrants into the region. A survey by the International Organization on Migration (IOM) (2015) shows that Europe is the only world region where a majority wants current immigration levels to decrease. Fifty-two percent of the respondents from this region held this opinion, as compared to 39% in North America and 26% in Oceania. Importantly, a Pew Research Center (2016) survey highlights that across European countries as diverse as Poland, Greece, Hungary, and the United Kingdom, this negative stance is partly to do with people's beliefs about refugees, such as those coming from the Middle East and North Africa. Of the total respondents, 59% thought that refugees would "increase the likelihood of terrorism in [their] country"; 50% that they were "a burden on [the] country because they [took] away [people's] jobs and social benefits"; and 30% that they were "more to blame for crime than other groups."

Contemporary scholarship has rightly paid attention to these polls that reflect the negative stance of Europe's cultural majorities toward the refugees coming in the region (e.g., Blinder & Allen, 2015; Dempster & Hargrave, 2017). These works are crucial interventions, as European popular opinion has implications for the direction of regional and state policies. The issue of immigration has in fact taken the political center stage in European countries like the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Germany, with nationalism being increasingly popular across the political spectrum and with moderate politicians being forced to think about how their policy positions might address the more extreme wings of their constituencies (Henley, 2018; Tartar, 2017; P. Taylor, 2018).

Beyond the European cultural majority's stance, however, it is also important to attend to the disposition that settled migrants in the region have of refugees. For one, this disposition has implications for the possibility of cross-migrant socialities. The ability of migrants to imagine positive interpersonal relationships with refugees offers the possibility of enhancing the quality of these refugees' everyday interactions in their host country (see Keith, 2005). This disposition also has implications for cross-migrant solidarities. The capacity of migrants to imagine coalitions with refugees open up opportunities to challenge institutional and everyday racisms against all migrants (see Su, 2010). Unfortunately, such socialities and solidarities are not at all a given because so-called "interminority attitudes" in culturally diverse places can sometimes be complicated and even conflictual (Hindriks, Verkuyten, & Coenders, 2014; Sturgis, Brunton-Smith, Kuha, & Jackson, 2014).

This article considers how popular media matter in the dispositions that the United Kingdom's non-European Union (non-EU) settled migrants have about the region's refugees. It looks specifically at entertainment and news media and the ways in which these settled migrants use them to construct and articulate their imaginaries of refugees. In doing so, it expands an extant set of literature that is central to this special issue's theme on refugee socialities in the media: media representations of distant suffering and the possible forms of solidarity with vulnerable others that these might foster (Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2006, 2013; Frosh & Pinchevski, 2008).

By attending specifically to the United Kingdom's non-EU settled migrants, this article contributes to the emerging set of scholarship that moves away from the conceptual assumption that the audience for distant suffering in the media—the one whose solidarity is sought—is the white Westerner (Ong, 2015; Orgad, 2015). Unlike their EU counterparts, many of these migrants had fewer rights before gaining their UK citizenship; they were subjected to the UK government's "hostile environment policy" toward nonsettled migrants and excluded from the EU's "freedom of movement principle" (R. Taylor, 2018; The Migration Observatory, 2012). This article sheds light particularly on key dimensions that shape the non-EU settled migrant experience and, in turn, how this experience influences the ways in which they engage with representations of distant

suffering. It also contributes to the interrogation of the very notion of the distance between the audience and the sufferers and how this might impinge on what forms of solidarity with vulnerable others these audiences might be able to imagine (see Silverstone, 2006; see also Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2018; Ogan, 2001). This is because for these migrants, refugees can be both proximate and distant, with their own experiences of social exclusion and marginalization being simultaneously the same as and different from these sufferers.

As an empirical anchor, I turn to London's settled Filipino nurses and explore their mediated imaginaries of refugees. London is a useful site from which to think about cross-migrant relations because it is a key node in transnational networks not only of migration, but also of capital and culture. As previous scholarship has established, it is in global cities like London that the realities of cultural diversity are most intensely encountered and felt. Such cities are where issues of coexistence and living together with cultural "others" are most tangible (Sassen, 2005). It is also in such cities that one finds intense forms of mediation that can have contradictory implications for people's openness to cultural diversity (Georgiou, 2006, 2013). Consequently, London provides a context from which one might see how migrant imaginaries of refugees might most tightly entangle with migrant experiences of everyday diversity.

Meanwhile, London's settled community of Filipino nurses is worth paying close attention to because of their distinct experience of marginality in the United Kingdom. Most of them only arrived in the United Kingdom in the early 2000s and, unlike other settled migrants, their 200,000-strong Filipino community only have weak historical and political connections to the country (Alcantara, 2007). These Filipino nurses are, as such, often invisible in the United Kingdom's public discourses surrounding migrants, even if at 15,300 they are the second largest group of "overseas hires" by the National Health Service (Baker, 2018). Crucially, these nurses tend to have complicated experiences of being included and excluded in broader UK society. While their occupation is conferred a professional and upwardly mobile status, it is also characterized by physical labor and care work that make them prone to experiencing discrimination at the hands of abusive patients and their relatives (Amrith, 2017; see also Daniel, Chamberlain, & Gordon, 2001; Walani, 2015; Withers & Snowball, 2003). Because London's Filipino nurses occupy a liminal space of marginality brought about by their labor of care, their capacity to imagine solidarities with the even more marginalized refugees would be indicative of the possibility and quality of cross-migrant affinities in the city.

### **Conceptualizing the role of media in migrant imaginaries of refugees**

As a way to understand popular media's role in how settled migrants in the United Kingdom might imagine solidarities with refugees coming into Europe, this article unpacks the ways that these migrants use media as "resources for judgement" (Silverstone, 2006, 44; see also Orgad, 2015). This process pertains

to how, in the face of diversity, people draw from media content to form their opinions of their cultural others. It encompasses not only people's direct consumption of popular media, but also, crucially, their constant exposure to everyday talk wherein popular media have become fundamentally inscribed.

In looking into this process, this article builds on an ethnographic approach that aims for a middle ground between problematic works that posit a relationship either of media content powerfully shaping cultural identities or of cultural identities powerfully shaping media content (Madianou, 2005). I specifically investigate the interweaving of entertainment and news content into the everyday lives of migrants and, consequently, the impact of this interweaving on migrants' imaginaries of themselves and their cultural others.

In the case of London's Filipino nurses, popular media become resources for judgment by contributing to an imaginary of refugees that is characterized by what I call a "compromised solidarity." To help make sense of this claim, which I flesh out later in this article, I first establish two distinct but intertwined dimensions of the migrant condition that are central to how they imagine solidarities with refugees. One is the migrants' experience of social marginalization—and particularly symbolic marginalization—by the cultural majority. A key expression of this is what I refer to as an amalgamated imaginary of migrants, a xenophobic trope in both public and media talk that lumps together different migrant categories into a single mass of interlocking fears. The second dimension is the migrants' relationships with each other. Extant literature indicates that this can be characterized by complicated forms of competition and cooperation, which can manifest in the way that they deploy media content in constructing and expressing views about their fellow migrants.

### **On an amalgamated imaginary of migrants**

A key dimension that shapes the capacity of settled migrants to imagine solidarities with incoming refugees is how they themselves are regarded by the locals. Experiencing exclusion at various levels of sociality—from the transnational to the national to the institutional to the interpersonal—can make migrants feel a lack of belongingness; they can feel as if they are in a perpetual state of limbo where they are no longer traveling but also do not feel firmly rooted (see Barnsley & Teifouri, 2017; Jackson, 2014). When migrants are preoccupied with seeking acceptance from the cultural majority, it becomes difficult for them to think beyond the struggles of their own group. As I discuss more fully in the next section, this prevents them from thoughtfully considering the condition of other migrant groups and can even lead them to assert their superior claims to belongingness by undermining other migrant groups (see Sawrikar & Katz, 2010; Shah, 2008).

Migrant experiences of social exclusion come in many forms, constituted by interlocking and multiple factors that include, among other things, "poverty and

disadvantage, poor health, cultural marginalization and restricted spatial mobility” (Spicer, 2011, p. 493). In this article, I focus on the discursive marginalization currently experienced by the United Kingdom’s settled migrants, London’s Filipino nurses included. What has happened in the United Kingdom in particular has been an increasingly hardening stance of state policy and public opinion toward both established and incoming migrants, something that is unfortunately reflected across Europe more broadly (Dempster & Hargrave, 2017).

Settled migrants in the United Kingdom are increasingly confronted with the public’s amalgamated imaginary of migrants. What is pernicious with this imaginary is not only that it blurs different migrant categories that people can actually regard in different ways, but that it fuses and amplifies the different fears that people have about them (see Blinder & Allen, 2015). There is the fear of so-called economic migrants—especially labor migrants—who are thought to undercut the employment opportunities of locals and burden the national welfare systems (Blanchflower & Shadforth, 2009). There is also the fear of Muslim migrants, who are perceived to undermine a fixed notion of British “cultural values” and, more insidiously, to bring in with them radical and terrorist currents (Abbas, 2011). Then, crucially for this article, there is the fear of the hundreds of thousands of refugees from conflict-torn zones in the Middle East, like Syria, whose numbers are perceived to overwhelm local resources and community cultures (Parker, 2015).

Recent scholarship indicates that UK mainstream media provide resources for judgment that tend to echo this amalgamated imaginary of migrants (for a cross-Europe perspective, see Zaborowski & Georgiou in this special issue; see also Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017). The news media in particular often represent migrants not as individual humans but as masses of people, painting them in broad brushstrokes as “natural disasters, criminals, [and/or] victims” (Silveira, 2016, p. 11). In many instances, they do not distinguish across migrant categories and instead group together economic migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, as well as migrants who enter the country legally or illegally (Silveira, 2016). They also focus on framing migrants primarily as a socioeconomic liability, excluding in their accounts settled migrants who have become wealthy or professionally successful and who therefore could potentially be more easily seen by locals as “people like us” (Crawley, McMahon, & Jones, 2016, p. 39). Concrete examples of the resources for judgment that the news media offer include tropes about “Polish plumbers” flooding the country and taking away jobs from local manual laborers (Spigelman, 2013, p. 98); Muslim migrants engaged in terrorism, violence, forced marriages, and grooming and who are therefore “backwards, oppressive and primitive” (Sian, Law, & Sayyid, 2012, p. 265); and refugees and asylum seekers being “unwanted invaders” who need to be removed from the country (Parker, 2015, p. 12).

Later in the findings, I discuss how the mediation of this amalgamated imaginary of migrants informs the stance that Filipino nurses in London have toward

refugees coming into Europe. I explain that this xenophobic imaginary can undermine the possibility for the nurses to express their solidarity with refugees. It pressures them to into emphasizing that they do not pose any of the grave societal threats in the way that refugees are imagined to do.

### **On complicated relationships among migrants**

The second key dimension that shapes the capacity of settled migrants to imagine solidarities with incoming refugees is how these migrants regard each other. There has not been enough research done on cross-migrant relationships in the United Kingdom particularly. But there has been important work done on interminority solidarities and tensions in the United States. A crucial insight that has emerged from this literature is that when minorities are lumped together into a superordinate category, they can push away other minority groups in a bid to competitively distinguish themselves from their fellow minorities (O'Brien, 2008). One can see how this might be the case especially when this superordinate category has negative connotations, as with the United Kingdom's migrants being amalgamated into a single fearful imaginary.

A key point to take away from the studies on interminority relations in the United States is that minorities often perceive competition among each other as a zero-sum game driven by a desire to be part of the "in-group." The work of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2004) is especially insightful here. He contends that in the United States, this game is about who can assert the strongest affinity with the white majority: the top of the country's emerging "triracial system" to whom the advantages of this system accrue. There is consequently an impetus for U.S. minorities to try to find ways to be part of the highest rung of the "whites," as in some assimilated Latinos, assimilated urban Native Americans, "new white" immigrants, or multiracials. Barring this, they can try to fashion themselves as part of the intermediary rung of "honorary whites," as in light-skinned Latinos or Japanese-Americans, Korean-Americans, Chinese-Americans, Asian Indians, Middle Eastern Americans, or Filipinos. To do this, they push away at the "collective blacks," defining themselves as superior to blacks, dark-skinned Latinos, Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians.

Another equally important point, however, is that the persistence of interminority hierarchies does not mean that they are static. Bonilla-Silva (2004) himself notes that empirically, they are provisional and dynamic. The primary value of conceptually identifying them does not lie in their capacity for full description, but in their ability to indicate the overall trends in how different groups are situated in multicultural contexts (see Song, 2004; see also Jimenez & Horowitz, 2013). Bindi Shah (2008) provides an illuminating discussion of the ways in which the place of particular minorities in such hierarchies might be contested. She contends that beyond skin color, minorities deploy other social differentials to assert or challenge their position in the hierarchy. These include economic class, educational attainment, linguistic assimilation, migration histories, and spatialities

of settlement. She argues that the conditional nature of interminority hierarchies actually opens up the possibility for imagining and even enacting cooperation among the groups. Because their relative position to each other is fluid and shifting, there is the potential that the political divisiveness of hierarchies can be softened. This allows, at the very least, “for shifting cross-racial and/or cross-ethnic alliances based on political commitments and shared interests that are highly contingent and situationally specific” (Shah, 2008, p. 466; see also Su, 2010).

Although there is little work on the impact of popular media on cross-migrant (or interminority) relations, there are a couple of important indications about these that can be gleaned from the established literature on migrant media consumption. One is that popular media are crucial in settled migrants’ attempts at claiming their belongingness to their current home country. Central to the well-documented experiences of how migrants actively negotiate and reinvent their hybrid identities is that they use the media not only as an information source but also as a cultural resource in their attempts at integrating with the locals. There are, for instance, the Greek and Cypriot diasporic youth in New York who use music to solidify their bonds with their friends in the city (Georgiou, 2006). There are also the second-generation Punjabi Indians in London’s Southall district who fashion their identities and aspirations partly from lifestyle imaginaries offered by British and other Western television programs and advertisements (Gillespie, 1995). The other equally indicative insight is that settled migrants can also react to problematic popular media representations of their groups by projecting a unified cultural identity. They gloss over their community debates about this identity and essentialize themselves in addressing their cultural others (Madianou, 2005).

Later in this article’s findings, I discuss how London’s Filipino nurses find themselves unable to express full solidarity with refugees because they are often preoccupied with competing for belongingness with the other migrants. They tend to deploy popular media to assert that they deserve to belong more than other migrants, refugees included.

## **Methodology**

As previously established, this research used an ethnographic lens to understand how the views of the United Kingdom’s settled migrants about the refugees coming into Europe were shaped by their popular media consumption (see Madianou, 2005). This meant looking into the ways in which the city’s migrants drew from entertainment and news content as resources for judgment, weaving them into their everyday lives and, subsequently, into their imaginaries of themselves and of their cultural others (see Silverstone, 2006; Orgad, 2015). I specifically conducted life-story interviews with 16 Filipino nurses working in the Greater London area. I then followed up these interviews from 2015 and 2016 with informal conversations, through to the end of 2017. While these interviews



an conversations were broadly about the nurses' lives as settled migrants, I was attentive to how participants referenced popular media in their talk. To probe their statements further, I asked them to elaborate on their thoughts on the particular news and entertainment content they mentioned. I also did an impressionistic analysis of this content to gain a more comprehensive picture of their media consumption.

In selecting the Filipino nurses to be interviewed for this research, I did a purposive sampling through snowballing. Through the help of a key informant, I aimed for a number of typical traits across the nine female and seven male participants. Importantly, I focused on those who were part of the "big nursing migration" from the Philippines to the United Kingdom in the early 2000s (see Alcantara, 2007). At the time of the interviews, the participants were all older than 35 years, had lived in the United Kingdom for more than a decade, and had acquired British citizenship within the first 4 years of moving. All of them were married, with five of them joined in London by their partners only and the rest by their children as well.

### **Articulating a compromised solidarity**

In expressing their stance about the refugees seeking entry into Europe, the Filipino nurses in London articulated what I call a "compromised solidarity." This concept attempts to capture the fractured way in which settled migrants like the Filipino nurses imagine social and political bonds with refugees. Indeed, the participants were strikingly similar in how they simultaneously expressed empathy with the refugees but also caution about what the arrival of these refugees might mean for their own social status as migrants in UK society.

Here it is crucial to make a conceptual distinction between this notion of a compromised solidarity and Chouliaraki's (2013) important and often-discussed notion of ironic forms of solidarity. In her work, what Chouliaraki attends to is the problematic interpretive position that contemporary humanitarian appeals offer what they often assume to be a white Western audience. She argues that instead of encouraging people to truly engage with others, the imaginary these appeals encourage has been increasingly geared toward helping others in order to feel good about oneself. In this case then, the irony is textual.

In the compromised solidarity that I talk about, meanwhile, what is problematic is that settled migrants like the Filipino nurses in London are both proximate and distant to the refugees. Although the shared experience of the travails of migration enables the migrants to take an empathetic stance, it also prevents them from imagining a fuller solidarity with refugees. Consequently, the irony here is situational.

One can see this kind of compromised solidarity at play in the case of one of this study's participants, Wendell (male, 45 years old). During our interview, he said

that even if public talk and media talk were dominated by the idea that refugees are bad news for the country, he could not but be sorry for them (see Philo et al., 2013). Wendell contended, “No one with a heart would be able to ignore what [the refugees] go through every day just to survive ... many of them genuinely need help.” The other participants also expressed similar thoughts, sometimes as strong as his and sometimes less so:

“Seeing those refugees in the news is very heavy. Especially the children. Very heavy.” (Mario, male, 48)

“I sometimes feel for [the refugees]. I can’t imagine what they’re going through.” (Lara, female, 43)

Wendell explained that his stance about the plight of the refugees was rooted in his intimate familiarity with the travails of wanting to migrate out of trying life circumstances. As in the case with the other participants—and indeed with many other economic migrants—he said that knew how it felt to strongly desire to escape a developing country like the Philippines and move to a Western country like the United Kingdom (see Thompson, 2017; Thompson & Walton-Roberts, 2018). Recounting his personal experiences, Wendell lamented about the lack of feasible career opportunities in the Philippines. “It’s a joke,” he complained, “working twelve hour shifts in a hospital bursting to the seams with patients and then getting paid peanuts. PHP 600 (USD 11.20) for all that?! Seriously, right?” Wendell also talked at length about his earlier imagination of the West, whether it was the United Kingdom, the United States, or Canada. He explained, “I knew I would still have to work hard, no question. But I also knew I was going to get a decent salary.” Importantly, Wendell detailed all the demanding hurdles that a Filipino nurse like him had to go through if the person wanted to migrate legally. He talked about a range of challenges: from predeparture issues like dealing with unscrupulous manpower agencies that ask for exorbitant placement fees, to postarrival issues like having to work temporarily as a caregiver while completing requisite nursing postgraduate modules in the United Kingdom.

In the same interview, however, Wendell also said that he understood the UK government’s stringent policies about taking in refugees. He said that especially because of the recent series of “terror attacks” in London, “We can’t just be idealistic. We also need to be realistic. We need strong borders.” This was mirrored in my interviews with other participants, who said that they empathized with the refugees but supported, in differing degrees, the UK government and its tough stance:

“I think the authorities are right to be careful and take in only those who really deserve it ... I mean, look at London and how disorganized it already is!” (Babette, female, 50)

“I don’t think letting [the refugees] in is the solution. Especially not here in London! Don’t you think it’s almost like Manila in its chaos already? ... But the politicians shouldn’t just abandon them. They should figure out other ways for us to help.” (Jansen, male, 39)

For Wendell and the other participants, this inability to imagine a fuller solidarity with the refugees seemed to stem as well from the difficulties they themselves faced in trying to move to the United Kingdom. They thought that in the interest of fairness, only those who were as deserving as they were should be allowed to come in. This meant going through the same legal hurdles that they did. This, of course, ignores the different magnitude of suffering that refugees have to endure to get to the doorstep of Europe. Wendell justified his stance by saying:

“Having fair [immigration] rules doesn’t just work for the Britons. It actually protects us [migrants] too. It shows the Britons that we earned our place here. We went through the right channels. We have jobs that matter. We are valuable.”

Here, we begin to see that from the perspective of the participants, the opinion of broader UK society was central to the quality of their everyday lives as settled migrants. So, attending to this was a paramount concern. I further develop this line of thought in the two subsequent sections, as I explain the centrality of popular media as a “resource for judgment” in how the participants engage with such opinions (see Silverstone, 2006).

### **Asserting difference**

As I indicated in the preceding section, the Filipino nurses in London had great concern for how the UK public regarded settled migrants like them. This seemed to hinder them from imagining fuller forms of solidarity with the refugees seeking entry into Europe. I argue that popular media played a key role in entrenching the situational irony that undergirded the participants’ compromised solidarity. It heightened their awareness of the UK public’s amalgamated imaginary of migrants, which, as I discussed earlier in this article, perniciously blurs different migrant categories and the fears that people hold about them. This made the participants defensive, leading them to assert how different they were from other migrants, refugees included.

Almost all the participants in the study, except for two, did not actually have any consistent engagement with UK local and national news in traditional broadcast and print media. Common with the experience of other first-generation Filipino migrants in the country, their news consumption was heavily oriented toward the Philippines (see Ong & Cabañes, 2011). Wanting to maintain a connection to the homeland, the participants watched prime-time news a couple of days a week via their cable or Internet subscription to channels owned by the country’s leading media networks: ABS-CBN’s The Filipino Channel (TFC) and/or GMA Pinoy TV.

Although marketed to the Filipino diaspora, these channels nevertheless featured the same prime-time news programs shown to local audiences in the Philippines. There was scant programming about Filipino diasporic life in Europe. And these tended to be upbeat, rarely paying serious, sustained attention to the issues that migrants faced.

The participants' homeland-oriented news consumption meant that they only had a general awareness of most headline issues in the United Kingdom, including the refugee crisis. Despite only occasionally engaging with national news, their constant access to social media on their mobile devices meant that they still very much encountered the UK public's amalgamated imaginary of migrants. Since they were like other Filipino migrant workers in London who were active particularly on Facebook (see McKay, 2016), that was where they got to read the vast array of negative content about migrants. Shared by their friends, this content mostly came from mainstream news sources, like BBC, The Guardian, and CNN, but also from unverified social media uploads on Twitter and YouTube. It ranged from amateur videos of right-wing locals railing against migration and terrorism (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PyH5i1hY2Is>) to high-profile media events such as Nigel Farage's photo op with the UK Independence Party's (UKIP) infamous anti-migrant "Breaking Point" poster (see <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/jun/22/jeff-mitchells-best-shot-the-column-of-marching-refugees-used-in-ukips-brexit-campaign>).

Take the case of Gina (female, 42), who said that just scanning Facebook gave her a good sense of what the powerful voices in UK politics wanted the locals to think about migrants like her. She observed that there seemed to be an increasingly hostile stance toward migrants in general, especially after the Brexit referendum. Gina said that she understood that some locals had reasons for being anti-immigration, as some of their complaints were valid: "I know some people come over here just to leech off on the benefits system. That's true." Still, she was mortified when she saw Facebook commenters making blanket statements about wanting all migrants out of the country. She said, "I can't believe these comments! They're painful to read! We're not all the same, you know." Gina's puzzlement stemmed from how she saw herself as a nurse; she was not only a legal migrant, she was also a professional. She bemoaned,

"I've been a Londoner for more than a decade now. I've done so much service for the [National Health Service]. I follow the law. I pay my taxes. I haven't really claimed any social benefits ... Why are [these commenters] including me in their hate?!"

Clearly, Gina's reaction to the xenophobic amalgamated imaginary of migrants amplified by popular media was not to shun it in its entirety. Like the other participants in this study, she instead asserted how different she was from other migrants—such as the refugees—wanting to prove that she did not pose a threat to UK society in the way that others might. Reminiscent of Madianou's (2005)

work on cultural minorities faced with what they perceive to be unfair media representations, she and the other participants essentialized London's Filipino migrant community and projected a positive and unified cultural identity for themselves.

In Gina's case, her concern was to contest the notion that Filipino nurses were an economic liability to the United Kingdom. The other participants countered other negative content about migrants that they saw on Facebook. They talked about Filipino nurses not being a terrorist threat:

"Every time I see these clips where locals talk about migrants as a security problem, I think to myself that they surely don't mean me. It's the opposite of what a nurse does for a living ... [and] we [Filipinos] have a global reputation as health professionals. Everyone knows we provide the best care in the world." (Rowena, female, 36)

"I don't get offended when people share memes about migrants being terrorists. [The posts are] obviously stupid. But they're also not about us. [We Filipinos are] Christians. Hello!" (Art, male, 49)

They also talked about Filipino nurses not being a jobs threat:

"I just saw this clip where the BBC was interviewing shoppers in some small town, asking them about which migrants they thought were stealing their jobs ... I don't think they'd even want our job! It's not very easy." (Gemma, female, 44)

"I know for a fact that the children of many Filipino nurses here in London also take up nursing in [university]. It's a sure job ... [The locals] don't want it, but we're hardworking enough to be happy with it." (Jansen, male, 39)

Gina and the other participants were certainly preoccupied with thinking about the UK public's pernicious amalgamated imaginary of migrants, especially as they found this to be blatantly manifest on Facebook. Their concern with distancing themselves from other migrants made it difficult for them to foster an imaginary of greater solidarity with refugees.

### **Asserting belongingness**

Thus far, this article has talked about how popular media content, particularly that found online, served as a resource for how London's Filipino nurses assessed UK public opinion about migrants. I revealed that, in general, this contributed to how they distanced themselves from their fellow migrants, which unfortunately included the refugees. But this was not the only mediated dynamic that entrenched the situational irony undergirding the participants' compromised solidarity.

In a double move, the participants in this study also deployed popular media content to further contest the UK public's amalgamated imaginary of migrants. Parallel to the accounts of scholars like Georgiou (2006) and Gillespie (1995) about cultural minorities using media as cultural resources to integrate with the locals, the participants also drew on their familiarity with UK popular media in a bid to establish their belongingness not only to London, but the rest of the United Kingdom. In so doing, they could cover up their lack of engagement in UK mainstream media while positioning themselves above other migrant groups.

The way the participants claimed their belongingness seemed to be negatively influenced by their experience of cultural diversity in London. Of course, living in arguably the most global city in the world offers the possibility of a vernacular or bottom-up kind of cosmopolitanization, as one might develop reflexive sensibilities and a sense of responsibility for others that organically emerge from being surrounded by "diverse and divergent world views, practices and moralities" (Georgiou, 2013, p. 146). For the participants, however, the amalgamated imaginary of migrants—amplified by its mediation in online popular media content—seemed to have made them feel like they were in competition with other migrants.

Take the case of James (male, 47), who was staunch in arguing that Filipino nurses are the best in the National Health Service (NHS). During my most recent conversation with him in late 2017, he revealed that he was currently under suspension for getting into a physical fight with a British–Pakistani nurse in his ward. He narrated that they first got into a verbal tussle over a particular work task, which then escalated into what he called a "man-to-man fist fight." Although their colleagues intervened before any serious harm happened to either of them, the disruption they caused got both of them reprimanded. James admitted that he was partly at fault because he got incensed by his colleague's lackluster effort in the workplace. But he also had harsh and troubling things to say not only about his colleague, but about Pakistani migrants in general. "Pakistanis, they're all lazy," he said. "They're not serious with work in the way we Filipinos are."

This kind of superiority undergirding the participants' stance toward their fellow migrants in London also manifested in how they used popular media content as a resource to support the idea that they were the migrants who deserved to be most welcomed in the city. Like James, Lara (female, 43) also had misgivings about her British Pakistani colleagues in the hospital. She said that they did not do enough to integrate themselves into UK society. Lara claimed that Filipinos were much better at doing this because 350 years under Spain and 50 years under the United States made the Philippines "the most Westernized country in Asia." She said this immensely helped Filipinos in getting along very well with the British. Lara contended, "The Pakistanis here should also adjust to the culture of the British." To prove how well immersed she was in British culture, she began talking about the then-BBC and now Channel 4 program *The Great British Bake Off*, which features "passionate amateur baking fans competing to be crowned

the UK's Best Amateur Baker" (see <https://thegreatbritishbakeoff.co.uk>). She half-jokingly suggested, "[The Pakistanis] can start by watching Bake Off. Many of them can learn a thing or two about the Victoria sponge cake or the amuse-bouche from Nadiya [the British-Pakistani winner of the show in 2015]."

Meanwhile, Boyet (male, 47) emphasized the high level of English-language education that Filipinos had relative to other migrants, something that the other participants harped on as well. He said:

"Whatever others say, at least we all have university degrees. And we speak English very well. I think that's very important ... I don't get why other migrants here won't make an effort to learn the local language and culture. It's just basic respect [for the locals]."

To underscore this idea, Boyet talked about his favorite British "brainy programs": ITV's *The Chase*, described as a "quiz show where four contestants must pit their wits against the Chaser, a ruthless quiz genius determined to stop them winning the cash prize" (see <https://www.itv.com/hub/the-chase>), and BBC's *University Challenge*, described as an "academic quiz show where teams of students from UK universities answer questions on all manner of subjects" (see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006t6l0>). Boyet said that the two shows were a good balance for him. He liked *The Chase* because he felt smart enough to answer some of the questions there and *University Challenge* because he learned new things from it. He would go on to suggest that other migrants watch the latter most especially, since "They'll get to know about many things. I myself like knowing about Western literature, and music, and art, things I used to know little about!"

What emerges here is that the participants relied heavily on what they thought were "iconic" British television programs to assert their belongingness to broader UK society. In doing so, however, they also undermined the belongingness of other migrants in London particularly but also in the United Kingdom generally. As with their attempts to distance themselves from other migrants, their preoccupation with proving their superior belongingness also contributed to their difficulty in fostering an imaginary of greater solidarity with refugees.

## **Conclusion**

This article explored how popular media served as resources for judgment in the dispositions that non-EU settled migrants in the United Kingdom had toward refugees seeking entry into the region. I paid particular attention to Filipino nurses in London and how the news and entertainment media they consumed figured in their construction and articulation of their imaginaries of refugees. I proposed the notion of a "compromised solidarity" to capture the participants' fractured imaginary of social and political bonds with refugees. This solidarity borne out of situational irony sought to express how the participants

simultaneously showed empathy with the difficult life conditions of the refugees but also caution about what the arrival of these refugees might mean for their own social status as migrants in UK society.

The rest of the article explained how popular media contributed to hindering the Filipino nurses in London from imagining fuller forms of solidarity with refugees. First was that popular media content online—and particularly on Facebook—heightened the participants' awareness of the UK public's xenophobic amalgamated imaginary of migrants, which perniciously blurred different migrant categories and the fears that people held about them. This made them defensive, leading them to assert how different they were from other migrants, including the refugees. Then, in a double move, the participants also deployed popular media content to further contest the UK public's amalgamated imaginary of migrants. They demonstrated their immersion in "iconic" British television programs as part of their broader bid to assert that they belonged to UK society more than other migrants, again unfortunately including the refugees.

One insight that can be gleaned from all this is that Filipinos who have migrated continue to carry with them the persistent deference that the Philippines has toward "Westerners" and "Western culture" (Cabañes, 2014; for similar dynamics in other East/ Southeast Asian cultures, see also Ong & Lin, 2017; Ye, 2016). This can be seen in how the compromised solidarity that London's Filipino nurses have toward refugees rests significantly on their great concern for what the local Britons think about them and, crucially, whether these locals would welcome them. This is indicative of one important way in which the postcolonial skin-tone-based racial hierarchy in the Philippines and the multi-cultural dynamics in the contemporary United Kingdom intersect: they both privilege the light-skinned Caucasian (see Ang, 2005). Strikingly similar to cultural minorities in the United States, then, the participants in this study found themselves subscribing to—and not challenging—this game of trying to assert the strongest affinity with the white majority (see Bonilla-Silva, 2004). This was instantiated most clearly in how the participants engaged with and deployed popular media as a resource for judgment in ways that they thought put them in good stead with the locals.

One other insight from this study is the pernicious predominance of neoliberal cosmopolitanism, which is an ethos of selectively celebrating difference primarily to "sustain [a] city's symbolic power and appeal to global audiences, consumers and capital" (Georgiou, 2013, p. 145). This can be seen in how London's Filipino migrants construct belongingness, which is not so much about a cosmopolitan attitude of care and responsibility for cultural others as much as it is about claiming a cosmopolite Londoner and British identity. This becomes evident especially in how the participants draw on popular media as a cultural resource to show that they share in key traits of the cultural majority: that they speak fluent English, that they are university educated, and that, above all, they are Westernized.



In asserting distance from other migrants and claiming superior belongingness to UK society, London's Filipino migrants unfortunately undermine the possibility of achieving cross-migrant solidarities. As non-EU migrants who have experienced significant social marginalization, they are very keen to show how well integrated they are with the majority. They find it less important than to foster social and political bonds with other settled migrants and with newer arrivals like the refugees. This latter task, however, is crucial if migrants like them are to find meaningful ways of coalescing even contingently (Shah, 2008; Su, 2010), so that they are able challenge the social order that amalgamates and demonizes them as a collective.

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