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'From the Bottom of the Aegean Sea'¹ to Golden Dawn: Security, Xenophobia, and the Politics of Hate in Greece

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'Greece Belongs to the West'

'Greece belongs to the West' declared, simplistically, one of the most famous political leaders of the Greek Right in the 1970s. However, his family name was Karamanlis, stemming etymologically from the Turkish language. Precisely like the surnames of a lot of Greeks including several nationalists, even leading neo-Nazis of the Golden Dawn party.² As perhaps is expected, neither of them would consider Turkey Western or European.

The press officer and MP of Golden Dawn, Kassidiaris, has stated repeatedly the hate of the party for Turks, Muslims, Jews, non-white people, migrants, communists, anarchists, and more or less the rest of humanity apart from Nazis. Unfortunately for him, he fell victim to his own ideology, when the extreme-Right online forum 'Stormfront' published his photograph, in August 2013, setting the question to its users whether they felt he looked like a white man.³ Kassidiaris' fellow Nazis were quite vocal on the subject; most of them concluding that he does not look like a white man.⁴

The aforementioned incident about Kassidiaris along with Karamanlis' statement highlight a fundamental problem preoccupying public life in modern Greece. If one wants to summarize that problem, they could talk about a main tension between at least two wide identity schemes: a supposedly Western-European version of collective self and a non-Western idiom of selfhood. The country became the case study of Herzfeld (2005) when he wanted to talk about the distinction between the elements of a national self that are displayed and the elements that remain hidden or underplayed.

Karamanlis' statement about 'Greece belonging to the West' signified the ideological elevation of concepts such as 'West(ernization)' and later

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‘Europe(anization)’ or even ‘Modern(ization)’ (the suffix ‘-ization’ is added because these words also refer to aims that were supposed to be reached). Such pompous terms are useful to high politics, but the temporality of the terminological content reveals their theoretical invalidity, yet at the same time reveals their practical importance as political *passe-partout*. So, if up until 1989, Greece ‘belonging to the West’ implied, for example, being anti-communist or Christian, by the 1990s it had come to imply having a proper neoliberal political economy characterized in newly built mega-infrastructures and shopping malls, a modern police force and state apparatus, etc. But belonging to the west still included anti-communism along with domination of Christian dogma. However, the content of the terms had changed, and for example being Christian from 2001 came to imply also Islamophobia for a lot of Christians. And so goes the social life of the various elastic political terms.

The process is complex and, in practice, is full of contradictions – for example, one has to deal with people who have Turkish surnames declaring that are Western (excluding Turkey from the West) or with non-white advocates of white supremacy. However, the transfer of that tension in the political arena, the contradictions involved in that tension, as well as the top-down hierarchy of the process and the hollowness of the terms employed (and thus the flexibility in their content), have been very problematic.

Security and Xenophobia in European Greece

One of the major questions emerging in Greece of the post-2010 crisis has to do with the potential ideological infrastructure that paved the way for the sudden rise of neo-Nazism allowing a previously marginal party to gain over 400,000 votes (approximately 7%) in the elections of 2012. Arguably one of the factors contributing towards that direction is located precisely in the tension concerning the Western-ness and Europe-ness of this south-eastern margin of the continent – a margin that is not considered so ‘European’ or ‘Western’ by most other Europeans (or even Greeks). Admittedly Greece shares historically and culturally much more with its North African, Eastern and Balkan neighbours than it shares with the Northern European Western core.

Greek elites (and by extension the ideological and suppression state apparatuses they built) are suffering from a long-lasting (national) identity crisis for over a century now. So we end up in a very peculiar country that, on the one hand, wants to be modern, but on the other hand emphasizes antiquity. It wants to be Western, but simultaneously looks low at Westerners. ‘When we were building the Parthenon, the Northern Europeans were living on the trees’, is a phrase that one can hear in Greece for decades now. However, at the same time, as Herzfeld suggests, such statements should remain ‘among us’ – we should not manifest what we think to Others, because after all we probably want to become Western and look like them, although we do not like them and we consider ourselves better, but without anyone being able to determine what this ‘we’ or ‘Western’ refer to.

However, this identity crisis and this struggle to determine a functional (for the State and the elites) collective self has its victims. On the other end of the

everyday taxonomic system is the non-Western Others, who are perceived as second class by the Greek state apparatuses. Statements against this category are not that hidden, so state officials may be openly racist and discriminatory against these Others and thus the majority of mass media discourse follow this example. This category of 'non-Western' included also Europeans such as Eastern Europeans, especially Albanian migrants, who comprised the highest migratory population in Greece. However, the last few years the focus has shifted targeting explicitly people from Africa and Asia, implying more clearly a shift towards racial criteria. If during a certain period Albanian migrants were blamed, for example, for 'causing a drop in the wages' these days the African street vendors are blamed for 'ruining the small Greek merchants' or Afghans and Pakistanis are blamed just for being Muslims or dangerous for the public health. The wealth of unapologetic racist discourse is unlimited and very often the prime minister of the country, the local Golden Dawn MP, a tiny neo-Nazi weblog, and the presenter of 'eight o'clock news' will reproduce almost identical versions of such discourse.

We often deal with a semiological civil war or with a semiological polyphrenia since in fact different institutions employ the same language for very different processes. Terms remain open, to either refer to, touristic industry's slogans which use ancient Greek hospitality (i.e. *philoxenia*, *xenia* hotels, etc.) for the (otherwise disrespected) Western tourists or to refer to the most brutal and xenophobic police operation that Greece has ever seen, named by the commanders '*Xenios Dias*' after the ancient Greek god of hospitality (see Hamilakis 2007; Herzfeld 1989). Indeed, the contradictions involved in the process cause complications since there are not only white people who come as tourists in Greece. So plenty of non-white tourists were brutally detained and beaten up by the Greek police since August 2012 that '*Xenios Dias*' started. Moreover, the mainstream Greek perceptions of Europe and the West these days are shifting again since Greek government officials and their corporate media often blame the evil North Europeans for the austerity. Indeed the same governmental officials also make statements about the benefits of austerity.

Within such confused socio-cultural context, since the 1980s, the ideological elevation of a 'Europe-ness' took place,⁵ peaking in the 1990s in the name of the so-called European integration. The ideological and socio-cultural implications of that process cannot be addressed at this paper in their totality; however, the securitization-militarization of the boundaries of this undefined, but desired, 'Europe-ness' needs to be mentioned because of its role to the racist security dogma that paved the way to mass xenophobia.

On the one hand, the policies of European integration correctly led to a loosening of the internal borders for people living within the EU. On the other hand, this was accompanied with the militarization of the external European borders leading to 'Fortress Europe', a continent where non-Europeans are often condemned to death for their effort to cross the sealed common border. Frontex, national border police forces, and coast guards are just some of the apparatuses dedicated to the militarization of the European border. So along the so-called 'Europeanization' of the Greek state's institutions we had the ideological upgrading of the Greek

borders into European ones. Greece was located very much on the margin of that undetermined Europe-ness as the most south-eastern EU (and previously EEC) member country, surrounded by non-members for decades. So it became the favoured territory for the application of at least two xenophobic projects: the Greek one and the European one, often in tension with each other, but usually in collaboration. This process in ideological level was confirming a much desired admission of Greece to the European family and even worse as a significant player in the European securitization project.

This anti-migratory dogma did not limit itself to the borders; it was soon matched with the ongoing process of the militarization of public-space policing in European cities. The case of the Greek border guards symbolizes perfectly this extension of border-control security tactics to urban spaces; in 2010, it was reported that out of the 510 border guards employed in the country, 473 were, in fact, serving in Athens.⁶ Indeed, deployment of border guards in cities has become standard practice these days; for example, in the summer of 2013 UKBA organized a large-scale operation in London's underground stations stopping and checking migrants and people of migratory origin. So security and military techniques developed supposedly to protect the borders of a nation-state from a military attack (from the organized army of another nation-state) have been applied against unarmed migrants on the borders or on the city centres.

It is not simply the deployment of border guards in the cities; the urban policing itself targets the ethnic Other. In the case of Greece, the semi-military police operation 'Sweep', in the early 1990s, targeted migrants in the Omonoia⁷ area of central Athens and elsewhere. However, this paled in comparison to what was to follow. In 2005, operation 'Polis' led to over 200,000 people across the country being stopped and searched, and although the emphasis was on youths and migrants, they were not the only victims. Today the ongoing operation '*Xenios Zeus*' has resulted in over 84,000 migrants being detained between August 2012 and February 2013, targeting everyone who *appears* to be foreign. Given that this operation was implemented, ostensibly, with the intention of tackling the level of crime (implying a direct link between migrants and criminality) it has had very poor results indeed, as scarcely any of those detained was guilty of any offence other than lacking proper documents. Then the approximately 5,000 (by 9 September 2013) migrants who were arrested as part of *Xenios Zeus* have been transferred to and locked in new detention centres that were opened by the debt-ridden state.⁸

Such operations imply and apply a state-directed exclusion of the population of the cities, which takes spatial characteristics since it displaces people from where they live and locks them in police stations temporarily until their documents are checked or detention camps if they are arrested. The Other is gradually exiled or declared as undesired from parts of the city and more generally public spaces. Officially, this phenomenon is not based explicitly on racial criteria – as neo-Nazis demand; rather, the formal state authorities' claim is that they are trying to tackle the 'crime' of living without proper permission. In the case of UKBA operations or the operations of the respective French police, some of the officers stopping and searching non-white passersby are themselves non-white, precisely because the

European state authorities are aware of the racism involved in the process, and there is the hope to give the idea that it is not racist since non-white people are the physical agents of racism. However, as Kassidiaris' case suggests, you do not have to be white in order to apply fascism. By extension, as the example of police and border police forces physically targeting migrants *en masse* implies, you do not have to be explicitly and openly a neo-Nazi state apparatus in order to apply policies of racial discrimination in the streets and pave the way for the actual neo-Nazis. The cases of migrants who have been stopped and checked for their papers by Golden Dawn members, often in order to be beaten up afterwards, are not rare. The distance between anti-migratory policing and the Golden Dawn's ban of migrants from certain public spaces was not that long (see, e.g., Dalakoglou and Vradis 2011).

The Politics of Hate

The decades of xenophobic and racist logics developed and disseminated by Greek state apparatuses – under the auspices of EU policies (i.e. Fortress Europe) – has legitimated socially the hate for the migrants. At precisely the same time as 'flexible' and thus unstable employment was normalized via the neoliberal policies of European monetary integration in the 1990s, the xenophobic European and country's policies were keeping thousands of people on European soil without documents, detained, chased after, etc. At the same time these same 'undesired' populations were providing inexpensive labour in order to build the Olympic Greece and generally the Greece of the economic boom (1990s–2000s).

However, since the outbreak of the so-called crisis in 2010, the 'migrants vs indigenous' scheme is not the only divisive tactic employed by the state and their public opinion-making elites. Migrants remain the main victim, but to a certain extent similar kinds of phobic discourses are extended against other social groups. For instance, since the start of austerity, which led to the redundancies of civil servants, the latter ones are targeted, being labelled as 'lazy and corrupted'. Additionally, when protests on the streets of Athens during the crisis were increasing, the more classical schemes were rehashed and reproduced by the government and corporate media: 'the hooded anarchists who burn Athens', 'the protesting crowd that endangers public order', 'the strikers who ruin, economically, the city's small businesses and nation's industry'. When the privatization of higher education policies started to be implemented, the state and corporate media targeted 'the over-paid professors and the middle-class spoiled university students'. Then the state apparatuses targeted antifascist activists and anarchist squatters, so squats were named 'sources of anomy' arresting antifascists *en masse* and evicting squats all over the country and so on went the chorus of imagined social divisions.

Altogether, since the outbreak of the so-called crisis, following a fascist logic, the Greek nexus of power (government, corporate media, and big capital) were targeting, with remarkable symbolic and physical violence, various groups. This logic of 'everyone against everyone' (even their own selves) was disseminated on a daily basis via the dominant discourse. This dissemination was typified by a

statement made by Theodoros Pangalos, the vice president of the government who signed the loan agreement with IMF/EU and ECB in 2010. He blamed every single person in the country for the national debt, stating that ‘we all together’ spent the country’s wealth.⁹

Within this context of blaming, ostracizing and hating potentially any social group, immediately prior to the May 2012 elections the government turned their attentions and discrimination against one of the most marginalized groups of workers in the country: unlicensed sex workers. A series of joint police and mass-media operations raided the streets and prostitution houses of central Athens in order for the forces of order to ‘re-occupy the city’ and ‘clean it’ – as leaders of the governmental coalition would state. Some of the women arrested were found, after being forcibly tested, to be HIV-positive, so the Ministry ordered their photos to be made public, humiliating them, ‘for the purposes of public health protection’, as it was claimed. Indeed, the ministers of health and police at the time, the social-democrats Loverdos and Chrisochoides, who were desperate to get parliamentary seats in the upcoming elections, vehemently supported what they presented as a personal crusade against health risks on the streets of Athens’ centre.

In post-2010 Greece, however, these identical discourses were reproduced – without any façade of supposed democratic hypocrisy – by those who know best how to be violently effective: neo-Nazis. So the anti-migratory attacks of Golden Dawn looked like the extension of the formal state. Thus, it came to be that in the elections of May and June 2012, Golden Dawn, with the explicit pre-electoral slogan ‘Against Everyone’, received over 400,000 votes.

The Intimacy between State Apparatuses and Neo-Nazism

If Greek neo-Nazis who perceive migrants as their enemy in a mysterious undeclared war are peculiar, Golden Dawn, as a political phenomenon, may not be as peculiar as they first appear. First of all there are physical and historical roots of the extreme-Right in a country where various governments used them to do their dirty jobs (Dalakoglou 2012, 2013b, 2013c; Psarras 2010, 2012). However, as it was described above, there are less explicit but equally intimate and effective links between formal institutions and fascist logics in Greece and (more widely) Europe. This is not a one-way relationship; it is a complex process, where the formal state/suprastate institutions pave the way for neo-Nazi ideology, and the neo-Nazis apply or pave the way for the formal authorities, and gradually they both seem to become one, changing the known paradigm.

Today the UK government claims that EU migrants are also dangerous for Britain, or German magazines consider Greeks as lazy and corrupted thieves, while Greek media argue that Germans came back after 1944 to occupy the country again. Moreover, the Greek political spectrum is shifting towards schemes that resemble the rhetoric of the civil war period (1946–1949). So now that the project of ‘peaceful Europe’ seems to be shaking dangerously a tension becomes explicit between two European selves. On the one hand, there is a Europe as a peaceful region, place of tolerance, democracy, social policy, champion of human rights, multiculturalism, and so on. On the other hand, there is another body of

European identity elements, a Europe as the birthplace of Nazism and Fascism, as the 'dark continent' (Mazower 2000) where final solutions were given by state authorities to their problems. Europe as Christian and Islamophobic, or as 'white Europe'.

From the Norwegian neo-Nazi terrorist Breivik, Golden Dawn or EDL, to the Greek prime minister, Antonis Samaras, or the British Home Officer Theresa May, current governments and far-Right groups agree that migrants are danger to European countries. The more close to the political centre part of this rhetoric is with respect to public order, criminality, public health, the de-regularization of the job market or in terms of capacities of the economy. The more extreme version employs ideas about a supposed 'pollution' of an imagined European racial and cultural whiteness or talks about an unknown Islamic or even Jewish plan to colonize the 'Christian Europe'. Indeed, as the example of Greece or the example of post-electoral Norway in 2013 manifests, there is no problem for the centre-Right parties to collaborate with the far-Right parties within the parliamentary level in order to avoid any deviance of Europe towards slightly more anti-neoliberal or anti-racist pathways.

In times of crisis and in times of austerity, when the States are not allowed to provide any social provisions (breaking the culture of intimacy between citizens and the State mechanisms), security, policing, borders, nationalism and even racism – if necessary – are becoming the last sources for citizen consent that the European governments can offer to the most reactionary citizenry. However, this situation has an explicit result: it makes European governments to increasingly identify with the agendas of neo-Nazi groups and vice versa.

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Notes

¹ One of the main slogans of Anarchists in Greece is 'On the mines of Evros River [the river that marks the land border between Greece and Turkey] and on the bottom of Aegean Sea is built the security of each European' ('Στις νόρκες του Έβρου, στον πάτο του Αιγαίου, χτίζεται η ασφάλεια του κάθε Ευρωπαίου').

² Kassidiaris' biography is a typical example of most other leading neo-Nazis: in the past he had been charged for armed robbery, and he became notorious when he punched on the face a middle-aged female member of parliament on live national television before the 2012 elections.

³ In Golden Dawn's April 2011 magazine, Kassidiaris wrote an article in defence of Hitler explaining how good Europe and the world would look if the Nazis had won the Second World War. Among other things he wrote: 'Fundamental values stemming mostly from Greek antiquity, would have overpowered spiritually all states and would set the destiny of

nations. Romanticism as an intellectual movement and classicism would have prevailed over the decadent subculture that has eroded the white man.' Two years later, his own whiteness was challenged by his fellow neo-Nazis.

⁴ Neo-Nazism as an ideological scheme is laughable, but the rise of neo-Nazism is not a joke in Greece: migrants and anti-fascists are stabbed and beaten by neo-Nazis on the streets of Athens.

⁵ Europe-ness is of course a very contradictory and over-simplistic scheme. Although the so-called European commonalities have been promoted and emphasized the last few decades by national governments and EU authorities, it is well known that there is often hostility among different Europeans. A recent reshaping of hostile stereotypes can be seen today during the crisis when Greek and German public opinion-makers often refer to Second World War rhetoric about, for example, the new attempt of Germany to occupy Greece and, on the other side, in terms of stereotypical schemes about corrupted or lazy Greeks. But still these contradictions in fact remind us again of the complexities involved in the process of building cultural intimacy.

⁶ See *To Vima*, 2 December 2010, <http://www.tovima.gr/politics/article/?aid=370781>.

⁷ Omonoia and Syntagma are the two largest squares of central Athens (see Dalakoglou 2013a for more details).

⁸ It is worth noting that another big public work completed by Greece during 2012 was the fence along the Turkish-Greek border in order to prevent migration.

⁹ The vice president of the Greek government in 2010, Theodoros Pangalos, stated the notorious phrase 'we ate them all together' in reference to the causes of the Greek state's debts, implying that everyone in the country is responsible for the debt – especially the citizens. Indeed, such a phrase has become typical of the (self)-blame discourse promoted by Greek and European political and financial elites, since the outbreak of the crisis. An anthropological discussion of the concept of 'eating money' in Greece can be found in Green (2008).

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