ALLOGENIS AND HOMOGENIS IMMIGRANTS: CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION IN GREECE

ABSTRACT

The self-imagined Greek nation as a homogeneous Greek-orthodox entity is mirrored in citizenship law, which is based on ethno-genealogical considerations. The presence of a considerable immigrant population after the 1990s has not led to a reconsideration of this perception. Thus far, inclusion is negotiated around ideologies of Greekness and rights are distributed in terms of *jus sanguinis*.

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The function of citizenship as a mechanism of exclusion has become common knowledge in social and political sciences. Large-scale immigration and other features of globalization exposed a reality that has always been present: citizenship excludes as much as it includes (Castles and Davidson 2000, Wallerstein 2003). Entitlement to a set of rights, which are meant to be universal, is only provided though membership of a national community. Thus, inclusion and exclusion are closely linked to the ideological self-perception of the nation. Diverse historical paths of nation building have shaped diverse citizenship traditions and particular nationhood conceptions, which channel immigration in distinct ways (Joppke 1999a).

Greek national ideology was constructed around two core ideas: homogeneity of the nation and the uninterrupted continuity of Greek civilization and history from the classical past (Boeschoten 2008: 212). First, emigration of groups with a non-Greek consciousness, population exchanges and withdrawal of nationality all minimized the religious and ethnic diversity of the modern Greek state. The 1923 compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey in itself involved the movement of about 1.5 million people. More than one million Christians came to settle in Greece and more than 350,000 Muslims left for Turkey (Hirschon 2003: 14). At the same time, assimilation policies targeted the linguistic minorities. The religious and cultural plurality of the Ottoman past as well the continued presence of many linguistic minorities within the Greek nation-state have been erased from public memory, making the nation's self-imagination as a homogenous Greek-Orthodox entity a norm. Second, the idea of continuity with the classical past was justified by defining the nation with reference to a common ancestry. This perspective gradually rendered Greek citizenship an ethnic privilege derived from descent.

The term *genos*, with reference to the religious community of the rebel orthodox population within the Ottoman Empire that was gradually transformed into the Greek nation, became a key element of Greekness (Christopoulos 2007, Tsitselikis 2007). *Genos* is an actual legal category differentiating those who are of Greek descent, *homogenis*, and those who are not, *allogenis*. This additional distinction, which goes beyond the common dichotomy between the national and the foreigner, is of crucial importance in the Greek context. The category of national allogenis, which refers to persons belonging to minorities in Greece, is in opposition to the firm image of Greek national homogenis and appears as an anomaly (Christopoulos 2007: 253). At the same time, foreigner homogenis (i.e. Greeks from the diaspora) retain their ties with the "motherland" through a preferred legal status as people without Greek citizenship but with Greek descent. The distinction between homogenis and allogenis has played a central role in the design of Greek immigration policy and citizenship acquisition.

Allogenis and homogenis immigrants and citizenship acquisition

Traditionally a source country for emigration, Greece became a target destination for immigration in the early 1970s. This phenomenon gathered momentum during the 1990s, which saw the immigrant population grow more than four times in size. Less than 15 years after the beginning of mass immigration, the immigrant population was estimated at 1.15 million, and accounts for more than 10% of the total population (Baldwin Edwards 2005); this is one of the

highest immigrant population rates among EU member states. Greece's immigration turnaround can be placed in the framework of King's "Southern European model" (King et al. 1997),[1] yet the massive numbers and the sudden occurrence of the phenomenon in the 1990s are exceptional to the South European experience. The dramatic increase in immigration during that decade was closely connected to the disintegration of the former Communist Bloc and was shaped by two distinct population moves: mass undocumented immigration from the Balkans, notably Albania, and the "return" of ethnic Greeks.

The massive immigration in the 1990s found the administrative structure of Greece unprepared. Moreover, the legislative framework and, in particular, the nationality law could not meet the challenge since the Greek state had been completely unfamiliar with any condition other than marriage for the acquisition of citizenship by foreigners. The norm of zero immigration in the 1991 immigration law was the initial policy response to the massive influx of allogenis immigrants. As a result of this extremely restrictive policy, the vast majority of the approximately 700,000 immigrants living in Greece were still irregulars six years after the implementation of the new immigration law (Baldwin Edwards 2005). A series of regularizations in 1998, 2001, 2005 and 2007 were applied to deal with this novel situation. Legal residence is recognized as being accompanied by the entitlement to the same rights as Greeks in the labour market, excluding tenured positions in the public sector. Legal residence provides full civil rights but not (municipal and national) voting rights. Access to disability and subsistence welfare programs is also restricted. Resident permits are tied to social security contributions; hence legal immigrants are granted social security coverage.

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Legal status and access to these basic rights proved to be crucial in the lives of immigrants. Yet, the regularization programs did not mark a substantial shift towards a long-term migration policy. The improvement of life conditions for immigrants was coupled with new difficulties given their still precarious status, their political exclusion and widespread stigmatization, especially for the group of Albanians who are, in terms of numbers, the majority immigrant group. In spite of some favourable changes to the right to family reunification and the acquisition of long-term residence, the naturalization procedure was made even more exclusionary, with the aim of preventing any possible increase in the number of naturalization applications.

In 1993, minimal continuous residency requirements went from eight to 10 years during the 12 years preceding the application. Furthermore, the 2001 law introduced a fee of approximately 1,500 euros in order for the application to be considered. Proof of sufficient knowledge of the Greek language, history and culture is required and in the case of a rejected application, the decision need not be justified. The residency requirement is reduced to three years for a person married to a Greek citizen and who has become a parent and to five years for political refugees and stateless persons. Naturalization is extended automatically to all minor and unmarried children, yet there is no provision for children of foreign parents born in Greece. Second generation and even third generation children are excluded from automatic access to nationality if their parents have not naturalized. The rule of acquiring Greek nationality at birth, *jus solis*, is extremely restricted in Greek citizenship law. It is only relevant in cases of adopted children, children born out of wedlock or to individuals of unknown nationality who are born on Greek territory.

From a comparative perspective, Greece's performance on naturalization is well below the European average.[2] This is illustrated in its extremely low naturalization rates: fewer than 14,000 people acquired Greek citizenship from 1985 to 2003 (Christopoulos 2007: 267). This number accounts for less than 2% of the total immigrant population. The exclusionary policy with respect to immigration is not only reflected in the provisions for citizenship acquisition but is also evident in the lack of a legal framework that would facilitate the settlement of immigrants.

The Greek government adopted a substantially different policy towards immigrants of Greek descent. The category of homogenis includes two major groups: ethnic Greek immigrants from Albania (*Greek Albanians*) and the so-called home returnees from the former Soviet Union (*Soviet Greeks*). The first group refers to Albanian citizens of Greek ethnic origin and Christian Orthodox religion who are mainly from Southern Albania.[3] The second group refers to the Greek diaspora of the Soviet Union, mostly the so-called Pontic Greeks who claim their origin to be in "Pontos," the Black Sea coast of Turkey.[4] Even though the state's intention has been to limit the naturalization of allogenis immigrants, access to citizenship rights has been given to Soviet Greeks as a welcome gesture for their "repatriation" to the motherland. Considered as an important resource for the country's economy and demography, "a settlement plan was implemented inspired by the 'irreplaceable achievement' that is the successful settlement of the Minor Asia refugees of the 1923 compulsory population exchange" (Voutira 2004: 535).

A ministerial decision in 1990 aimed to ease and regulate the acquisition of citizenship by Soviet Greeks, which was defined as "a specific case" by the 1993 law. Soviet Greeks who wished to acquire Greek citizenship could apply through the so-called procedure of "verification of nationality." By means of a summary mode of acquisition, citizenship rights were granted upon proof of the applicant's descent by documents certified by the Greek consular authorities in the country of origin. The investigation of the applicant's "Greek national consciousness" was introduced as a supplementary criterion in 2000. Soviet Greeks who

do not wish to acquire Greek citizenship in order not to lose their existing one are provided with a special "card of homogenis." This is tantamount to semi-citizenship and grants them all but voting rights. According to Christopoulos (2007: 272), by 2003, approximately 125,000 of the estimated 180,000 Soviet Greeks residing permanently in Greece had acquired Greek nationality, mostly through the verification procedure. In addition to the Greek government's generosity towards the citizenship acquisition by Soviet Greeks, a series of favourable policies for employment, housing and language skills were also developed.

In the case of Greek Albanians, the Greek government had to balance its policy between the proclaimed moral obligation towards co-ethnics and the political considerations whereby Greek Albanians are deemed more important for the nation outside the nation rather than within it. In particular, the continuous presence of the Greek minority in Albania is considered vital to the promotion of Greek interests in that neighbouring country. Since there is a threat that Albania will withdraw Albanian citizenship from those who eventually acquire Greek citizenship, the Greek policy attempts to prevent the acquisition of Greek citizenship by homogenis from Albania (Tsitelikis 2007: 156). The status of these people was clarified in 1998 when they were granted the "card of homogenis." Although they are given preferential status as people without Greek citizenship but with Greek nationality, they receive fewer benefits than the Soviet Greeks and have no voting rights since they are excluded from citizenship. Therefore, in the Greek policy framework, rights are distributed according to ideologies of nationhood and political interests of the Greek state. This has produced a hierarchy of immigrant groups with varying statuses that are placed in concentric circles around the ethnonational core (Triantafyllidou and Veikou 2002).

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Different trajectories?

Evidently the level of civic engagement differs substantially between homogenis and allogenis immigrants. The absence of formal political rights has not facilitated active civic participation on the part of allogenis immigrants in Greek public life. Although several immigrant associations have gradually emerged, they have few means to negotiate their needs and claims with the Greek authorities. Immigrant activism in mainstream associations like trade unions or political parties is also quite scarce (Gropas and Triantafyllidou 2005). In addition to their precarious legal status and lack of time and resources to devote to activities other than paid work, immigrants' lack of civic activism may also be related to their mistrust of the Greek state and a conscious abstention from visible participation in a socio-political context where ethnic difference is certainly not a privilege. Homogenis immigrants have more resources to mobilize in order to achieve their aims. In particular, Soviet Greeks – the majority of whom enjoy full political rights – have established a wide network of local associations.[5]

Less pronounced are the economic differences between allogenis and homogenis immigrants. For homogenis immigrants, immigration and settlement involved a substantial declassing and deskilling experience. Except for a small minority of Soviet Greeks and Greek Albanians who managed high economic returns by means of transnational activities or ethnic entrepreneurship, the majority of these immigrants found themselves in insecure and low-status jobs, just like other immigrants.

There is a substantial lack of research on the cultural and social interactions between immigrants and native-born Greeks and on the role that formal inclusion and citizenship rights have played in that respect. A focus on the only group that enjoys full citizenship rights is instructive here. According to evidence from Thessaloniki's neighbourhoods, it seems that Soviet Greeks and native-born Greeks avoid each other and that representations are mutually prejudiced (Pratsinakis forthcoming). Disappointed by the experience of return to their homeland, Soviet Greeks stick to their own community. Having immigrated collectively and been institutionalized as one group, they form visible ethnic neighbourhoods in the city, and these appear alien and unassimilated to local Greeks. Paradoxically, the group, which is by legal definition the closest to the ethnic cultural core, is the one that appears the most different at the local level.[6] This is simply because it is the only group that is able to present its differences. The impressive Russian-style wooden church, inaugurated in 2005 in the western part of the city of Thessaloniki, testifies symbolically to this: it is the only temple built by an immigrant group, challenging the homogeneity of the city's religious townscape.

This "difference," however, is used by local Greeks to question the immigrants' true Greek descent. Disillusionment is also expressed on the part of native-born Greeks who see Soviet Greeks as "Russians," "lazy" and "ignorant" in comparison to the 1923 refugees (Voutira 2004: 537). The legacy of the "successful assimilation" of Asia Minor refugees more than 80 years after their arrival is used as the point of reference for Soviet Greek repatriation. At the local level, criteria of Greekness are used in a "flexible" way to include only those who "behave properly" and exclude those who do not (Pratsinakis forthcoming). So even if Soviet Greeks are positively framed at the policy and ideological level, their

social exclusion at the local level is not prevented. Indeed, this is a much more complex situation, one which cannot be explained in terms of access to citizenship rights. Yet, it evinces that although citizenship acquisition is a fundamental part of social inclusion, it is not sufficient.

A comparison of the immigration policy implemented towards homogenis and allogenis immigrants is revealing. On the one hand, the presence of a significant allogenis immigrant population was consistently treated as a temporary phenomenon rather than as a permanent feature of the contemporary Greek state. On the other, favourable policies encouraged the return of Soviet Greeks. This differentiated policy approach is closely linked to the nation's self-perception as a homogenous Greek orthodox entity. According to this perception, only immigrants of Greek descent may be an important resource for the country, in contrast to allogenis immigrants who are viewed as a threat to both the social cohesion and to the cultural homogeneity of the nation. Nationality law served as the main tool to secure this ideology and the political interests of the state. Access to citizenship rights has been given to Soviet Greeks as a welcome gesture for their "repatriation" to the motherland, whereas strict naturalization requirements are aimed at limiting the naturalization of allogenis immigrants.

Since Greece has become a de facto immigration country, there is an urgent need to reconsider citizenship law. The present framework puts allogenis immigrants in an awkward situation where they are forced to conceal their differences and behave like Greeks while at the same time are not "Greeks" (Christopoulos 2004: 362). This situation is especially problematic for second generation immigrants whose home is the receiving society but who become foreigners as soon as they reach the age of 18 under the current law. The new code of nationality, which was passed at the end of 2004 (Law *3284*), appears as a lost opportunity because it "abstains from introducing any new perspective that would meet the current challenges" (Christopoulos 2007: 255). The example of Germany shows that states are not slaves of their "cultural idioms" of nationhood but may devise flexible citizenship policies in response to immigration (Joppke 1999b: 644-645). What, however, may prove to be a much more difficult task is the reinvention of Greek nationality in favour of a model that is much more open to pluralism. The dominant norm of the homogenous Greek nation needs to be deconstructed since it not only posed major obstacles to the inclusion of allogenis immigrants but also to the acceptance of the Soviet Greeks. Any aspect of their identity that is not considered "Greek" marks a boundary between them and native-born Greeks.

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Notes

[1] King's model emphasizes specific features of the South European economy along with the gradual end of rural-urban migration in all countries, common demographic trends and social changes.

[2] See the work by J. Niessen, T. Huddleston and L. Citron. 2007. "Migrant Integration Policy Index" *British Council*. Retrieved from <www.integrationindex.eu/multiversions/2712/FileName/MIPEX-2006-2007-final.pdf>.

[3] Due to their Greek descent, they are legally differentiated from other Albanian immigrants. As previously mentioned, Albanians of Albanian descent are the major immigrant group making up approximately half of the allogenis immigrant population. Greek Albanians are much fewer in number: no official data are available, but estimates vary from 100,000 to 200,000 persons.

[4] Pontic Greeks left Pontos for Russia during the 19th century or during the turbulent period from 1914 to 1923. After the Greco-Turkish war in 1922 and following the population exchange, they completely deserted their homeland, fleeing either to Greece as political refugees or immigrating to Russia. The Pontic diaspora of FSU is found in small cultural enclaves in South Russia, South Caucasus and Central Asia, where they had been deported during the Stalinist era. Formally, Pontic Greeks are referred to as repatriated Greeks (*palinnostoundes*), which is actually an incorrect term because they are not returning to their native land: they had never lived in Greece.

[5] It should be noted, however, that political parties have a strong hold over Greek state administration as a result of the relations between the state administration and immigrant groups of a political and clientelistic nature (Gropas and Triantafyllidou 2005).

[6] Generally, allogenis immigrants remain rather invisible due to their prolonged undocumented residence and their precarious legal status. In particular, Albanians of Albanian origin have had no option but to try to fit in due to their widespread stigmatization. They have followed strategies to blur the boundary that is set to exclude them by identity encryption, passing as Greek Albanians and then by actively claiming similarity in a common way of life with the Greeks. Although they managed to gain social acceptance at the local level, inclusion happens mostly at the individual level, even against the stigmatized image of the Albanian immigrant, which remains intact (Pratsinakis 2005).

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