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# Migration, crisis, liberalism: the cultural and racial politics of Islamophobia and “radical alterity” in modern Greece

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## ABSTRACT

This paper attempts a critical and ethnographically informed reading of the complex assemblage of linkages between migration, racialization and liberal values in modern Greece as a symptomatic case of European attitudes to migration. In line with recent scholarship on racialization and Islamophobia, we discuss novel forms of racism, that support the construction of hierarchies and geographies of entitlement, going beyond notions of biological difference. Processes of inclusion and exclusion, we argue, rest on a meshwork of seemingly disparate identification markers that form the basis of universalist, hegemonic visions of citizenship. Migrants are ultimately expected by considerable sections of the Greek public to demonstrate their acceptance of an array of values regarded as “European”, and to manifest their support to (neo)liberal regimes of subjectification. We conclude by arguing that racialization can be traced back to an imagined “orient”, and just as well, to contemporary cultural and political imperialist projects.

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## Introduction

The present paper focuses on a critical analysis of the culture–race–migration kaleidoscope found in public attitudes and state policies in modern Greece. We take Greece as a symptomatic case of the racialized character of national and EU immigration policies and discourses. By examining a variety of settings in a period that ranges from the early 1990s to the present, we argue in favour of a unified analysis of the culturalist, racist and historically *cum* economically produced conditions of the alterity of the migrant other. We suggest

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that migrants and displaced persons are caught in hierarchies of entitlement and often reduced to a perpetual status of *allochthony* (foreignness) (cf. Silverstein 2005). The complexity and shiftiness of contemporary forms of racism (cf. Balibar 2007, 21) led us to consider the shared philosophical roots of conservative, right wing and liberal political projects (cf. Choudhury 2015). The focus on the economies of desirability and undesirability, exclusion and inclusion of migrant others, reveals the need to reflect on (neo)liberal visions of “modernity”, “progress” and “integration” as decisive factors in the conceptualisation of (supra)state policies and public attitudes to migrants. In order to develop and substantiate this argument, our paper is organized in three distinct sections. The first section touches upon the rise of ultra-nationalism and the far right in Greece and discusses the intimate connections between racial and cultural politics of “radical alterity” (cf. Kirtsoglou and Tsimouris 2016). The second section proceeds to examine Islamophobia as a variation of the racialized attitudes to migrant populations. We examine the spatial politics of the production of the Muslim “other” as a partial and potentially dangerous presence and we explain the tensions between religious and secular configurations of the Greek state. Taking our cue from recent attempts to establish a “Euro-Islam” (cf. Ramadan 2004), we examine the distinctions between “good” and “bad” Muslims and their relation to (neo)liberal values of self-transformation. The manner in which (neo) liberal governmentalities are implicated in the illegality and deportability of migrants in contexts of new labour relations is further discussed in the third and final section of the paper. Taking the Albanian migrant as the most “successful” case of incorporation in modern Greek society, we problematize the concept of “integration” and its association with universalist visions of European superiority. The paper concludes by stressing the role of hegemonic narratives of cosmopolitanism prevalent in Greek and European discourses on migration.

### ***The coloured people***

While conducting fieldwork with diaspora communities in Athens, in 2014,<sup>1</sup> we found ourselves in a taxi on Patision street. Patision – a central Athenian avenue – connects densely populated, currently impoverished neighbourhoods, once inhabited by the middle-classes and now home to various migrant communities.

*Look Madame! Look! – the taxi driver exclaimed, pointing to pedestrians – the place is full of coloured people (gemisame eghromous). The once superb neighbourhoods of central Athens are now full of immigrants (metanastes). People are afraid to go out at night. Most residents [i.e. Greeks] (katoikoi) have left. It is only the poor and the elderly that have nowhere else to go, who continue living here. Black, white, yellow (mavroi, asproi, kitrinoi), they all gather here. They drink, they steal, they kill*

*each other, fight, prostitute themselves; they show no respect. They occupy every bit of space, sometimes sleep on the streets and use the pavements as toilets. Awful mess! Central Athens has turned into an awful mess.*

Focusing on the period between 2009 and 2015, the present section will establish that widespread xenophobia is symptomatic of deep-seated, negative attitudes towards particular categories of people perceived as “foreign” and by consequence regarded as threatening to the Greek nation. Original ethnographic data will be discussed against analytical approaches on the production of migrants as a problem of cultural and racial difference (cf. Vertovec 2011, 242). By examining literature on cultural politics and racialization, we wish to argue that the Greek case is better explained through a combined emphasis on cultural and racial essentialism, rather than a single-handed focus on any one of the two aspects.

In May 2013, a cultural group called “Atenistas” organized an open tour in Kypseli, one of the most densely populated neighbourhoods off-Patision street. The tour was scheduled to end in the premises of a primary school where three “famous Kypseliots” (a poet *cum* writer, a director and an architect) would deliver speeches about their neighbourhood. Parts of the speech of the established poet and writer Kiki Dimoula became the subject of a bitter public debate due to their xenophobic depictions of the current demography of the neighbourhood and its effects to the lives of “original” Kypseliots. We will hereby translate the most contentious parts of the talk<sup>2</sup> and invite the reader to compare their spirit with that of the taxi-driver’s comment quoted in the very beginning of this section.

*I live in Kypseli for 76 years; on the very same street. I have lived through the nice years of Kypseli (ta oraia hronia tis Kypselis) ... Pythias’ street, where I lived, was full of beautiful detached houses with gardens, the inhabitants all knew each other. It was very picturesque ... I still live here, not entirely reconciled with the changes ... Let us not forget that the foreigners, who found themselves here, did so because of the poverty of their countries ... But we must state, as well, that they are a constant danger. The locals are in danger of being mugged on the street ... 42 Pythias’ street, where my sister lives. She was hospitalised twice. Twice she was beaten by someone outside her door because she could not find her key house quickly enough ... Limited cases, yes, but the fear is unlimited. I do not mean to say that the foreigners of Kypseli are burglars. But if one goes to the square, there is no space to walk. Foreign people sit on the benches – naturally, they want to pass the time – and they play some strange card games of their own and the whole place becomes full of little cards. Of course, the Kypseliots have been displaced; this is a fact. Of course we love the foreigners, since they left their countries to come and live here, to work, but the spaces need to be somehow distributed<sup>3</sup> ... I have become accustomed to foreigners; accustomed to waking up and seeing them. I have come across many blacks pushing supermarket*

*trolleys ... I wish hunger did not exist, I wish all the races of the world were mixed, but here there is a problem now. How are these people [referring to "foreigners"] supposed to sustain themselves? I am really pleased today that I found myself among other Kypseliots. Really pleased.*

Dimoula's speech metonymically stands for the dominant narrative, prevalent among Greek people who reside or visit frequently the impoverished parts of the urban centres of Athens where most diaspora communities live. With the striking exception of politicised members of pro-migrant activist groups, associated mainly with the radical left and/or anarchist circles, the majority of respondents articulated stereotypically negative discourses about the "migrants". Foreigners, *xenoi*<sup>4</sup> were almost indiscriminately portrayed as a cultural and physical threat to local communities and the nation in general (cf. Silverstein 2005, 376; Vertovec 2011, 243). The organizing themes of this dominant narrative, the convenient "story seeds" (Knight 2013, 153) relate to perceptions of migrants as dangerous, potentially prone to criminal activity, as unhealthy and possibly contagious, and as religious and cultural misfits that will never "assimilate" (*den afomoionontai*) in Greek society. Their countries of origin are imagined as "poor" and "destitute", while their "cultures" are frequently judged as "backwards", "inferior" or lagging modernisation.

Such narratives about the "Other" do not limit themselves to supporters of the far right (cf. Virdee 2014). Different respondents, according to their political affiliation, general knowledge and level of religiosity were elaborating on some or all of the aforementioned themes. Anti-migrant discourses reflect therefore a whole spectrum of positions and often assume the form of "dogmas of cultural difference" (cf. Strathern 1995, 16; Vertovec 2011, 244). Virdee's study of race and English working class explains eloquently the manner in which socialist "arguments and struggles to secure economic and social justice for the excluded came to be ideologically located in the terrain of the nation" that "operated as a power container limiting the political imagination ... of the representatives of the exploited and the oppressed" (2014, 5). Regarding the liberal side of the political spectrum, in a discussion of the shared philosophical roots of right wing and liberal political theory, Choudhury argues that both strands converge on ideas about civilizational superiority that ultimately produce new kinds of racism (2015, 48). The co-constructed character of "culturalist" and "racist" discourses against immigrants has been first noted by Barker who saw the emergence of a "new racism", hidden "inside apparently innocent language about culture" (1981, 3). The seemingly "incommensurable racial difference" of immigrant populations forms the basis of new "racist paradigms" in Europe, whereby biological differences between races, that once formed the backbone of racism, are now increasingly expressed in terms of cultural incompatibility (Grillo 2003; cf. Silverstein 2005, 364, 365).

Such culturalist discourses – based on perceptions of cultures as static, essentialised, biologised and inherited (Baumann 1996; cf. Vertovec 2011) – need not divert our attention from the processes through which migration has become a “racialised category” (Silverstein 2005, 367). The manner in which “race” is implicated with migration issues reminds one of Ingold’s concept of the “meshwork”, namely of a network of interacting concepts, entangled lines of discourse and co-constructed ideas about seemingly disparate notions such as “culture”, “civilisation”, “progress”, “modernisation”, “descent”, religion, gender and “biology” (to name some, but not all) (cf. Ingold 2011, 63). This meshwork of interdependent concepts is not static. On the contrary, in line with Ingold’s original idea, it is in a constant state of flux, growth and movement (Ingold 2011). In this sense, we are in complete agreement with the analytical conviction of Kibria, Bowman and O’Leary that the race–migration kaleidoscope is a “fluid and intertwined bundle of linkages” (2013, 5), a highly complex and complicated political project “rooted in colonialism and imperialism” (Erel, Murji, and Nahaboo 2016, 1343). The transformation of biological racism into cultural, and/or religious racism enabled scholars to realise that “race moves” (Erel, Murji, and Nahaboo 2016; cf. also Mishra Tarc 2013, 373) and transforms itself independently of “the old certainties of colour” (Lazaridis and Koumandraki 2001, 279–301) taking on multiple guises.

Race has been sharply critiqued in analytical and scientific terms. It remains nonetheless an organising theme of public discourses and perceptions of the “other” in Greece and elsewhere (also Balibar and Wallerstein 1991; cf. Silverstein 2005, 364–365). When problematizing race, we follow Silverstein’s definition of a

cultural category of difference that is contextually constructed as essential and natural – as residing within the very body of the individual – [being] thus generally tied, in scientific theory and popular understanding to a set of somatic, physiognomic, and even genetic and other traits. (2005, 364)

These traits may be corresponding to a person’s phenotype, or inferred and imagined in ways that render categories such as “whiteness”, “blackness” and everything else “in-between” – so to speak – fluid and unstable. The fluidity of race refers not only to cases recorded in the literature, namely Eastern European people, Jews or Roma (cf. Malkki 1992; Barrett and Roediger 1997), but also to the everyday politics of banal racial “identification” that prove to be highly dependent on other factors, like linguistic fluency, birth-place or descent. Modern Greeks, for instance, would easily joke about how a darker member of the family “looks like a gypsy” (cf. also Panourgia 1995), but they would never question that person’s rightful belonging to the “white race” (with which they readily identify themselves). Similarly, a lighter-skinned Roma, or Asian would still be cast as “other”, “foreign” or

person of colour on the basis of their origin, or Greek language skills (compare with Vargas-Ramos 2014). A closer look at the ethnographic data suggests that rather than race itself (cf. Anthias 1990), it is *perceptions of race* that matter. Ultimately, the manner in which race as a political category is imagined, socially, historically and economically constructed, points to the pertinence of the concept of *racialization* that we have employed in our discussion (cf. Gilroy 1987, 38). Racialization refers precisely to those “dynamic and dialectical processes of categorisation and meaning construction in which specific meanings are ascribed to real or fictitious somatic features” (Wodak and Reisigl 1999, 180; cf. Silverstein 2005, 364). The “racial system” according to which immigrants and various “others” are taxonomically categorized largely corresponds to the hierarchy of entitlements imposed onto them in everyday social situations, and in their relations to the state, the law and supranational formations.

Researchers have long pointed out the racialized character of national and EU policies in relation to immigration (cf. Cabot 2014; Erel, Murji, and Nahaboo 2016). Racialized perceptions of migrants are produced both within every day banal contexts of cultural racism, and through policy narratives and categories such as illegality and deportability (cf. De Genova 2002, 2010; Hiemstra 2010, 75). The current complex European border regime (Green 2013) reveals the role of the EU as a “racial supra-state” (Garner 2007, 14; Cole 2009; cf. Erel, Murji, and Nahaboo 2016, 1344). State and policy-conceived racialized taxonomies appear to be congruent with racialized *geographies*, establishing a firm connection between racialization and colonial histories of the past, as well as, between racialization and current asymmetrical structures of extractive economic relations between national and supranational entities (cf. Virdee 2014). The meshwork of culture, race, civilisation, progress, modernity, religion, gender and ethnicity is – we claim – a (post)colonial technology that permeates state-citizen relations, policy narratives and casual sociality. It is a technology that aims at managing difference; sometimes by transforming difference into forms of “radical and incommensurable alterity” (cf. Kirtsoglou and Tsimouris 2016), and at other times by hegemonically commanding the conditions of the “Other’s” integration.

### ***Islamophobia and the politics of space***

One of the most shocking ideas in Dimoula’s speech cited in the previous section regards the division of public space (*na moirastoun oi horoi*). Currently, in Greece and elsewhere, the politics of distribution of migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees is a field where state policies both produce (cf. Shore and Wright 1997) and are inspired by various xenophobic and segregationist narratives that coagulate chiefly around Islamophobia as yet another expression of the racialization of certain populations (Fulcher and Scott

2003; Levey and Modood 2009, 241). The present section builds on ethnographic data gathered jointly by the co-authors in 2015 and 2016 in Athens.<sup>5</sup> Our primary aim is to comment on the effects of racialized Islamophobia as a form of “radical alterity” following the thought of scholars who argue that “religion is raced” (Sayyid and Vakil 2010; Vakil 2010, 276; cf. also Mandel et al. 2015). We also wish to touch upon the gendered aspects of these racialized perceptions of Islam (cf. Triandafyllidou 2001) and to discuss the importance of spatial politics in the development of Islamophobic discourses and attitudes in the public sphere. We will introduce the importance of neo-liberal understandings of personhood in the construction of interconnected false dichotomies between “good” and “bad” Islam, and between “good” and “bad” migrants. The role of neo-liberal ideologies as disciplining technologies productive of further hierarchies of entitlement will be further explored in the third and final section of this paper.

In December 2015, we found ourselves conducting fieldwork in Victoria square, located not very far away from Patision street. Due to its direct public transport connection with the port of Piraeus, where most refugees who crossed from Turkey<sup>6</sup> eventually arrived, Victoria square was a transit point of mainly Afghan refugees, but also a few Moroccans and Tunisians. Large families with children as young as a few months old remained in the square through the day trying to arrange their transportation to Greece’s northern border.

Local communities (encouraged by the positive attitude of the Greek state) demonstrated high levels of empathy towards displaced persons in 2015–2016 (cf. Kirtsoglou and Tsimouris 2016; Kirtsoglou 2018). Despite the generalized positive attitude of the Greek public towards the refugees, a number of interlocutors in the square expressed their concern and reservations especially towards young “foreign” men who did not appear to be part of larger families. *Can’t you see? (a local small-business owner commented, pointing towards the direction of a company of young Afghan men) they are all of conscription age.<sup>7</sup> These are not refugees. They are an invading army.* Amidst a strong spirit of solidarity exhibited towards the 2015–2016 refugees, xenophobic voices (admittedly, usually belonging to the conservatives or the far right) insisted that on the back of the “refugee crisis”, a number of “radical Muslims” (*skliropyrinikoi Mousoulmanoï*) were entering Europe with the specific intention to “corrupt the values of European civilisation” (*na alloiosoun tis aksies tou Europaïkou politismou*). The widely circulating (in Greece and generally in Europe) xenophobic narrative of “Muslim cultural invasion” is, of course, another version of the official discourse, upheld by high-level policy figures, which transforms refugees to a security risk<sup>8</sup> by claiming that Muslim terrorists, radicalised individuals, or terrorist sympathizers regularly infiltrate refugee populations.



Following September 11 and the War on Terror, the young (single) Muslim man, imagined as culturally and racially different in ways that are incompatible with the imagined community of W.E.I.R.D.<sup>9</sup> nationals has become an iconic figure of radical alterity. The young Muslim man – similarly to the covered Muslim woman – is a synecdochical<sup>10</sup> representation (Bowen 2007, 246; cf. Vertovec 2011, 249) of Islamophobia. The alleged incompatibility of Islam with “Western liberal values” (*dytikes dimokratikes aksies*) has been repeatedly summarised by our Greek informants in the phrase “these people cannot be assimilated” (*autoi oi anthropoi den afomoionontai*). The neo-colonial expectation that Muslims need to be “assimilated” arises from widespread, orientalist understandings of Islam as generally inferior to Western cultural superiority (cf. Choudhury 2015). Anti-Muslim prejudice that leads to fully developed forms of racialised Islamophobia has been a prominent feature of colonial and post-colonial histories (Choudhury 2015). The production of the Orient as a distinct and different entity (cf. Said 1979), inferior to the Occident (cf. Mandel et al. 2015), rests on the systematic “coupling of modernity and civilisation with liberal Western law” – among other institutions – and the spirit of secularism (Choudhury 2015, 51). As Mahmood (2006) rightly observes, however, when it comes to Islam, liberal politics do not actually promote secularisation, but rather attempt to control and transform religious expression in a fashion that is closer to liberal values.

In the case of Greece – similarly to other European countries (Choudhury 2015, 55) – the state controls meticulously religious affairs. Unlike other European countries, the Greek state is far from secular in the liberal sense of the term (cf. Kravva [2003] 2004). Apart from the fact that the ministry of education is also the ministry of “religious affairs” (*ypourgeio paideias kai thriskeumaton*), the Greek Orthodox Church is energetically engaged in the regulation of the religious landscape. For the last twenty years or so, Athens (that has, mostly as a result of immigration, a sizeable population of Muslims of different denominations) does not have an official mosque. The attempts of different centre-left governments to build one have been vehemently opposed by the Orthodox Church. Supported by conservatives and the far right, Christian Orthodox religious leaders mobilized the general public against the erection of a mosque. It is only in spring 2017 that relevant legislation finally gained parliamentary approval and it remains to be seen whether and when the mosque will be actually built. Until then, the Muslims of Athens are forced to pray in impromptu unofficial mosques hidden from the public eye. These literally separate and separated spaces of religious expression are only symptomatic of the general desire (echoed in the public speech of Dimoula) of many ordinary Greeks to remain – as much as possible – physically and certainly socially apart from migrant populations.

The politics of space affect much more than everyday sociality. The impoverished “migrant neighbourhoods” of central Athens are being slowly

transformed into unsafe spaces for all kinds of residents (cf. Veikou 2016, 156), introducing new asymmetries between the rich (who have the economic power to desert them) and the poor who have no other choice but to remain in them. Migrants of first, and often second generation, are condemned to a “perpetual status of *allochthony* (foreignness)” and remain “marginalised along class [and] racial lines” (Silverstein 2005, 366).

Racialized Islamophobia is certainly one of the decisive factors of the partial presence and the persisting abjection of certain migrant populations. Images of the “radical” Islam as politically threatening, culturally inferior and incompatible with “modern values”, were first introduced to Greece by the media as a result of September 11 and the War on Terror (cf. Kirtsoglou 2013). Gradually, Islamophobic attitudes expanded and became dominant in public discourse. The literature does not provide a unified definition of Islamophobia (cf. Klug 2012). Most authors follow Bleich’s description of the phenomenon as “indiscriminate negative attitudes and emotions directed at Islam or Muslims” (2012; cf. also Helbling 2012, 6; Borell 2015, 411). There is, however, considerable debate over whether the term is analytically useful, or supportive of further simplifications and essentialist assumptions about the existence of an undifferentiated Islam (cf. Halliday 1999). Other authors insist on the usefulness of the term in special relation to the racialization of Muslims (cf. Rana 2007; Meer and Modood 2011). “The figure of the Muslim”, Klug argues,

is essentially a figment of fiction; any resemblance to real Muslims, living or dead is purely incidental. But when this fantasy figure is projected onto the screen of reality, Muslims as Muslims morph into the “other” essentially different from “us”. (2012; 678 cf. also Allen 2010; Esposito and Kalin 2011; Morey and Yaqin 2011)

The political and historical construction of the radical alterity of the Muslim ‘Other’, is not unrelated to political and historical processes of the past (colonialism) and the present (American imperialism) (cf. Sheehi 2011). The alleged incommensurability of Islamic and Christian or secular traditions is also intimately connected to neo-liberal understandings and figurations of subjectivity. Echoing Zizek (2010), Veikou pointedly observes that “in today’s liberal multiculturalism the experience of the other must be deprived of its otherness” (2016, 163). Commenting on the effects of liberal political philosophy and cultural agenda, Zizek claims that we are prepared to tolerate immigrants insofar as they become “detoxified from their dangerous qualities” (2010; Veikou 2016, 163). This “lighter” version of Islam takes the form of what Ramadan calls “Euro-Islam”, represented in the figure of a “Muslim personality, faithful to the principles of Islam, dressed in European and American cultures, and definitely rooted in Western societies” (2004, 4; cf. Mandel et al. 2015, 366). Separating Muslims into followers of a “good” or a “bad” Islam (cf. Kumar 2013) is characteristic of discourses prevalent in Greece (similarly to the rest of Europe) and representative of a wider tendency of distinguishing

“good” from “bad” migrants. Reminiscent of financial tools<sup>11</sup> this (neo)liberal vision of other religious and cultural communities rests on specific conceptualisations of agency and the autonomous subject (cf. Mahmood 2005) who is capable – and indeed expected – to transform oneself in order to fit in wider societal structures (cf. Pedwell 2012). Just as “becoming a good Muslim” relates to reconfiguring one’s religious subjectivity in ways that are culturally congruent with liberal values, becoming “a good migrant” is connected to the neo-liberal vision of upward mobility through hard work (cf. Erel, Murji, and Nahaboo 2016, 1348). In the third and final section that follows, we will concisely discuss the passage from “Albanophobia” to representations of Albanians as “integrated” migrants in Greece, in an attempt to further decipher the hegemonic character of the concept of migrant “integration” and its intimate connection to liberal perceptions of what constitutes “migrant success”.

### ***From Albanophobia to becoming (like a) Greek: constructing the “good” and the “bad” migrant***

Greece, classified for most of its history as a predominantly migrant-sending state, started receiving significant numbers of migrants and asylum-seekers since the late eighties. Since then, approximately one million immigrants arrived in Greece, at first mostly from Balkan countries. Around 56 per cent of the newcomers were of Albanian origin.<sup>12</sup>

The Greek state was legislatively ill-prepared to receive considerable numbers of migrants (Pratsinakis 2014, 1298). The immigration law of 1991 was conceived as part of a “zero immigration” policy aim (Pratsinakis 2014). Successive legislative frameworks (as late as 2010) remained organised around the principle of *jus sanguinis* and directly or indirectly supported a “silent policy of tolerance towards the entry of cheap foreign labour due to pressures from employers of small-labour intensive units, trying to survive the competition through numerical flexibilisation, or from farmers who needed extra seasonal labour” (Lazaridis and Koumandraki 2001, 287).

The case of Albanian migrants, as the iconic representatives of economic immigration to Greece, showcases the elaborate connections between migration and neo-liberal governmentality. It reveals the manner in which state policies and public perceptions of racialized cultural differentialism aided by liberal visions of subjectivity coalesce in the creation of hierarchies of entitlement and asymmetrical political, social and economic relations. The different permutations of racism, we argue, are inspired by historical relations of exploitation and firmly established in the present socio-economic and ideological context that fosters racialized structures of exploitation specific to migrant populations (cf. Anderson, Gibney, and Paoletti 2011). Labour relations, irregularity and deportability (De Genova 2002, 2010), as

well as notions of the “self-made”, upwardly mobile, hard-working migrant form the complex pattern of (neo)liberal governmentality of immigration.

Irregularity and deportability were established in Greece through bordering practices, “sweep” police operations frequently launched in major city-centres, cumbersome naturalisation procedures and the absence of a long-term sensible reception and integration plan on behalf of the Greek state (cf. Papailias 2003; Christopoulos 2006; Cabot 2014). Successive Greek governments (socialist and conservative) succumbed to the domestic demands of employees and dealt with immigrants as cheap labour regulated by the needs of the parallel economy and the black labour market (Cholezas and Tsakloglou 2009; Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini 2011). The absence of appropriate legislative frameworks resulted in the legal limbo of as many as 700,000 immigrants (cf. Pratsinakis 2014, 1298) creating the space for the proliferation of illegal and exploitative labour relations (Lazaridis and Poyago-Theotoki 1999).

The relationship between “configurations of illegality” promoted by migration regimes (cf. De Genova 2002, 424), and the manner in which “policies do not only impose conditions... but [also] influence people’s indigenous norms of conduct” (Shore and Wright 1997, 6) has been long established in migration studies’ literature (cf. Andreas 2009; Vertovec 2011, 246–248). In the case of Greece, state-led irregularity, illegality and the reduction of Albanian immigrants to non-citizens promoted a generalised condition of moral panic in public discourse and the media (Papastergiou and Takou 2013). Immigrants were constructed as either (and both) a *class dangereuse* (cf. Lazaridis and Wickens 1999, 646) and as the precarious proletariat of a society that was becoming increasingly fascinated with consumption. Albanian immigrants were tolerated in as much as they provided cheap labour, performing the difficult tasks that local people gradually avoided. In this context, any discussion about human or legal rights of the immigrants was deflected, or dismissed as “unpatriotic”. So much so, that on one occasion, representatives of farmer associations in Macedonia, North Greece, protested against deportations of Albanian migrants on the account of being deprived of manual workers to cover for their seasonal needs and demanded that foreign workers were deported only after the end of the agricultural season.

Perhaps the most telling example of exclusion, however, was the issue of the “flag” in the early 2000s. Twice a year, during national celebration days Greek students participate in parades held throughout Greece. The best student of the school (the one with the highest GPA) holds the flag and leads the rest of the group. In 2000 the best student was of Albanian origin. Parents and the community in a small suburb of Thessaloniki (Northern Greece) demanded that the “Albanian” boy was not allowed to hold the Greek flag. Despite the fact that the relevant law and the ministry of education

were clear that the student could parade holding the flag, since he had the highest GPA, the hostility of parents and the local community forced him to withdraw (Tzanelli 2006). Apart from the ultra-nationalist rhetoric which proclaimed that the flag is a national symbol and thus should not be carried by a non-national person, what is important to note here is that immigrants (even those born or raised in Greece) were not allowed to participate in the heritage and history of the *ethnos*, while at the same time they were also disallowed from celebrating their own history and heritage. Characteristic of the latter is the case of a reception teacher reported to the relevant authorities by the parents' association because she encouraged Albanian students to draw the flags of their own countries and pinned them on the wall next to the Greek ones.

Denying immigrants the right to exist as cultural and historical subjects, or to even partake in the national culture and history is a form of existential violence, paradigmatic of modern Greek resistance to cosmopolitanism both as an ethical and as a political project (cf. Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos 2010). The status and notion of the *economic* migrant, further reduces persons, and eventually entire populations, to the status or precarious proletarians. Being a "worker" (cf. Arendt [1958] 1998) becomes the defining feature that determines one's conditions of personhood (cf. Veikou 2016, 159) in the context of an unequal "immigrant-native power struggle", that shapes dominant "perceptions about how immigrants should behave and what their position should be" in a given society (Pratsinakis 2014, 1297). As Virdee has demonstrated, in the English context, racialization of the "other" was mediated by the state and the hegemonic narratives of the elite and became a constituent force in the development of "white" working-class identity, which coalesced around colour and religion (2014). In the case of Albanians and other migrant subjects in Greece, this unequal power struggle is explicated in the ambivalent feelings of the state and Greek society as a whole towards migrant populations that are regarded – on the one hand – as a desirable labour force and – simultaneously – as a class of undesirable citizens. Caught in this paradox, whole generations of immigrants, since the late eighties adopted different "integration" strategies compatible with (neo)liberal values and the demands of "local" societies that "foreigners" are only partially present in Greek social life. That is, unless they are/become rich or famous.

Before proceeding to explain how upward mobility and the subjectivity of the "hard-working person" became the major integration avenues for different generations of immigrants in Greece, we would like to clarify our use of the term neoliberalism in this section. As Hall (2011) argues, neoliberalism is not a singular force restricted to the financial sector. As a vehicle of liberal values, it becomes the organising principle of different spectrums of society and culture (Hall 2011). Neo-liberal governmentality as "a set of actions" (Foucault 1997, 92–93) affects in diverse ways different subjects, countries

and regions modifying previous hierarchies, forms of governance and modes of subjectification.

In the case of Albanian immigrants, upward mobility facilitated their acceptance by Greek society, to the point that a number of our respondents would refer to second-generation Albanians as “having become (like) Greeks” (*ehoun ginei (san) Ellines*). Pratsinakis (2014) discusses the integration of Albanian migrants in Greece comparing it to the case of Former Soviet Union (FSU) subjects who immigrated to the country approximately in the same period. Pratsinakis reports how his Northern Greek respondents appeared to prefer Albanian immigrants from FSU Pontian Greeks (2014, 1303). Despite the fact that both groups were mostly employed in physically demanding, low-skilled and underpaid jobs, Pontian Greeks were reproached for maintaining their linguistic and cultural distinctiveness, asking for “rights” (*dikaionomata*) and making use of state resources (2014, 1299–1303; cf. also Voutira 2004). Albanian immigrants, on the other hand, were portrayed as “peaceful, hardworking” individuals “who caused no problems” in the community (2014, 1303).

Despite being still victimised and vilified, Albanian migrants – left on their own devices – managed to adapt to an array of cultural, religious and (neo)liberal expectations. Through mass baptisms, by concealing or underplaying their religious affiliation, by presenting themselves as “soft” Muslims who participate in instances of drinking conviviality in rural coffee-shops, through exhibiting a hard-working ethos, and linguistic competence, Albanian immigrants attested to what Hage (2000) calls “practical nationality”. By “practical cultural nationality” Hage refers to styles and practices that assume the form of cultural capital and afford the bearer certain degrees of national inclusion (2000, 51–62).

The case of first- and second-generation Albanian “good” migrants is indicative of the kaleidoscopic relationship between culturalist, nationalist, racialized, neo-liberal and neo-colonial understandings of the place and “ideal” trajectory of the migrant in Greece and Europe, in general. Modern Greek phobic and ambivalent attitudes towards migrant populations are not, of course, unrelated to the hegemonic dogma of Greek political elites that Greece – culturally, economically and historically – belongs to the West (cf. Kirtsoglou 2006). The Western, liberal orientation of Greek national culture crystallised in popular ideology in a fashion that supported ambivalent and often hostile attitudes towards “oriental others” (compare with Virdee 2014). In this sense, our research attests to the validity of Ong’s call for “a broader conception of race and [cultural] citizenship shaped by the history of European imperialism” (Ong 1996, 738).

## Concluding remarks

The present paper attempted a critical and ethnographically informed reading of contemporary literature on the complex assemblage of linkages between

migration, racialization and liberal values in modern Greece as a symptomatic case of European attitudes to migration. Our main argument supports the idea that we need a holistic, intersectional and unified framework for the analysis of contemporary migration, reception and integration conditions. Echoing the approach of Vertovec (2011), we offered ethnographic evidence of how migrants are routinely produced as racially, religiously and culturally differentiated subjects supposedly threatening to the cohesion of particular nations and of “western” liberal values. In line with recent scholarship on racialization and Islamophobia, the paper discussed novel forms of racism that go beyond notions of biological difference and support the construction of hierarchies and geographies of entitlement. Processes of inclusion and exclusion, we argued, rest on a meshwork (cf. Ingold 2011) of seemingly disparate notions and identification markers such as culture, religion, gender, descent, modernisation and progress (to name some), which form a fluid and shifting reservoir of convenient story seeds (cf. Knight 2013) about the self and the other. In the absence of a definable organising principle of inclusion and exclusion, we proposed that citizenship and membership to national and supranational bodies ultimately rests on the hegemonic acceptance of (neo)-liberal regimes of subjectification and of an array of “European” values that form the basis of a universalist hegemonic vision of the world. We traced racialization back to an imagined “orient” (cf. Said 1979), but also to contemporary cultural and political imperialist projects. Ultimately, this paper traced the limits of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism to the requisites for mobility and difference established in the ambiguities of state policies, legal frameworks, everyday sociality and the spaces in-between desirable and undesirable migrants.

## Notes

1. Fieldwork with Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Syrian diaspora in Athens, in 2014, was generously funded by Durham University, Seedcorn Fund. The funding was awarded to Dr Elisabeth Kirtsoglou, Dr Stephen Lyon. Dr G. Tsimouris, Dr Daniel Knight and Dr Maria Kastrinou.
2. The entire speech can be found in Greek here: <http://www.tanea.gr/news/greece/article/5016105/ti-akribws-eipe-h-kikh-dhmoyla-gia-thn-kypselh-kai-toys-metanastes/>.
3. Dimoula has a perfect command of the language. Her choice of words, grammar and syntax here cannot be possibly misunderstood. She does not refer to the “sharing” of space (na moirastoume to horo), but to the division, separation or assigning of different spaces to “locals” and “foreigners” (na moirastoun oi horoi).
4. For a discussion of the term *xenos* (foreigner, outsider) versus *dhikos* (insider, one of our own) see Kirtsoglou (2018); Herzfeld (2003, 142); and Panourgia (1995, 16–17).

5. This research was part of the ESRC/DFID-funded project *Transitory Lives* (October 2015–July 2017).
6. Between the summer of 2015 and the spring of 2016, approximately one million refugees crossed the Aegean from Turkey and Greece, before they eventually continued their journeys to Northern Europe through an unofficial humanitarian corridor which was closed in late February 2016. The majority of them were Syrians who fled the war, closely followed by Afghans, Iraqis and Kurds.
7. In Greece conscription is compulsory.
8. See, for instance, the 2016 Risk Analysis of FRONTEX [http://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk\\_Analysis/Annula\\_Risk\\_Analysis\\_2016.pdf](http://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annula_Risk_Analysis_2016.pdf)
9. W.E.I.R.D. stands for Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, Democratic. It is an especially popular acronym amongst various social scientists, especially experimental psychologists, that refers to biases arising from the demography of their samples.
10. Vertovec employs the term synecdoche, a figure of speech whereby the part stands for the whole (*pars for toto*) to explain “the extraordinary symbolic weight” that certain images and symbols (like the head scarf) carry in public perception (2011, 249).
11. We refer here to strategies like the dissolving of financial institutions into their “good” and “bad” constituents on the basis of “good debt” (regularly served) and “bad debt” (non-regularly served, or not served at all).
12. [http://www.immigrantwomen.gr/portal/images/ektheseis/statistika\\_dedomena.metanaston.pdf](http://www.immigrantwomen.gr/portal/images/ektheseis/statistika_dedomena.metanaston.pdf) (6.)

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