

Punitive inclusion: The political economy of irregular migration in the margins of Europe

European Journal of Criminology

1–22

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DOI: 10.1177/1477370816640137

euc.sagepub.com



Leonidas K. Cheliotis

London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

Abstract

Focusing on the treatment irregular migrants have received in Greece since the early 1990s, this article seeks to advance critical scholarship on how European countries have responded to migration from impoverished or otherwise disadvantaged parts of the globe over recent decades. The article first draws attention to ways in which purportedly exclusionary approaches to irregular migration control may be imperfect by design, insofar as restrictions are imposed on outflows to secure an exploitable workforce that serves important labour market needs and, by extension, dominant political interests in the 'host' state. Moving on to address the precise ways in which labour exploitation of irregular migrants is brought into effect, the article demonstrates how seemingly unrelated state policies and practices regarding matters of migration, welfare, employment and criminal justice, as well as certain manifestations of anti-migrant violence by non-state actors, may act in combination with one another to this end.

Keywords

Greece, inclusion, irregular migration, labour exploitation, violence

Critical approaches to national and international efforts to manage the flows of poor migrants into advanced Western economies over recent decades have tended to be premised on the notion of physical or geographical exclusion. Accordingly, nation-states, transnational regions and even whole continents have been described as striving to solidify their borders against migration from impoverished or otherwise disadvantaged parts of the globe (see, e.g., van Houtum, 2010; Carr, 2012). This claim appears to contain a

Corresponding author:

Leonidas K. Cheliotis, Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics and Political Science, Old Building, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE, UK.

Email: l.cheliotis@lse.ac.uk

significant element of truth when one considers, for instance, that irregular migrants are often forced by border regimes to navigate risky border zones and, indeed, that many of them die as a result (see further Weber and Pickering, 2011; Albahari, 2015; Bigo, 2015). There is increasing recognition in the literature on migration, however, that borders can be far more permeable than usually assumed, and they are thus better described as points of variable intensity than as strictly linear and rigid structures (Rahola, 2011; see also Bourbeau, 2011). A considerable number of scholars working in this vein have sought to explain the permeability of borders from the perspective of political economy, extending their focus beyond practical factors that may undermine effective border control as such (e.g., extensive borderlands or limited availability of financial resources) and, rather, privileging the role played by governing elites inside nation-states in adopting policies and promoting practices that essentially relax border controls so as to enable mass import of exploitable migrant labour according to domestic market needs and dominant political interests (see further Wacquant, 1999; De Giorgi, 2010). This article sets out to address the ways in which migrant labour exploitation is actually achieved; a question that political economy analyses of policies and practices of migration control have left understudied to date.

There is no shortage of accounts arguing that, over recent decades, deprivation, wars, human rights abuses, and other adversities in various parts of the world have combined with advancement in transport and communication technologies to give rise to a global pool of exploitable migrant labour. Yet the ways in which migrant labour exploitability is maintained and, indeed, enhanced inside the borders of so-called 'host' countries have yet to receive sufficiently comprehensive scholarly attention. Pertinent research has so far focused either on unjust welfare and employment policies that are designed to keep migrants socio-politically weak, for example through systematically restricting their access to welfare and labour rights, or on aggressive criminal justice and cognate policies that target migrants and threaten them into acceptance of unfair conditions of work (see, e.g., Bigo, 2002; Melossi, 2003; Calavita, 2005; Lawrence, 2007; Lazaridis, 2011; Brotherton and Barrios, 2011; Sawyer and Blitz, 2011). Its indisputable importance notwithstanding, this body of work is nevertheless limited in scope. With a few partial exceptions (e.g., Andreas, 2009; Wacquant, 2009a, 2009b; Anderson, 2010; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013; De Giorgi, 2010), little recognition has been paid to a cluster of emergent themes: the functional equivalence and aggregate effect of seemingly unrelated state policies and practices regarding matters of welfare, employment and criminal justice, insofar as they bolster, simultaneously as well as cumulatively, migrants' exploitability in the labour market; the contributions state policies and practices in other areas (e.g., migration) and certain patterns of behaviour by non-state actors (e.g., street-level manifestations of anti-migrant violence performed by private citizens or political formations) may additionally make to the same outcome, whether by design or coincidence; the precise mechanisms through which the policies, practices and behaviours in question buttress migrant labour exploitability; the ways in which different policies, practices and behaviours may actually stand in a relationship of operational complementarity, their respective modes of execution interacting and reinforcing one another, either materially or symbolically; and the specific institutional arrangements (e.g., legislation and bureaucratic structures and cultures) that facilitate the execution of each of those

policies, practices and patterns of behaviour. In neglecting the above themes, one risks undermining not only the multiplicity of bases of migrant labour exploitability, but also the complexity and intensity of the issue, thereby ultimately overlooking the full scope and downplaying the intricate and persistent nature of the political and policy interventions required to overturn it.

With a view to helping fill these gaps in the literature and thereby promote suitable responses against migrant labour exploitation, this article focuses on the case of Greece and the treatment irregular migrants have been afforded in the country over recent decades. There are three main reasons why Greece lends herself ideally for the analytic purposes at hand. First, both the estimated absolute number and proportional population share of irregular migrants residing on Greek soil have persistently stood at exceptionally high levels by European standards ever since Greece first became a country of net immigration in the 1990s. Second, the country's extensive informal labour market has since absorbed large cohorts of workers without papers. And third, there is by now ample scholarly and other evidence regarding the array of unjust and abusive realities irregular migrants typically experience both inside and outside the labour market in Greece. An exhaustive overview of such evidence has yet to be produced, however, which goes some way towards explaining the disproportionately limited attention paid to date to the links between migrant labour exploitation and policies and practices against migrants in domains other than employment as such; links that have become all the more prominent since Greece was plunged into recession in 2008 and full-blown financial crisis in 2009.

Bringing together material from a variety of Greek and international sources, spanning scholarly research, media reports and official documentation by government and independent actors, the article sets out to offer an unprecedentedly wide-ranging summary of policies, practices and behaviours that have systematically disadvantaged or otherwise harmed irregular migrants in the context of contemporary Greece. The article also presents an original synthesis of media reports and scholarly, polling company and NGO research on dominant political discourse and public opinion in Greece, which suggests close links between the political construction of a crime-migration nexus and a broad environment where the policies, practices and behaviours at issue have flourished, including an impressive degree of express public support towards various of them. By reference to key tenets and insights of scholarship on political domination and labour exploitation, the article meanwhile identifies the multifarious ways in which these policies, practices and patterns of behaviour have served in conjunction with one another to promote migrants' exploitability in the workplace.

A few caveats regarding the article's analytic scope and method are in order at this juncture. To begin with, the article covers developments that have taken place in Greece since the early 1990s, at which time migration policy started taking shape in the country in order to deal with what was already a rapidly growing influx of foreigners and especially undocumented migrants. The cut-off point of the analysis is the beginning of 2015, when a coalition government led by the left-wing Syriza party assumed power against the backdrop of a refugee crisis mounting in various parts of the globe and manifesting itself particularly acutely in Greek border areas. This temporal span was necessary partly due to limitations of space, and partly because at the time of writing the Syriza-led coalition had been in office for too short a period for its policies on migration and other social

issues to be conclusively assessed. With regard to the preceding two-and-a-half decades, moreover, the article does not distinguish between policies under governments of avowedly different ideological orientation, nor does it seek to differentiate between policies according to contemporaneous changes in the socio-demographic composition of irregular migrants in Greece (e.g., the substantial decrease in the proportion of Albanians, and the increase in the proportion of Asians and Africans, by the late 2000s). Again, such analysis would have been impossible here for reasons of space, but would have been redundant, too; indeed, a diversion from the main substantive aim of the article. This is because any differences between the migration, employment, welfare and criminal justice policies of the two political parties that alternately dominated government until mid-2012 (PASOK, on the centre-left, and New Democracy, on the centre-right), before joining forces in the context of a centre-right-led coalition that ruled until January 2015, have been convincingly identified in prior research as mostly superficial (see further Cheliotis and Xenakis, 2010; Baldwin-Edwards, 2014).¹

Irregular migration as entrapment

In trying to enter Greece, be it by land or sea, irregular migrants often find themselves at serious risk of death. Indeed, whilst the Greek state has long failed to keep records on the prevalence of death in the process of clandestine border-crossing, secondary analysis of domestic and international media reports has revealed hundreds of fatalities and an even greater and growing number of 'missing persons' since the early 1990s (Baldwin-Edwards, 2009; FRA, 2011; Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2012). Irregular migration to Greece has nonetheless undergone an impressive overall rise during the same period. Although regular migration to the country has increased only modestly, the estimated growth of irregular migration to Greece has been by far the highest in Europe, as the country has become the main point of entry into the European Union. By 2011, the absolute number of undocumented migrants in Greece (including irregular entrants, rejected asylum seekers, visa overstayers and individuals whose temporary permits were not renewed) was approximately 390,000, which nearly amounted to one-third of the estimated total of 1,239,472 migrants in the country that year, itself comprising around one-tenth of the country's total population (Maroukis, 2012a, 2012b; see also Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2012).

That Greece is such a common destination for irregular migrants is due only in part to the practical difficulties involved in controlling the country's unusually extensive borderline, which spans 1,170 kilometers of land borders and the longest coastline in Europe, at 13,676 kilometers, including far-stretching land and coastal borders with several migrant source countries (e.g., Turkey, Albania) and hundreds of remote islands scattered across the Mediterranean and the Aegean. At the same time, large flows of irregular migration have effectively been channelled towards Greece's perilous though still porous borders by ever-tightening restrictions imposed across Europe upon irregular migration from other parts of the world, in the form, for example, of stricter policing of national borders and narrowed opportunities for accessing asylum and visa procedures (Xenakis, 2004).² Whilst, at least until the financial crisis hit Greece in 2009, the country's informal labour market easily incorporated unskilled and semi-skilled workers without papers (as

set out below), irregular migrants have nevertheless tended to treat Greece as a transit country on their way to mainland Europe, where the prospects of long-term and permanent settlement appear more appealing (see further Papadopoulou-Kourkoulou, 2008).

Crucially, however, and despite repeated official proclamations to the contrary, the Greek state itself has introduced policies and promoted practices that have effectively restricted both forced and voluntary outflow for those already inside Greek borders without papers, thereby serving to maintain the size of the irregular migrant population in the country at consistently high levels. As discussed in some detail later, asylum and regularisation procedures have been notoriously arduous, protracted and, for the overwhelming majority of applicants, with no or only temporary success. This is an outcome Greek state officials often openly endorse, portraying it as a deterrent against irregular migration into Greece (see, e.g., Baldwin-Edwards, 2014), although it may rather serve to discourage transit migration from within Greece herself on to continental Europe, not least by raising fears of being caught in the process of irregular border-crossing or thereafter (see further Papadopoulou-Kourkoulou, 2008: 82-90). Meanwhile, efforts inside Greece to apprehend and deport irregular migrants have long been known to be of limited efficiency and effectiveness, so much so that the annual rates of apprehensions and deportations have both followed an overall downward trend over the years. Finally, whilst voluntary repatriation schemes for undocumented migrants remain little used, the legal maximum length of administrative detention of irregular migrants underwent repeated extensions before being rendered indefinite in April 2014 (see further Cheliotis, 2013, 2015b).

In this sense, it is fair to conclude, as Carr (2012: 108) does, that for irregular migrants Greece has been a 'trap' (see also Anderson, 2000: 49-56). Albeit not necessarily incongruent with international pressures associated with the country's membership of the Schengen regime to enforce strict migration controls (see, e.g., Zaiotti, 2011), this 'entrapment' has been in considerable measure Greece's own responsibility and in line with mainstream interests domestically. Viewed through the analytic lens of political economy, irregular migrants' 'entrapment' within Greek borders has been inextricably linked to the combination of four contingencies in the country's informal economy: first, its unusually large size, estimated to account for around 25% of GDP, one of the highest proportions in the EU-27 (Schneider, 2012); second, its crude capitalist nature, insofar as it predominantly entails exploitative conditions of work that secure excessive gains for employers; third, its role in supporting a 'semi-peripheral' national economy by bringing together low-skill labour and employers seeking to fill vacancies in private households and small or medium-sized enterprises specialising in farming, construction, industry or service activities (Cheliotis and Xenakis, 2010); and fourth, the ample opportunities for employment it affords outsiders. Broader developments such as the construction boom in the 1990s, the expansion of export-oriented labour-intensive farming, and the rise of dual-income nuclear families against the backdrop of persistently minimal levels of state welfare provision for the elderly and young children, have heightened demand for a wide range of informal, low-prestige and poorly paid menial labour (e.g., building, fruit-picking, domestic care work) that unemployed Greek nationals have grown increasingly likely to shun, many even under conditions of financial crisis (see further Triandafyllidou, 2013; also Cavounidis, 2006; Lawrence, 2007; Demoussis et al., 2010). It cannot be a

mere coincidence that the large numbers of irregular migrants who find themselves 'trapped' in Greece also prove to be a highly exploitable workforce fit for the needs of the country's informal sector.³

Research on wage differentials in Greece points in this direction, given that the wages of migrant workers have been found to be systematically and significantly lower than those of their Greek counterparts, partly because migrants are usually pushed into low-paid jobs regardless of their skills and prior experience, and partly as a result of discriminatory practices against them within their occupations (see further Demoussis et al., 2010; Drydakos and Vlassis, 2010; Lianos et al., 1996; Fakiolas, 1999). What has yet to be explained in sufficient scope and depth, whether in relation to the Greek case or other cases where similar arguments have been made, concerns the ways in which irregular migrants are turned into exploitable workers and the role played by the state in this process. It is to this issue that the article now turns.

Irregular status and labour exploitation

As a general rule, the degree to which workers are amenable to having their labour exploited increases with the level of flexibilisation of working conditions and the intensity of job precariousness in particular; a phenomenon aptly captured by Pierre Bourdieu's (1998: 85) portmanteau term 'flexploitation'. The effectiveness of job precariousness as a mechanism of labour control is further enhanced in two complementary and mutually reinforcing ways. On one hand, the creation and maintenance of a large reserve pool of workers increases the perceived certainty of precariousness, signalling to those already in wage labour that they are, in fact, easily replaceable. On the other hand, the reduction of welfare provisions for those out of work raises the costs of prospective unemployment for current wage labourers, and of continued unemployment for their would-be reserves, thus pushing the former and preparing the latter to settle for exploitation in the workplace (see further Wright et al., 1998; Harvey, 2006).

The massive swathes of irregular migrants who keep crossing the porous Greek borders in search of a better future lend themselves both as exploitable workers and amenable reserves. For one, their numbers help ensure that a sufficiently large pool of 'surplus' labourers is at hand, whilst their desperate predicament as a result of poverty and attendant needs (e.g., to earn a living) further inclines them to exploitability if and when a job becomes available. Indeed, although migrants are excluded in Greece from national indices of poverty, they are over-represented amongst the poorest and most vulnerable (Tsakoglou and Mitrakos, 2006; NSSG, 2010).

Irregular migrants' exploitability as wage labourers cannot be adequately explained, however, without also considering the consequences that stem from their irregular status itself. In Greece at least, irregularity precludes one from access either to legal employment and labour rights or to welfare benefits. In other words, irregularity does not just restrict migrants' prospects for paid employment to the informal labour market, where wages can freely be shrunk well below the legal minimum and layoffs go entirely unchecked. It also deprives migrants of any welfare entitlements (even emergency social assistance) that would soften the sanction of dismissal and the strains of unemployment more generally (European Committee of Social Rights, 2010). In sum, irregularity

promotes labour exploitation in that it facilitates both the depression of wages as such and the production of conditions that make depressed wages more likely to be accepted by workers; conditions, it should be added here, which include restricted ability to transit from Greece on to mainland Europe, and which extend to anti-migrant violence, as we shall see shortly.

Greek governments have been neither oblivious nor adverse to the wide scope for labour exploitation that mass poverty and irregularity of status generate in the country's vast shadow economy. To take perhaps the most telling example, commenting on the growing influx of irregular migrants from Albania into Greece in the mid-1990s, the then Minister of Finance and known ardent supporter of neoliberal socio-economic policies Stefanos Manos publicly stated as much: 'I am enthusiastic about Albanians! It is, of course, illegal work [that they can only offer], but this is a precondition for their labour to be provided at a low price' (cited in Karydis, 2011: 100). Notwithstanding resistance from trade unions and some variation in the views held by officials in different ministries, policies on asylum and regularisation have ultimately been reflective of what Iosifides (1997: 49) describes as Greek governing elites' 'desire to maximise economic benefit from cheap and flexible labour'. Whether actively through new restrictive legislation, or passively in the sense of leaving unfavourable legal structures and bureaucratic arrangements more or less intact, successive governments have played a key role in keeping exceedingly high numbers of migrants irregular, thereby also reproducing their vulnerability to exploitation in the labour market (Baldwin-Edwards, 2014).

Whilst Greece has ratified a number of key international and European treaties that guarantee fundamental rights for all, it has been reluctant to grant legal status to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants more generally. Indeed, Greek border authorities have been found to actively discourage apprehended irregular entrants from seeking international protection in the first instance (see, e.g., Human Rights Watch, 2008). Although, up until the financial crisis broke out in 2009, the rate of asylum applications to Greece had nevertheless grown to be amongst the highest in Europe, the country maintained one of the lowest rates of refugee recognition in the continent and one of the highest rates of pending asylum cases in the world (Papadimitriou and Papageorgiou, 2005; Eurostat, 2010; UNHCR, 2009), having long failed to establish an effective and timely system for processing applications, rather keeping asylum decisions within the purview of an ill-equipped and generally unsympathetic national police force (CPT, 2011; see also Karamanidou, 2007; Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008; Karamanidou and Schuster, 2011; Cabot, 2012, 2014). Between 2009 and 2014, the volume of asylum applications to Greece underwent an important overall drop (ESI, 2015). Some improvements have also been identified in the Greek asylum system over more recent years, including a growth in the proportional rate of successful applications for the second half of 2013 and for 2014, following the long-awaited launch of dedicated Asylum and First Reception Services in line with pertinent European Union directives (Spathana and Papamina, 2014; Triandafyllidou et al., 2014). This growth, however, occurred against the background of a notable decline in the volume of applications processed at first instance, despite a significant rise in the number of applications submitted between 2013 and 2014 (see further Spathana and Papamina, 2014; ESI, 2015). In any case, Greece remained one of the least likely European states to grant refugee recognition at first instance, its rate of

positive decisions on asylum applications ranking fifth lowest in the EU-27 in 2014 (see Eurostat, 2015).

In a similar vein, regularisation in Greece has been substantively narrow and procedurally perverse. In the vast majority of cases, regularisation is effectively reduced to seeking a renewable residence or work permit of very short duration.⁴ The process of regularisation, including renewal of temporary permits, has meanwhile been fraught with a series of grave challenges over the years. Before all else, access to the application process is anything but straightforward. Pertinent information is usually limited and unclear, formal eligibility criteria have been increasingly stringent, and deeply unfair financial impediments are in place, including, most notably, excessively high application fees and, for the purposes of renewing a work permit, the legal requirement that applicants themselves assume the burden of paying their social insurance contributions when their employer has refused or otherwise failed to do so. Lengthy delays are also common in the assessment and subsequent stages of applications as a consequence of complex bureaucratic procedures, inadequate training and poor staffing levels, to the effect that permits have at times been granted after their expiration date, whilst decision-making has often been found to be arbitrary and inconsistent. Although the volume of regularisation applications received by Greek authorities is nonetheless one of the highest in Europe (McKay et al., 2011; Baldwin-Edwards and Kraler, 2014), this is no doubt reflective of the exceptionally high number of irregular migrants in the country, rather than of a generalised inclination amongst them to engage with the system; indeed, applications have undergone a dramatic drop in recent years (Cavounidis, 2008; Baldwin-Edwards, 2014). True as it may be that the success rate of applications for regularisation has been notably higher than the respective rate for asylum claims, a considerable proportion of beneficiaries are thought to be applicants repeatedly seeking renewal of their expired short-term permits, although it is also known that the onerous nature and costliness of the process may cause former permit-holders to drop out (*ibid.*). Practically, the best case scenario for most migrants seeking regularisation is to find themselves in limbo, shifting between regular and irregular status with long breaks filled with uncertainty and anxiety in between, when their chances of falling victim to unscrupulous lawyers, mafia operators and corrupt state officials are also greater (see further Baldwin-Edwards, 2014; Cabot, 2014; Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008; Gialis et al., 2014).

As elaborated below, irregular status is an insufficient means of generating exploitable labour, yet its limitations are compensated in no small part by stigmatising political discourses, punitive public attitudes, and the violence to which they give rise.

Political discourse and public attitudes about migrants

Despite – or, indeed, as we shall see, because of – the contribution migrants make to the Greek economy, they are systematically subject to stigmatisation. Mainstream political discourse in Greece has typically employed apocalyptic language to frame migrants as an undifferentiated mass that poses a variety of serious threats to Greek society, from ethno-cultural disintegration and health deterioration to unemployment and, most notably, crime, often also associating these purported threats to one another. Particularly with regard to the issue of crime, such discourse points, on one hand, to what is

presented as an inexorable rise in police-recorded crime rates in Greece since migration into the country started rising in the early 1990s, and, on the other hand, to the over-representation of non-Greeks both in official crime statistics and the country's prison population, especially the fact that they have come to outnumber Greeks behind bars. Nowhere is the constructed nexus between migration and crime more acute than in the case of irregular migrants, who, before anything else, are ascribed a criminal label by mere dint of their irregular status itself (see further Xenakis and Cheliotis, 2013a, 2013b; also Tzanelli, 2006; Karamanidou, 2007; Karyotis, 2012). A series of important facts are obscured by this discourse: that crime in Greece has remained moderate by European standards; that Greeks are still responsible for the bulk of offences committed, and that their participation has in recent years grown substantially in the case of certain key property and violent offences (e.g., thefts, burglaries, robberies, homicides); and that there are strong anti-foreigner biases in police practices and judicial decision-making processes, which inflate the proportional share of migrants in crime and prison statistics (see further Papandreou, 2009; Cheliotis and Xenakis, 2010, 2011; Xenakis and Cheliotis, 2013b).

Despite distorting lived reality, mainstream political discourse appears to have had an appreciable degree of influence on public attitudes, either inciting or sustaining and exacerbating concern about the impact of migration on Greek society, fear of crime by migrants, and a punitive attitude towards them. Comparative survey research, for example, has demonstrated that anti-foreigner sentiment is higher in Greece than anywhere else in Europe (Semyonov et al., 2006; Mulcahy, 2011), and that Greeks hold the most negative views on the continent regarding the impact of foreigners on society, including their impact on crime (Semyonov et al., 2012; see also Semyonov et al., 2008; Semyonov and Glikman, 2009; Ceobanu, 2011; Mulcahy, 2011; Swarts and Karakatsanis, 2013; Figgou et al., 2011). Domestic nationwide survey research has meanwhile found that a large majority of Greeks favour intensified criminal justice measures against migrants (Karydis, 2004; see further Cheliotis and Xenakis, 2011).

In addition, it has been shown that a substantial proportion of the Greek public supports control measures specifically oriented against irregular migration, such as simplification of extradition proceedings, denial of political asylum, and enhanced border controls (Papastamou et al., 2005). Indeed, in January 2011, the then recently announced construction of the infamous barbed-wire fence along a section of the country's mainland borders with Turkey was met with especially high levels of public approval, ranging according to different opinion polls between 59% and 80% (Public Issue, 2011; *Proto Thema*, 2011; *Ethnos*, 2011). These attitudes, not unlike increased consent to situational crime control measures that compromise personal convenience and liberties since migration into Greece began its upward climb in the early 1990s, are linked to the widespread perception of migrants as the primary source of criminal danger and associated insecurities (Bakalaki, 2003; Karydis, 2004; Figgou et al., 2011; see further Cheliotis and Xenakis, 2011).

Since the onset of the Greek financial crisis in 2009, the messages put forward by the neo-fascistic party Chrysi Avyi ('Golden Dawn'), and the degree to which they have found appeal amongst the Greek public, have taken hostility towards migrants in general and irregular migrants in particular to an even higher level. Chrysi Avyi has mainly based

its discourse on an anti-migrant platform, not only castigating irregular migrants for their purported role in rising crime rates and falling living standards for the Greek majority – indeed, migrants are systematically referred to as ‘filth’, ‘rubbish’ and ‘subhuman’ in official party rhetoric – but also advocating cracking down on irregular migration by laying landmines along the Greek-Turkish mainland borders and placing special forces in the area with a licence to shoot at will (Human Rights Watch, 2012; see also Psarras, 2012; Xenakis, 2012; Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2015). The party has additionally threatened to have migrants and their children thrown out of hospitals and kindergartens (see, e.g., *The Guardian*, 2012), has requested in parliament that ethno-racial segregation be enforced in schools (*Eleftherotypia*, 2013b), and has spoken about the need to reinstate the death penalty in the country as a means of dealing with ‘foreign murderers’ (*Eleftherotypia*, 2013a).

A significant and growing minority of the Greek population appears to agree with this discourse. Not only did Chrysi Avyi see its share of the vote increase from a slender 0.3% in the national elections of 2009 to 6.9% in those of June 2012, it also managed to attract similar levels of support in all three subsequent national elections, including those of September 2015, thereby consolidating its position as the third largest parliamentary party. This was despite the arrest and pre-trial detention in late 2013 of several of its MPs, including party leader Nikos Michaloliakos, on charges of involvement in a criminal organisation responsible for multiple cases of homicide and a series of other serious offences, a development triggered by the murder of a Greek left-wing anti-fascist musician in the Keratsini district of Piraeus (see further Xenakis and Cheliotis, 2015; Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou, 2015). This goes a long way towards explaining why centre-left PASOK and centre-right New Democracy have both increasingly sought to intensify their anti-migrant rhetoric, and have co-opted the far-right agenda in so doing (Karamanidou, 2015).

To account for the political use of anti-migrant rhetoric solely by reference to its electoral appeal, however, stops short of explaining why such rhetoric should be appealing in the first instance. To put the point differently, why would the Greek public hold views or fall for political narratives that blatantly misrepresent a population of weaker others, let alone weaker others so useful to the country’s economy as irregular migrants? It is easy to see how anti-migrant discourse can resonate in the context of a strongly nationalistic society with deeply entrenched racist attitudes and a markedly declining birth rate, not to mention the intensification of socio-economic insecurities amongst large segments of the public since the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2009. Yet at least part of the answer requires that we grasp the role of anti-migrant discourse in helping to authorise or otherwise promote policies, practices and behaviours that effectively serve the economic interests of many average Greeks by heightening the exploitability of irregular migrants in the country’s informal labour market, even whilst calling, at a conscious level, for their exclusion from local communities and Greek national territory altogether.

Having explored the ways in which popular policies and practices that keep migrants irregular facilitate their exploitation in Greece’s informal labour market, we can now address the contributions widespread forms of violence and intimidation against migrants also make to this end.

Violence and labour exploitation

A continuum of physical violence, both threatened and enacted, has long unfurled against migrants in Greece. Alongside state violence, carried out routinely on a large scale and in the name of security by a series of criminal justice and cognate institutions, repertoires of violence are performed on smaller scales, albeit not necessarily less systematically, by non-state actors such as private citizens (e.g., from employers, to staffing agents, to foremen) and political groups and organisations. In important respects, state and non-state actors may be bound together by strong ties of mutual dependence and support. Just as, for example, Greek state authorities may rely on information from members of the public in order to be able to initiate and carry through proceedings of arrest, detention and deportation against individuals residing or working in the country without papers, so too they may tolerate or promote anti-migrant violence perpetrated by non-state actors, often even by colluding with them. This continuum of physical violence is actually the means by which labour exploitability is maximised amongst irregular migrants in Greece, even if not all violent actors are consciously or directly invested in labour exploitation as such.

From a theoretical point of view, the use of violence against unruly employees compensates, at least in part, for the imperfection of job precariousness and workers' socio-economic weakness as the key practical bases of labour exploitation, inasmuch, for instance, as workers may opt for different modes of employment or seek to engage in collective bargaining with their employers, at the same time as employers themselves may have to consider adjustment costs associated with finding and training replacements. As well as increasing the perceived certainty of punishment, regular exhibitions of pure force against unruly workers also establish in their minds the severity of ramifications of either repeating or reproducing the behaviour in question. This, in turn, helps to quell or pre-empt instances of individual and collective worker resistance, be they oriented towards altering the conditions of extant employment, changing employer or occupation, or promoting disengagement from the system of market exchange with employers in favour of alternative sources of paid labour (e.g., self-employment). The way in which reserve pools of workers are kept in check is not dissimilar, insofar as large-scale intimidation through widespread enactments of violence forces them into submission to the established order (see further Wright et al., 1998; Wrong, 1979, 1994).

To return to the case of Greece, the combination of force against unruly workers and a broader environment of violent intimidation of migrants as a whole is what strengthens control over irregular migrants and exploitation of their wage labour. Although irregular migrant workers find themselves bereft of trade union rights on account of their legal status, and although they, like their regularised counterparts, do not have the right to public protest, in practice they are still able informally to raise grievances with their employers or switch to another job, occupation or type of paid labour in the hope that their work conditions will improve (see, e.g., Maroukis et al., 2011). There have even been instances where irregular migrants have engaged in organised protest action against the unjust and exploitative conditions they commonly endure in their capacity as workers (see, e.g., Karyotis and Skleparis, 2016).

Albeit to different degrees, each and every of these prospects can be disruptive for business, and all the more so if opportunities for securing reserves happen to be limited

(e.g., due to the specialist nature of skills required in certain occupations, or temporary labour shortages in geographically isolated locations). With a view to anticipating or suppressing such disruption (if sporadically also with the counterproductive effect of further fuelling it), irregular migrants have commonly been subject to blackmail by Greek employers who threaten either to report the undocumented status of troublesome employees to the police – in which case deportation proceedings would be triggered against the individuals concerned – or to call upon the violent ‘rent-a-mob’ services of Chrysi Avyi to deal with them (see further Reyneri, 2001; Lawrence, 2007; Papaioannou, 2013; Chrysochoou, 2014).

Irregular migrants are likely to experience similar treatment by staffing agencies when seeking to obtain or maintain employment through them. As revealed, for example, in research by Maroukis (2016) on Greece’s temporary employment agencies industry, whose size and turnover have both grown thanks to the rise in the availability of undeclared migrant labour in the country from the 1990s onwards, agencies have commonly taken financial advantage of irregular migrants (e.g., charging them with illegal brokerage fees prior to work placement, or extracting additional fees when migrants undertake work ‘unauthorised’ by agencies themselves) by capitalising on their fear of arrest and deportation, and even by recourse to threats or acts of direct violence against them.

On occasion, custodians have been put in place to exercise surveillance over workers and mete out physical punishment as necessary. To take the most well-known example, that of the vast strawberry plantation of Nea Manolada in the southern Peloponnese, irregular migrants from Bangladesh have been forced to live in barracks under degrading conditions and to pay more than half their meagre salary to employers in rent. Long tolerated by officials at the Greek Ministry of Labour, this situation only came to broad public attention in April 2013, when some 200 workers found themselves under gunfire by Greek foremen upon demanding six months’ unpaid wages. Dozens of workers were injured at the time, four of whom so badly as to be in need of hospitalisation, at which point the police swiftly initiated proceedings to have them deported. Upon completion of the ensuing rounds of court hearings with a verdict reached after a mere fifteen minutes, all four Greek defendants walked free, two cleared of all charges and two having received suspended sentences. Denied witness protection and still awaiting their dues by the time the case was tried, migrant plaintiffs were, by contrast, ordered to pay a total of €12,000 as fines for having previously exercised their right to apply for a change of judge on suspicion of bias. It comes as no surprise that irregular migrants’ labour exploitation in the plantation in question has reportedly continued unabated (see further *Channel 4*, 2013; *The Guardian*, 2014; also, more generally, Lawrence 2005, 2007).

The scare tactics and direct violence with impunity that migrants in Greece typically also experience beyond the immediate environment of the workplace compounds a sense of fatalism both amongst irregular migrant workers themselves and amongst reserves and migrant communities more generally. This is especially the case amongst those whose skin colour renders them more visible (but see also Zavos, 2014; Karyotis and Skleparis, 2016; Xenakis and Cheliotis, 2016, forthcoming). In particular, migrant communities are systematically subject to intimidatory practices of over-policing, including a greater likelihood of being stopped and searched, alongside so-called ‘sweep’ or ‘cleaning operations’ launched in the name of fighting illegal immigration and associated

crimes. Similarly, migrants are significantly more likely to be brought to a police station than Greek persons, just as they are more likely to be arrested by the police regardless of whether one accounts for the number of arrests for deportation (see further EU-MIDIS, 2010; Cheliotis and Xenakis, 2011). Police violence against migrants is also reportedly commonplace, ranging from the unwarranted use of force and the deliberate destruction of residence permits during routine identity checks, to physical maltreatment in police stations (see, e.g., Amnesty International, 2012a; also Samatas, 2011: 433-434).

Police authorities have meanwhile shown extraordinary tolerance to cases where members of Chrysi Avyi have systematically conducted open attacks on migrants and their property (purporting, ironically, to be re-establishing law and order in the absence of state action), and where they have issued threats against activist organisations that provide assistance to migrants in need, such as the medical NGO Doctors of the World (see *Eleftherotypia*, 2013c).⁵ Several such activities, including attacks on the market stalls of migrant traders by MPs and other members of Chrysi Avyi, have been captured on film and used by the party itself in propaganda and intimidation campaigns (see further Xenakis and Cheliotis, 2013b). To the extent that governments have recognised the existence of anti-migrant far-right violence at all, its effects have generally been neutralised and its control has been approached in a self-defeating fashion. In October 2012, for example, the then Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection Nikos Dendias advocated the policing of migrants as a key means of tackling far-right violence in the country (*Financial Times*, 2012), thereby not only confusing victims with their victimisers, but also disregarding reports of police collusion with Chrysi Avyi and high levels of infiltration of the force by members of the party (see further Psarras, 2012; Papaioannou, 2013; Christopoulos, 2014; Amnesty International, 2014).

More generally, racist violence has been a serious and rapidly growing issue in Greece. Official data are bound to downplay its prevalence, both because of practices of under-recording and insufficient investigation, prosecution and punishment of such cases by the police and judicial authorities (especially when police officers are implicated as perpetrators), and because of under-reporting by victims themselves due to lack of confidence in the Greek criminal justice system, fear of reprisals, and active dissuasion by the state. In the latter respect, for example, a €100 fee was introduced in 2010 as a prerequisite to the investigation of complaints against the police, whilst undocumented migrants have additionally been effectively threatened with punishment should they report their victimisation. At the beginning of 2013, amidst fanfare accompanying the launch of a police hotline for reporting racist violence against migrants, the Chief of Hellenic Police made clear that victims with irregular status would not be offered 'some form of immunity' but, rather, would be arrested and deported (*To Vima*, 2013; see further Amnesty International, 2012a; Human Rights Watch, 2012; NCHR, 2011; RED, 2012).

Data provided by Greek and international NGOs, however, suffice to indicate the gravity of the problem. During the first six months of 2011 alone, for example, the NGO Doctors of the World estimated that their Athens clinic had treated 300 victims of racist attacks, whilst the NGO Praksis claimed to have treated just over 200 victims over the same period. Furthermore, according to local anti-racist organisations, at least 300 attacks on migrants took place between April and June 2012 in Greece (Human Rights Watch, 2012; *Associated Press*, 2012; see also Amnesty International, 2012b; RVRN,

2016). Racist violence has grown to be so acute that, in late 2012, the US Embassy in Athens issued an official public warning to American citizens residing in or travelling to Greece about a heightened risk of attack for those whose complexion might lead them to be perceived as foreign migrants (US Embassy in Athens, Greece, 2012; see also *BBC*, 2013). Albeit exceptional in terms of foreign relations and diplomatic practice, the US Embassy's warning was in tune with a growing body of reports from domestic and, especially, international media and organisations that have revealed and strongly condemned Greece for the high and rising prevalence of inhumane treatment of migrants in the country, as well as for the long-standing and continuing failure of Greek state authorities to properly acknowledge and tackle the issue (see, e.g., Amnesty International, 2012a; Cheliotis, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2013a).

The continuum of violence against migrants in Greece extends to sentencing and custodial policies and practices. As soon as migration to Greece began to rise in the 1990s, the country's crumbling prisons started filling with migrants typically serving long-term sentences for relatively minor infractions. Indeed, owing largely to biases in the sentencing behaviour of judges, non-Greek prisoners have come to outnumber their Greek counterparts in recent years, amounting, for example, to 7,875, or 60%, out of a total of 12,912 pre-trial and convicted prisoners on 1 January 2013, with a significant and increasing proportion of non-Greeks – half of them by 2012, for instance – being imprisoned in connection with irregular migration (see further Cheliotis, 2012; Cheliotis and Xenakis, 2011, 2016). In line with what is known in penological literature as the 'less eligibility' principle, whereby the working and unemployed poor are controlled by being constantly threatened with a fate even worse than their poverty, the looming prospect of imprisonment combines with the overhanging threat of administrative detention under notoriously inhumane and degrading conditions (Cheliotis, 2013) to further enhance the exploitability of irregular migrants in the job market, whether as wage labourers or as reserves.⁶

Concluding remarks: the limits of inclusion

On a broad, conceptual level, this article seeks to problematise the dominant critical perspective on policies and practices that have evolved in response to the flows of poor migrants into advanced Western economies over recent decades. This perspective views exclusion as the intended outcome and practical effect of migration management, and either openly or implicitly proposes inclusion as a more just and humane alternative.

Focusing on the case of Greece and the treatment irregular migrants have been afforded in the country since the early 1990s, this article first draws attention to ways in which purportedly exclusionary approaches to irregular migration control may be imperfect by design, not in the sense of deliberately allowing permeable borders, but rather in the sense of restricting outflows, thereby serving particular politico-economic interests in the 'host' state. In the Greek case, the physical 'entrapment' of irregular migrants has been crucial to the country's vast informal labour market and to native employers operating therein, as well as, by extension, to political elites seeking to retain and broaden their electoral clienteles (Xenakis and Cheliotis, 2013b).

Moving on to address the exploitative nature of irregular migrants' inclusion in the Greek informal labour market, the article argues that their exploitability has been

intensified through a combination of three dynamics: the maintenance of a consistently large pool of irregular migrant labour; severely curtailed access to labour, welfare and civil and political rights and entitlements for migrants without papers; and systematic application of anti-migrant violence and intimidation in the workplace and beyond. Thus, apparently unrelated state policies and practices regarding matters of migration, welfare, employment and criminal justice, together with patterns of anti-migrant brutality and intimidation by non-state actors, have effectively formed a concatenation of forces that push irregular migrants either to submit to any available condition of work or to await employment in a disciplined fashion.

Labour exploitation has not always been an intended effect on the part of the actors involved, nor the sole function served in the process. The politico-economic perspective and findings of this article nevertheless suggest that migrant inclusion can assume forms and perform functions that are no less unjust or inhumane than those of unequivocally exclusionary strategies of migration control; indeed, inclusion and exclusion may stand in a relation of complementarity rather than of opposition. To this extent, unpicking the conventional distinction between them is an important step towards grasping and ultimately tackling the woes of irregular migration.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Maartje van der Woude, Vanessa Barker and Joanne van der Leun for their supportive feedback on the paper. I also thank the two anonymous reviewers for their comments on the original submission. An earlier version of this paper was presented at a staff seminar at the Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics and Political Science, as well as at a conference organised by the Law School, University of A Coruña in Spain. I am grateful for comments received at these venues by Tim Newburn, Anne West, David Lewis, Jane Lewis, Armine Ishkanian and Isabel Shutes, and by Dario Melossi, Alessandro De Giorgi, Hilde Tubex and Charlotte Vanneste. Sappho Xenakis provided constructively critical feedback at various points during this article's gestation.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Notes

1. It is true that successive waves of irregular migrants have varied not only by the main country or region of origin and other socio-demographic characteristics, but also to a significant degree by the niches they have respectively occupied in Greece's informal labour market (during the 1990s, for example, Albanians were predominant in unskilled farm work and the construction industry, whilst since the 2000s Chinese have usually filled gaps in retail stores and trade, and Bangladeshis in restaurants). But this should by no means detract from the fact that Greek migration policy has undergone little substantive change over the years.
2. At the same time, Greece has also received unaccompanied migrant children and adult asylum seekers returned from neighbouring Italy in contravention of pertinent international legislation (Human Rights Watch, 2013b).
3. Other explanations for the 'trapping' of irregular migrants in Greece, most notably accounts of politico-economic pressures exerted to this end on Greece from other EU member-states,

- or of the role played by Greece's own infrastructural and financial constraints, are beyond the scope of this article.
4. Rejected asylum seekers may also apply for regularisation.
 5. Since the financial crisis hit Greece, the party has also organised soup kitchens, food distribution and blood donations only for natives, and has established a network of doctors providing free consultations again to Greeks alone, hence the network has officially been named 'Doctors with Borders' (see further *The Independent*, 2013).
 6. Elsewhere I have sought to advance this argument by claiming that the deplorable conditions under which migrants are typically kept in Greece's carceral institutions also perform important symbolic functions for the broader Greek public. That is to say, knowledge of such conditions helps unconsciously alleviate the pains of downward mobility and falling living standards that the average Greek citizen has been experiencing amidst conditions of financial crisis over recent years, providing him or her with reassurance that they continue to enjoy material advantages over those on the margins of society. The principle underlying this subtle symbolic function is what may be termed 'more eligibility' (see further Cheliotis, 2013, 2015a, 2015b).

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