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Beyond Migration Binaries and Linear Transitions: The Complexification of Greece's Migratory Landscape at Times of Crisis

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Abstract

Although migration scholars have long acknowledged the need to move beyond opposing binaries, these dualisms continue to dominate both policy and academic research. Typical migration binaries include international vs internal, forced vs voluntary, temporary vs permanent and legal vs illegal. Binary categories may be useful analytical tools, but have limited value in explaining emerging forms and patterns of mobility in today's complex global migration map. Above all, they need to be critiqued and transcended. In this paper we particularly address the established but increasingly untenable distinction between origin and destination countries, which – despite holding some obvious truth – rests upon assumptions of a direct causal relationship between migration and development, treating developing countries as sources of emigration and developed ones as immigrant destinations. This simplistic understanding serves little in explaining contemporary trajectories marked by the simultaneity of emigration and immigration, the stagnation or reversal of developmental pathways, the blurring between various 'categories' of migrants, and more. In this paper, we argue that such tendencies are well exemplified in the case of Greece, until recently understood in the frame of a common Southern European migration transition from emigration to immigration. As will be shown, developments in the last few years of crisis have shaped an ever-complex mobility landscape from which we can start to interrogate conventional assumptions about clear-cut categories and linear transitions in migration research.

Keywords

Migration binaries; Greek migration; economic crisis; migration transition

Introduction

Although migration scholars have long acknowledged the need to move beyond opposing binaries (Cohen 1995: 5-6), these continue to dominate thinking about migration. Binary categories may have been useful analytical tools to heuristically map the field of migration studies, but they have limited explanatory value when it comes to assessing different forms of mobility, particularly in the complex new global map of migrations. Currently, new space-time flexibilisations and forces of globalisation are changing the modalities of and motivations for migration in ways that render those binaries obsolete. King (2002), reprising Cohen's initial formulation, critically comments on binaries such as internal–international, voluntary–forced, temporary–permanent, and legal–illegal migration, proposing ways to transcend them. To these dualisms, we further add the distinction between origin and destination countries, which – despite holding some elements of truth – rests upon assumptions of a direct causal relationship between migration and development, treating developing countries as sources of emigration and developed ones as destinations for migrants.

The reification of this distinction engenders an artificial image of the world as neatly divided between states that attract populations and those that push their citizens out. Such a simplistic perspective lacks insight into the plurality of migrants' motivations and aspirations (King 2002), and deprives them of agency. It further neglects the fact there have been considerable population flows between developing countries as well as within the so-called developed world (Skeldon 2012). Ultimately, it serves little in explaining contemporary trajectories marked by the simultaneity of emigration and immigration, the stagnation or

reversal of developmental pathways, the blurring between various ‘categories’ of migrants, and more. This empirical reality led Castles and Miller (2009: 12) to propose *the proliferation of migration transition* as a general tendency in the ‘age of migration’ – i.e. the temporal coexistence of various stages of ‘the migration transition’ in many countries, including emigration, immigration, return migration and transit migration.

In this paper we argue that such tendencies are well exemplified in the case of Greece, until recently understood in the frame of a common Southern European migration transition from emigration to immigration. We show that developments in the last few years of crisis and recession, as well as the unfolding migration humanitarian disaster in the Mediterranean, have shaped an increasingly complex mobility landscape that raises questions about Greece’s migration transition. Based on our own past and ongoing research, empirical literature and secondary material, we take account of three most evident trends. First, we show how Greece, until recently a destination for international migrants, emerges as a major space of passage in the context of European responses to the recent surge of ‘mixed’ migration flows. Secondly, we explore a new turnaround in net migration suggesting a resurgence of emigration, conventionally labelled as ‘brain drain’ yet, as we argue, comprising a variety of movers. Thirdly, we examine a far less pronounced shift in Greece’s internal migration patterns, notably a silent counter-urbanisation wave. In all three cases, we place contemporary trends in a historical continuum within which we capture the rupture signalled by the economic crisis.

Can we describe Greece’s current migration experience as marking a new stage in its migration trajectory? More substantially, can the current diverse and volatile migration patterns to, from and within Greece be described and assessed through the lens of the migration transition paradigm, and if yes in what ways? In discussing these issues, we question clear-cut distinctions between immigration and emigration countries and the linear developmental pathways they tend to imply. Our aim is not simply to discard these distinctions, but to reflect upon the theoretical and normative assumptions that underpin them in order to identify possible ways through which we can question established theoretical schemes in the study of migration at a period of hypermobility (among the economically privileged) and of blocked mobility or even forced immobility (for the underprivileged). Restricting our focus on the idea that there are may be ‘definite, patterned regularities in the volume, direction, composition and qualitative dimensions of population flows through space and time’ (Zelinsky 1971), we take Greece’s case as a starting point to tentatively explore the ‘irregularities’ of the current era’s migration ‘regularities’.

Questioning linear transitions and binary migration categories

The distinction between emigration and immigration countries essentially rests upon the assumption of a linear relationship between migration and the process of modernisation (Zelinsky 1971), treating developing countries as sources of emigration and the developed states as immigrant destinations. It implies disparities in ‘states’ or ‘stages’ of development and the ways they intersect with migration. Migration and development are clearly interrelated, yet their interlinkages have not been conclusively assessed (Skeldon 2010; de Haas 2012) and there is no consensus on whether migration is a cause or an outcome of development and vice-versa (Raghuram 2009). Academic and policy assumptions have been shifting, reflecting shifts in the prevailing views on either ‘migration’ or ‘development’ or indeed ‘underdevelopment’ (Raghluram 2009; de Haas 2012).

Highly skilled migration, for instance, understood in earlier decades as a ‘drain’ from the countries of origin of their most talented labour force, is now seen as a potential ‘gain’ whose benefits for countries of origin through financial or social remittances may not necessarily require their return but instead their ‘circulation’ (de Haas 2012). The rather

evocative and indeed even derogatory term ‘brain drain’ is being replaced by the more neutral ‘skill flow’ (Clemens 2009) to describe the international mobility of human capital, knowledge workers and the ‘creative class’ (Ewers 2007). This unveils another binary, this time between ‘desirable’ and ‘unwanted’ migration, whereby the former increasingly concerns highly skilled migrants. Around the year 2000, levels of emigration among highly skilled people worldwide exceeded the rate of emigration of people with lower educational qualifications, while in most destination countries the share of migrants with tertiary education was higher than that of the native-born (Dumont et al. 2010). Apart from the self-selectivity of migration, by which the highly skilled are in many ways among those most likely to move and most capable of doing so, a global competition for highly skilled professionals has intensified in recent decades, spurred by neoliberal deregulation and further encouraged by selective migration management schemes in many destination countries of the North (Zaletel 2006; Triandafilopoulos 2013).¹

While the privileging of certain forms of migration over others confirms the part of demand coming from the most dynamic sectors of the knowledge economy, the demand for low-skilled or unskilled labour is rarely acknowledged (Casey 2009: 23-24), and when it does this may translate into a demand for obedient, complying and disciplined workers (Anderson and Ruhs 2012: 12). Not only is the latter’s contribution to growth undervalued (Wilson and Keil 2008), but these two sides of demand are in some cases sides of the same coin, as ‘upstream’ and ‘low-stream’ sectors are intrinsically interconnected, notably in global cities (Sassen 2001). This brings to the fore yet another binary distinction between skilled and unskilled labour, which is found at the epicentre of current policy debates on migration, and also needs to be problematised. Skills are conventionally understood as individual attributes, e.g. formal qualifications or education levels, while other forms of knowledge, such as tacit knowledge, experience, capabilities, etc. are rarely considered (Kofman 2012). Any definition, however, should account not only for the skills workers possess, but also for those required by the labour market (Quintini 2011; Handel 2012). The question of skills thus depends on productive and employment structures and on how these are mediated through state policies. As Kofman (2012: 80) notes, ‘immigration policies increasingly reflect the calibration of desirable knowledge, human capital and skills against a hierarchy of stratified statuses’. Alongside schemes aiming to attract ‘desirable’ migrant labour to feed the machines of the knowledge economy, tough immigration controls often serve to fashion precarious workers meeting the demand from low added-value sectors (Anderson and Ruhs 2012), with numerous and sometimes overlapping layers in-between.

Hardening migration controls, however, targeting chiefly those who are deemed ‘unwanted’, underscore additional binary categories which relate little to developmental trajectories but rather are legal, political and rhetorical constructs. While migration is often praised for its developmental potential and alleged contribution to smoothing global inequalities, it is increasingly pointed as a threat to international security and national integrity (Raghuram 2009). Hence the growing salience of the legal–illegal migration binary: as globalisation forces produce ‘an ever-increasing set of restrictions to the very same human mobility they trigger’ (Bommes and Sciortino 2011: 214), irregular migration emerged as ‘the fastest rising single form of migration’ at the turn of millennium (Papademetriou 2005). The

¹ This competition is related to a recognition of the role of knowledge and innovation in development – and yet by a diverse range of approaches, from endogenous growth theory (e.g. Romer 1994) to the human capabilities perspective (e.g. Sen 2012) – and to the rise of the ‘knowledge economy’ and a concomitantly increased demand for highly specialised skills. Expanding and upgrading their knowledge-base and human capital resources becomes a development strategy for countries, cities or regions, either through training of the labour force, or by attracting well-educated and ‘creative’ people from elsewhere (OECD 2012).

proliferation of concerns over irregular migration, which seem to grow faster than the phenomenon itself (Dauvergne 2004: 599), and their material consequences, blur further the distinction between different categories concerning the original causes of movement, the implied motives and aspirations of moving populations, the itineraries, forms and conditions of their journeys, as well as their resulting pathways to enter their desired destinations. The boundaries between ‘forced’ versus ‘voluntary’ migrants, and hence those ‘deserving’ the right to entry, such as refugees and those with ‘genuine’ asylum claims, and the ‘undeserving’ ones, all too often ‘labour’ or ‘economic’ migrants, are not clear-cut in practice, as ‘mixed migration’ features in all stages of the migration process and interweaves with the agendas of (western) destination states (Black 2003; van Hear et al. 2009; Yarris and Castañeda 2015).

The very same agendas produce multiple exclusionary spatialities and new migrant categories through the sealing and militarisation of borders and the externalisation of controls. To mention but one, the highly politicised concept of ‘transit migration’ has serious implications not only for migrant themselves but also for specific countries and their place and role within shifting regimes of migration control (Tsianos and Karakayali 2010; Duvell 2012; Hess 2012). Global (geo)political currents and (supra)state security infrastructures, together with national policies, politics and political interests in destination countries make up ‘a missing element in migration theories’ (Massey 2005), a by-product of the increasing politicisation of migration (Castles and Miller 2009: 12), which extends well beyond any account of migration transitions.

Overall, dominant market and state logics have legitimatised mobilities of the highly skilled as economically efficient and thus desirable, while problematising labour migrants and asylum seekers as threats for labour markets, welfare states and the security and social cohesion of national communities. Moreover, the analytical separation between highly skilled as well as lifestyle migrants and the rest is often unreflexively adopted by scholars in migration studies who have not yet developed a common analytical framework within which to approach the (international) mobilities of both less privileged people and those of the transnational mobile elites together (but see Glick Schiller 2010; Skeldon 2012).

This bifurcated analytical approach entails that limited research has focused on what seems to be a significant characteristic of the new global migratory landscape: the fact that several countries are experiencing both emigration and immigration flows as well as various other forms and directions of mobility on a considerable scale. Not only is this the case in the European ‘transit’ periphery (Baldwin-Edwards 2006; Duvell 2012; İçduygu and Yüksek 2012) or the new EU member states of Central and Eastern Europe (Okolski 2012); also ‘core’ EU countries and major migrant destinations, such as Britain, the Netherlands, France and Germany experience large annual outflow of nationals, whether of native or migrant background, and the return or onward migration of non-nationals – population moves that attract limited scholarly attention, leaving the picture of West European countries as (solely) immigrant destination countries unchallenged.

This lack of attention is partly result of methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). Given that much of the literature remains preoccupied with migrations that are framed as problems in national public and political discourses, outmigration flows from countries in ‘the West’ receive limited attention, except when they concern the highly skilled and they reach a critical mass, triggering discussions about their potential negative outcomes for the competitiveness of national economies. Even less attention is paid to internal migrations and how these fit in the contemporary migratory landscape; not only does their volume far exceed that of international movement, but also the distinction between internal

and international mobility is also being blurred as migrants' journeys become increasingly multiple, complex and fragmented (King and Skeldon 2010; King and Conti 2013).

In the remainder of the paper, we examine the temporal and spatial coexistence of a plurality of 'different types' of mobilities, while restricting our attention to one country, Greece. We focus particularly on the changes that have taken place in the migratory landscape of that country over the past few years in the context of two 'crises', the post-2008 financial crisis and the 'refugee crisis' of 2015-16.

Greece: from emigration to immigration

Since its formation as a modern nation state in the first half of the 19th century, Greece has experienced a variety of population movements, inward, outward or internal, forced or voluntary. In the post-war decades, in particular, alongside large-scale urbanisation waves, it emerged as a net exporter of labour (Fakiolas and King 1996). By the mid-1970s, net migration rates had turned positive, but inflows were then mostly attributed to the return of former Greek emigrants, especially from European destinations, primarily the Federal Republic of Germany. It is around the same period when the recruitment of foreign labour was first registered, while the country also becomes a space of passage for migrants heading to 'traditional' destinations. Since the 1980s, Greece also began to attract (limited numbers of) refugees as well as international students, and by the early 1990s, it became a de facto destination for international migrants. This transition, and its underlying factors, coincided with similar changes in other Southern European countries (King 1998; 2000). Domestic economic development, demographics and socio-cultural change played a significant role in ways that (to a lesser or greater extent) may confirm certain stages in Zelinsky's hypothesis of the mobility transition (1971). Yet Southern Europe's international migration 'turnaround' entailed a broader shift in the region's position and role within the international division of labour, and involved a series of other factors, including internal and international (geo)political developments as well as the location and geography of Mediterranean European countries (King and Rybaczuk 1993; King et al. 1997; King 1998; 2000).

Greece's transition to immigration was originally closely linked to the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the demise of 'actually existing socialism' in Eastern Europe. The bulk of immigration flows in the 1990s concerned two major waves: on the one hand, labour immigrants from neighbouring Balkan countries, chiefly from Albania, entering or staying irregularly, many on a seasonal basis; on the other, migrants of ethnic Greek origin, primarily from former Soviet republics, who were encouraged to settle in the country for good. Despite its initial hesitation and unpreparedness, the Greek state regarded the latter as permanent 'repatriates', offering them a pathway to integration eventually leading to citizenship, but treated the former as temporary 'guestworkers'; ethnic Greek Albanians were found somewhere in the middle, subjected to a legal status that gave them residence rights but not citizenship. The complex and fragmented policy framework that has developed since the early 1990s along these lines was thus influenced by national identity considerations that privileged some categories of migrants over others (Pratsinakis 2014).

Yet, at the same time, it facilitated the absorption of migrant labour in the informal economy, by leaving the majority of immigrants in a limbo without any opportunity to regularise their status until 1998, when the first large-scale regularisation programme was enacted (Hatziprokopiou 2006). Immigrant labour largely met a domestic demand for cheap and flexible, low-skilled work, mostly deriving from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and private households, and covered gaps and shortages in low-skilled labour-intensive activities in construction, tourism, agriculture, cleaning and caretaking (Hatziprokopiou 2006). In fact, for SMEs in particular, labour demands were met either

domestically, by employing immigrants, or by relocating in neighbouring Balkan countries, where the majority of migrants originated, establishing new cross-border economic and social links (Labrianidis et al. 2004).

Between 1995 and 2007 the Greek economy enjoyed higher growth rates than the EU average (Pelagidis 2010), and the economic optimism and prosperity associated, for instance, with the single currency and the 2004 Olympic Games largely conditioned immigrants' socio-economic integration. Large-scale public works and large firms, including development and infrastructure projects executed in the context of the Olympics, came to employ migrant labour alongside small businesses and households. While the main sectors of employment remained the same, many longer-settled immigrants upgraded their position in terms of remuneration, social security, conditions and skills, as the more demanding, precarious, lesser skilled and poorly paid jobs were reserved for the newcomers. At the same time, with immigrants' settlement and the formation of ethnic migrant communities, growing numbers started moving to self-employment and various forms of entrepreneurship, particularly common among certain migrant groups and especially in large cities (Labrianidis and Hatziprokopiou 2010). While immigration from Albania remained dominant, even at a limited pace, and seasonal/circular movements from neighbouring countries persisted, migratory flows diversified and increasingly involved largely undocumented arrivals originating from Asian and (to a lesser extent) African countries, including refugees, many of whom used Greece as a necessary stopover (Papadopoulou 2004; Cabot 2014). At the same time, the eastwards enlargement of the EU in 2004 and 2007 decisively affected mobility patterns and the status of citizens of new member states residing in Greece. Meanwhile, those able to prove their Greek roots took the path of naturalisation: most of those from the former Soviet Union had acquired Greek citizenship already by the early 2000s, while access to nationality for ethnic-Greek Albanians opened up towards the end of the decade.

Generally speaking, the policy framework for third-country nationals (TCNs) initially appeared to move towards rationalisation and compliance with EU practices, at least on paper: successive Greek governments voted two immigration bills, in 2000 and 2005, each followed by an extensive regularisation programme, and took several additional measures including provisions addressing the issue of integration. Notwithstanding delays, inefficiency and bureaucracy in the Greek administration, many settled immigrants managed to move towards legal status and improve their situation (Hatziprokopiou 2006). Nevertheless, few had access to long-term residence, while no provisions were taken for migrant children born and/or raised in Greece, many of whom were by then reaching adulthood. Even more, no subsequent regularisation measures were taken at the very period when irregular border crossings through Turkey started spiralling. Thus emerged a new socio-economic and socio-ethnic hierarchy (Kandylis et al. 2012), especially in major urban centres, with a complex stratification of legal statuses, social circumstances and labour market positions for different categories of migrants.

Greece in crisis: from destination to transit space?

Official census data provide an indication of changes that occurred during the 2000s, reflecting shifts in the composition of immigration flows. As Table 1 illustrates, the overall recorded 'foreign' population rose by nearly 20% between 2001 and 2011, and that of certain groups has grown much faster. For instance, the numbers of Bulgarians and Romanians more than doubled, reflecting the mobility possibilities opened up by the 2007 EU enlargement (Hatziprokopiou and Markova 2015). The numbers of South Asians have grown even more, as Greece turned into an important destination for migrants from these countries (Broersma and Lazarescu 2009). The spectacular increase in the numbers of Afghans owes much to the proliferation of asylum-related movements and transit migration (Dimitriadi 2017). These two latter types of flows have been largely undocumented, to some extent reflecting elements of

continuity in the ‘Southern European immigration model’, whereby irregular migration feeds relatively large informal sectors, partly characterised by high seasonality of key economic activities, with increased demand for flexible and cheap labour (Hatziprokopiou 2006; King and DeBono 2013).

Table 1. Total population and foreign nationals (selected nationalities) in Greece, 2001-2011

Country of citizenship	2001		2011		2001-2011 % change
	N	%	N	%	
Total population	10,934,097		10,815,197		-1.1
Greek nationals	10,218,775		9,903,268		-2.6
Foreign nationals	762,191	7.0	911,929	8.4	19.1
Albanians	438,036	57.5	480,824	52.7	9.8

Top 5 nationalities whose population in 2011 was at least double than in 2001

Bulgaria	35,104	4.61	75,915	8.32	116.3
Romania	21,994	2.89	46,523	5.10	111.5
Pakistan	11,130	1.46	34,177	3.75	207.1
Bangladesh	4,854	0.64	11,076	1.21	128.2
Afghanistan	371	0.05	6,911	0.76	1762.8

Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority, Census 2001, 2011: www.statistics.gr

Yet the global economic downturn and Greece’s escalating debt crisis since 2008 have severely undermined the employment prospects of newcomers, at the same time when increasing financial strain and social difficulties are facing established migrants and natives alike. In the context of a contraction in GDP of more than a quarter between 2008 and 2014, the crisis in Greece severely undermined the employment prospects of the entire workforce and also brought about steep decreases in earnings, welfare provision and allowances. As shown in Figure 1, the unemployment rate of foreign nationals since 2009 exceeds the already high and rising total unemployment and the gap has grown and persists.

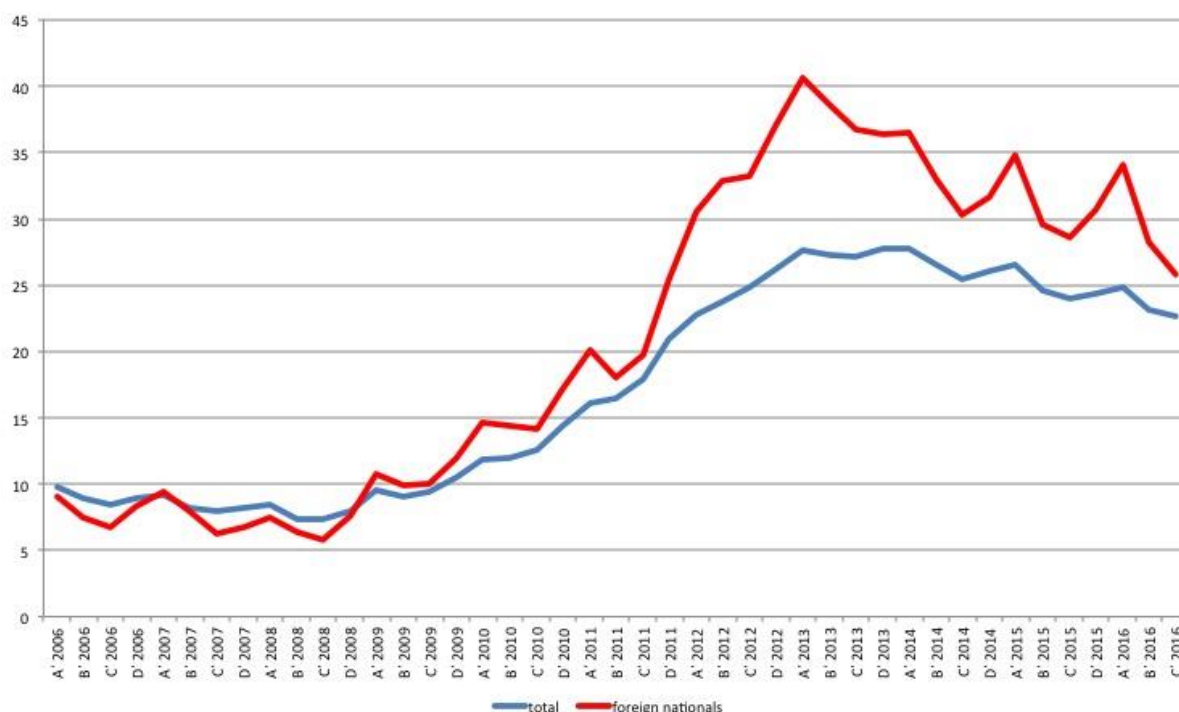


Figure 1. Unemployment rate, total and foreign nationals, 2006-2016

Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority, Labour Force Surveys, time series: <http://www.statistics.gr/en/statistics/-/publication/SJO01/>

The post-2008 crisis and recession as well as the shifting character and direction of migratory flows mark the transition to a new phase in Greece's migratory experience, which is still unfolding. Figure 2 compares the evolution of asylum applications since 2005 to the number of apprehensions for irregular entry or residence by the Greek police and coastguard.² The latter (in the bar chart) also account for the major nationalities of migrants arrested, thus confirming the trend earlier described. Clearly, the relative weight of irregular movements by Albanian migrants until ten years ago gradually declines – indicative of both the move of most Albanians towards regular status and the possibility for their visa-free travel in the EU as of 2011. Yet, during that period, illegal border crossings especially through the Greek-Turkish border gain momentum, as illustrated in both the number of apprehensions and that of asylum applications that somehow follow in parallel. The drop in the latter during the years 2007-14 may to some extent reflect the shortcomings of Greece's immigration and asylum policy, with practically closed doors for newcomers and with extremely low asylum approval rates; the decline of the newcomers during 2010-14, may be partly a combined result of the economic downturn in Greece (and other European destinations) and of increased enforcement and controls, in which Greek authorities have started being supported by EU structures (e.g. FRONTEX). In retrospective, these developments could now be seen as a prelude to the unfolding migration disaster that came to be called the 'refugee crisis' of 2015-16.

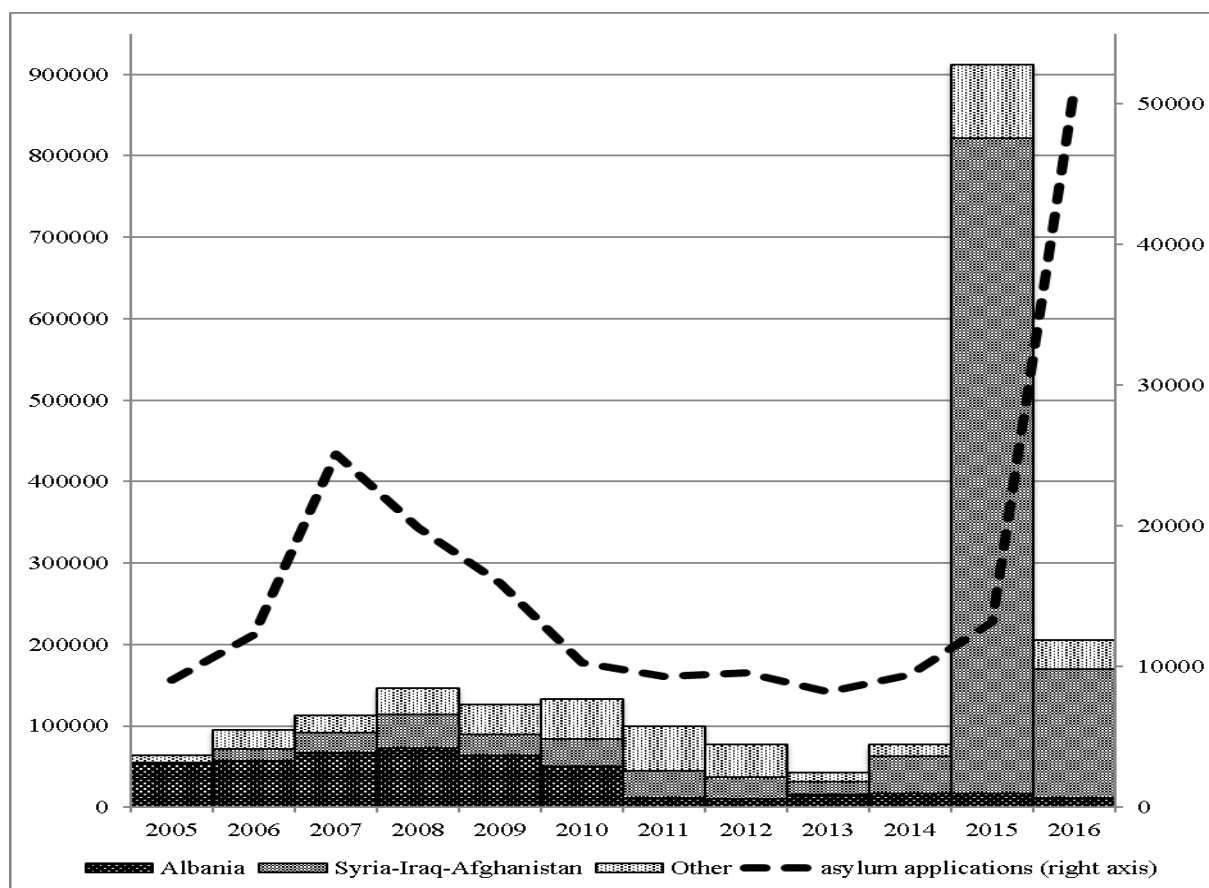


Figure 2. Number of apprehensions of irregular migrants and asylum applications, 2005-2016

Source: Hellenic Police website (www.astonomia.gr, statistics section, webpages in greek only). Data on asylum applications since June 2013 come from the new Asylum Service (http://asylo.gov.gr/en/?page_id=110); 2005 apprehensions data are adapted from Maroukis (2008: 60, table 13).

² Data on apprehensions should be treated with caution since they count arrests rather than people; hence the same person may have been arrested at least twice e.g. for irregular entry (e.g. in Evros or Lesvos) and for undocumented stay (e.g. in Athens).

These broader reshufflings of migration channels and routes to and through Greece relate to both Greece's geographic location at the south-eastern corner of the EU and the Union's expanding apparatus of migration and border controls. Coupled with measures deterring entry through other European countries, the bulk of undocumented immigration to Europe has been largely diverted through the Greek borders, and, towards the end of the past decade, the country found itself at the epicentre of the emerging European border regime (Tsianos and Karakayali 2010). In 2010, an estimated 90% of all apprehensions for unauthorised entry into the EU took place in Greece, compared to 50% in 2008 (Kasimis 2012). Soon the quasi 'laissez-faire' approach of pre-crisis governments, at least with respect to asylum and new immigration, was succeeded in the context of the crisis by a tough approach and an overall xenophobic agenda, stated or unspoken, in the years of the crisis. This was marked by increased enforcement and controls at various levels, such as the fencing of the Evros land crossing on the north-east Greek-Turkish border (e.g. Cavounidis 2013), the infamous police operation Xenios Zeus targeting migrants primarily in Athens (e.g. Dalakoglou 2013), or an excessive resort to detention as a means to deter further inflows (Kotsioni 2016). These developments have in practice turned Greece into a 'storage-house' for immigration that is unwanted by the countries of the north, giving way to a creeping 'humanitarian crisis' affecting people trapped in Greece without documents and hence without rights, particularly evident in Athens (Koutrolidou 2015) and (originally) in western port cities (Lafazani 2013) where most newcomers concentrated.

Alongside the country's deepening economic woes, and their social implications, including political instability and the rise of racist violence, Greece has been lately receiving even larger numbers of arrivals from outside the EU. As also depicted in Figure 2, migration has surged since Spring 2015, due in large measure to the unfolding tragedy in Syria and those displaced in neighbouring countries, especially Turkey: within 2015 alone, more than 900,000 people were apprehended for alleged irregular entry, more than half originating from Syria, the vast majority (95%) crossing the eastern Aegean in an extremely perilous journey that has already cost many lives.³ Their prospects of reaching a safe haven in a northern EU country (mainly Germany, but also Austria, Sweden, and elsewhere) opened up a new migratory route via Greece's northern border and through the Balkans. Political developments in the last year or so have brought to the fore the limits of the common EU asylum system (Den Heijer et al. 2016; Afouxenidis et al. 2017), also involving unilateral decisions of both non-EU (e.g. the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia) and EU (e.g. Austria, Croatia, Hungary) countries to close their borders, the latter suspending Schengen provisions, at least temporarily. Following also the EU-Turkey statement of March 2016, and the current (centre-left majority) Greek government's Law 4375 (3 April 2016), many migrants and refugees are now blocked in Greece and remain in a limbo situation.

The majority are sheltered in what the government calls 'open temporary hospitality structures' (as well as 'reception and identification structures'), or 'hot spots' in EU jargon; in essence, these are camps managed by the state and operated by UNHCR and a range of international and domestic NGOs. Currently there are 44 such sites in 41 mainland locations, and another nine sites in seven eastern Aegean islands. Progress in arranging for minimum accommodation standards has been extremely slow, conditions are often appalling and many people, including families with children, remained still in tents amidst a severe winter with very low temperatures and snow. As of mid-February 2017, the government estimated just

³ See for instance the UNHCR's Mediterranean Refugees/Migrant response website: <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/country.php?id=83>. The IOM reports on over 800 border crossing fatalities in the Eastern Mediterranean, 21% of all deaths in the entire Mediterranean (press release 1.5.2016): <http://www.iom.int/news/iom-counts-3771-migrant-fatalities-mediterranean-2015>.

over 47,122 people hosted in official and informal sites, other state-run facilities, NGOs' accommodation, or being self-settled: of them 28% are blocked on the islands, whereby camps have an overall capacity of places for just the two thirds; another 15,418 stay in private flats rented out through the UNHCR accommodation scheme (8.3% in the islands).⁴ Lastly, Figure 2 shows a steep increase in the number of asylum applications since 2015, with more and more applications coming through monthly in 2016, reaching a historical 'record' of nearly 51,100.⁵ It is perhaps too early to assess whether this could be indicative of changes in the migratory plans of individuals and families who may now decide to set roots in Greece, or a strategy of temporary settlement before acquiring the documents that may allow them to move on. While at the outset of the crisis Greece was a transit country in refugees' attempt to reach their desired destinations in Western and Northern Europe, the EU's sealed borders policy reinforced the country's role as an internal borderland of migration control within EU territory.

Emigration reloaded: a new turnaround?

Despite growing immigration, the 2011 Census depicted that Greece's overall population is on the decline (Table 1); considering that the past decade was also characterised by natural population growth, this is exclusively due to growing outflows. Other sources confirm the case in point: EUROSTAT estimations revealed that Greece had been among the few EU countries that experienced annual population declines during 2010-12, at a time when the total population of the Union has grown, and attribute this decline to net (out)migration (European Commission 2013: 6-7). This seems quite a change within a very short timespan, as Greeks notably featured among the Europeans least disposed towards long-distance mobility, according to recent Eurobarometer surveys (European Commission 2006; 2010). The combined effects of recession, extreme austerity, and a concomitant generalised mistrust of institutions and the political system drastically transformed mobility intentions and forced many to actually take that step. As illustrated in Figure 3, in the six-year period from 2010 to 2015, more than 610,000 people were estimated to have left Greece, accounting for approximately 6% of the total population.

In attempting to place Greek emigration in its temporal context, we see both continuation and breaks from earlier mobility patterns. While since the mid-1970s outmigration has been relatively limited, it was more frequent among specific groups: emigrants of the post-war waves and their offspring moving between Greece and European destinations (Fakiolas and King 1996); Muslims from the minority of Thrace spending spells of employment in Turkey or Germany (Pratsinakis 2002); as well as increased number of students going abroad, at least until the early 2000s (Karamesini 2010). Above all, there has been a continuous outflow of professionals that started becoming prominent in the 1990s, increasingly to European destinations (Labrianidis 2011). Labour market restructuring led to the deterioration of employment opportunities for those born from the 1970s onwards, and to ongoing relatively high unemployment, underemployment and employment precariousness in the 2000s (Karamesini 2010).

⁴ According to the UNHCR's 'Sites in Greece' online information and mapping tool: <http://rrse-smi.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=d5f377f7f6f2418b8ebadaae638df2e1>.

⁵ The recently established (June 2013) Asylum Service has been under pressure to process large numbers of cases, while facing severe staff shortages and bureaucratic problems, especially until summer 2016: according to its website, some 28,000 asylum applications were still pending by the end of the year. Relocations to other member states have also progressed slowly: just over half of about 13,000 requests have been materialised by the end of 2016, and only one out of four of nearly 4,900 requesting transfer under Dublin III procedures.

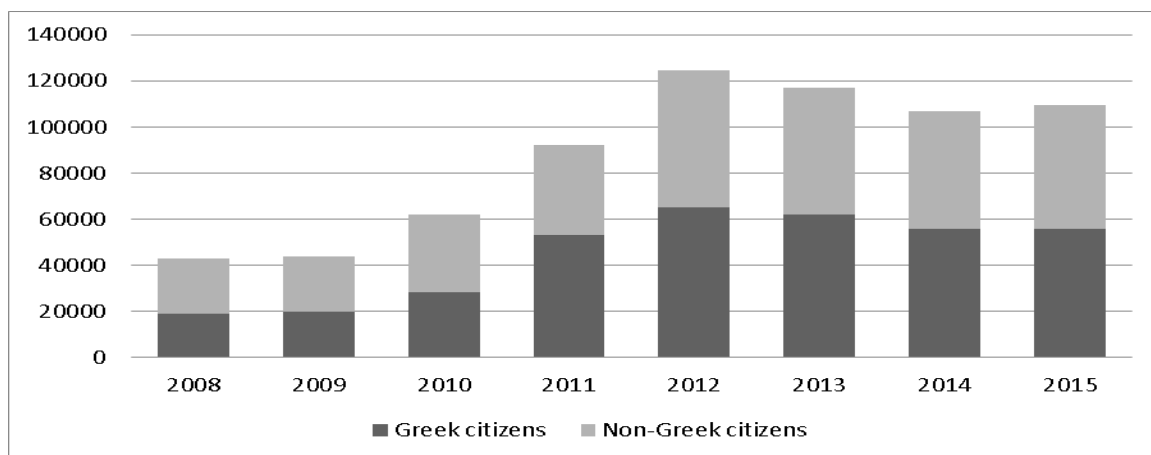


Figure 3. Estimated annual emigration, 2006-15

Source: Eurostat, emigration statistics: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-datasets/-/MIGR_EMI1CTZ; * Hellenic Statistical Authority, emigration estimations: <http://www.statistics.gr/en/statistics/-/publication/SPO15/>

This was not mainly due to young Greeks ‘over-education’, as conventionally assumed.⁶ While the numbers of graduates have increased substantially in past decades, they are not among the highest in Europe or in the ‘developed’ world. In fact, this growth was not matched by a corresponding increase in demand for high-skilled human capital especially by private businesses. Indicatively, during 2008-15, Greece had one of the lowest rates of employment in high-technology sectors in the EU, while Research and Development expenditure in Greece is much lower than the EU-28 average – and the comparison is even more unfavourable when it comes to the contribution of the private sector. Thus the explanation for the unfavourable conditions for graduates in Greece in past decades lies not in the supply side of a supposedly excessively skilled workforce, but rather in the demand side of a labour market failing to absorb these segments of the workforce (Labrianidis 2011; 2014).

Greek firms, mostly due to their small size and several other related weaknesses, have been mainly focused on the production of low-cost products and services, to an extent capitalising on the exploitation of the abundant immigrant labour, as earlier mentioned, and thus avoiding any attempts at upgrading, including the infusion of technology and innovation. These characteristics have hindered the utilisation of a highly educated labour force that could act as an intermediary between universities/research centres and the private sector. Combined with the fact that the Greek Research and Development system is not able to attract and retain the growing number of qualified scientists, this has led a significant share of these graduates to migrate abroad, in order to seek employment with better prospects elsewhere (Labrianidis 2011; 2014). Moreover, the extent of informal economic arrangements, as well as long-standing pathologies such as nepotism and clientelism, have affected the relative position of graduates in the Greek labour market. On the other hand, greater opportunities for employment in highly skilled positions as well as higher average salaries of graduates in specific destination countries, combined with ease and relatively low cost of movement especially in the EU, have also attracted Greek professionals abroad. As a result, even before the outbreak of the crisis, a considerable number of highly skilled young Greeks had been

⁶ With the exception of certain disciplines, such as medicine and law, in which a growing demand during past years indeed resulted in saturated job market prospects.

emigrating for better career prospects, better chances of finding a job related to their specialisation, a satisfactory income and increased opportunities for further training.

Yet, the outmigration of graduates intensified significantly as job opportunities shrank in the shadow of the crisis and once public sector employment was no longer an option as a result of cuts and restrictions in new recruitments (Labrianidis and Pratsinakis 2016). A comparative presentation of unemployment rates in Greece and the EU over the past ten years provides a graphic depiction of Greece's particularity as regards the position of the highly skilled in the labour market and explains the sharp increase in emigration among these workers in the period of the crisis. As seen in Figure 4, in the years directly preceding the onset of the global financial crisis and up to 2010, unemployment rates among the poorly educated (0-2 ISCED) were significantly lower in Greece than in the EU-28 on average. In fact, from 2006 to 2008 they were on a par with those of graduates (5-8 ISCED), indicating that education did not provide significant advantages in terms of access to the labour market in Greece – although of course to different sectors of the labour market. This changed with the crisis, which had a direct and much more acute impact on the less privileged. In Greece, as elsewhere in Europe, unemployment rates for lesser-educated people became higher than for those with higher education. Yet, while in most European countries the unemployment rates of more highly educated people increased only marginally, if at all, in Greece they skyrocketed, being almost four times higher those of the EU-28 mean, making the push-pull migration factors for Greeks with higher education particularly strong.

Thus, the emigration of the highly educated in the post-2010 period should be understood as a continuation of an earlier ongoing and intensifying phenomenon, as well as a part, albeit a very significant one, of the new crisis-driven emigration. According to estimations based on a recent survey by Labrianidis and Pratsinakis (2016), approximately 190,000 graduates live outside Greece, of whom more than the half emigrated after 2010.⁷ Two out of three of the post-2010 emigrants are university graduates and one fourth of the total outflow represents people with postgraduate degrees or who are graduates of medical or engineering schools. The same survey also points to the diversity of new migrants' destinations; yet, as other studies (e.g. Triandafyllidou and Gropas 2014) show, the majority head to the EU, with two countries alone receiving the bulk of the flows. About 173,700 Greek citizens appear to have entered Germany during 2010-2015, with the numbers in 2015 being 137% higher than in 2010; and nearly 48,000 moved to the UK for work, with an increase by 170% over the same period.⁸

The magnitude of the outflow has attracted considerable media attention and has triggered a public debate on brain drain, including lamenting the loss of Greece's young educated 'bloodstream' (Pratsinakis et al. 2017). Yet the discussion is often characterised by two misconceptions. First, the emigration of the highly skilled is presented as a new phenomenon resulting from the crisis, while its underlying structural causes are not addressed. Second, the crisis-driven emigration is presented as exclusively pertaining to the young and the educated, while the emigration of older people, those with less qualifications, immigrants

⁷ The survey was conducted in the context of the project 'Outward Migration from Greece during the Crisis', funded by a National Bank of Greece research grant (2014 Call) administered by the Hellenic Observatory at the LSE. It was compiled during March-April 2015 by telephone interviewing. A structured questionnaire was addressed to a total of 1,237 households comprising 3,970 people and generated information for 248 emigrants.

⁸ Data respectively derive from two online databases: that of the German Federal Statistical Service (<https://www-genesis.destatis.de/genesis/online>), to our knowledge referring to new Municipal registrations (thus they may be somehow exaggerated as they may capture internal relocations of earlier Greek migrants, as well as students); and that of the British Department for Work and Pensions (<https://sw.stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/login.xhtml>), referring to new National Insurance registrations (and thus may fall short of capturing dependent family members).

or people from minority groups is often neglected. True, the crisis has amplified push factors that already existed in Greece for the highly skilled, intensifying their emigration patterns. But it has also impacted on the mobility aspirations and practices of people of other educational levels and socio-economic backgrounds.

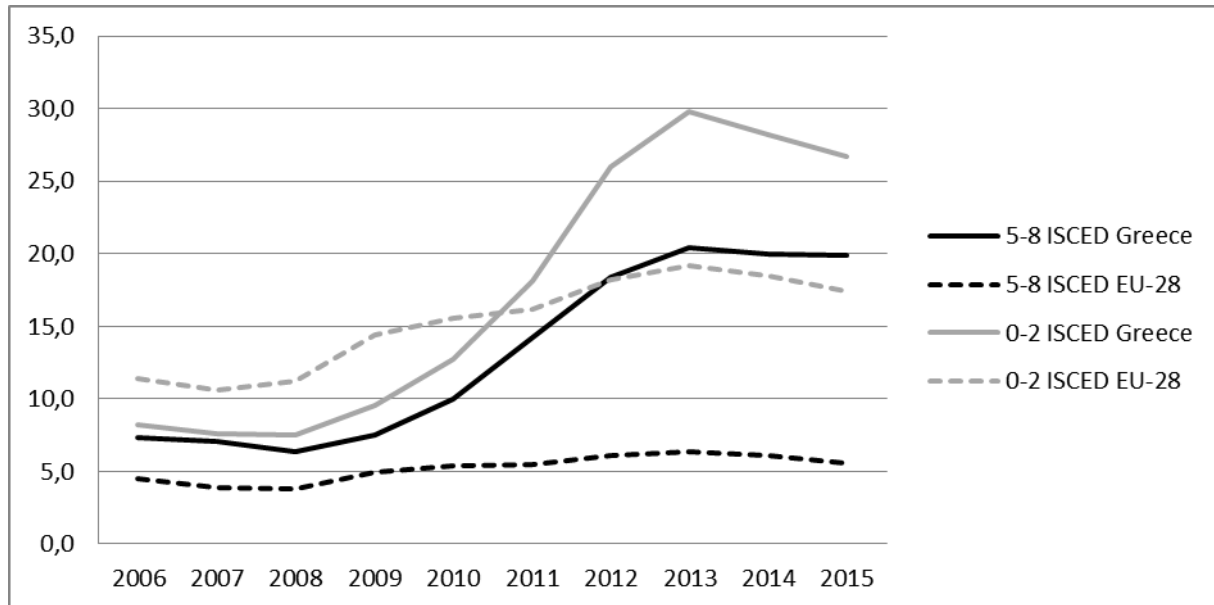


Figure 4. Unemployment levels in Greece by educational attainment

Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Surveys:

http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=lfsa_urgaed&lang=en.

Even though they form a minority among recent emigrants, the crisis seems once again to be pushing people of lower educational and income backgrounds out of the country, while drastic salary cuts and rising unemployment in the past years are also driving significant numbers of people to take the route of emigration at a late phase in their life-course. According to findings from Labrianidis and Pratsinakis' survey (2016), people from 'low to very low' income households now constitute 28% of the post-2010 emigration outflow, while before the crisis this group used to be the least prone to emigrate. Lastly, a significant number of post-2010 emigrants left Greece after their forties; the mean age of people who emigrated after 2010 is 30.5 years old, two years older than those who left during the 2000s (28.3) and six years older than people who migrated during the 1990s (24.3). Given other survey findings on emigration intentions (Chiotis 2010; Newpost 2014), we may assume that the decision to emigrate for older people, as well as for those coming from lower educational backgrounds and lower income families, may be framed more as a matter of need than a (career) choice. However, this seems to be becoming a rather generalised condition in the current emigration wave concerning a significant segment of the highly educated emigrants, too.

At the same time, however, other groups of emigrants are entirely neglected in both public discourses and academic research. For example, Pratsinakis et al. (2017) report on (Greek) minority Muslims in the Netherlands following earlier migration patterns, who are faced with highly precarious conditions. Moreover, the 2011 Census results made evident significant declines in the numbers of foreign residents from 'developed' countries since 2001: e.g. the number of US nationals dropped by two-thirds and that of Australians by more

than 75%. To the extent that these figures reveal actual trends of outmigration,⁹ this development could relate to an outflow of foreign employees following their companies shutting down or relocating in the context of the market downturn, or to the re-migration of foreign-born people of Greek roots who had recently ‘returned’ to Greece (e.g. on the latter see King and Christou 2014). After all, the data presented in Figure 1 show that, for the years available (2008-14) almost half of the (estimated) outflow comprises of foreign nationals. And in terms of absolute numbers, the majority of foreign nationals who returned to their countries of origin, or were forced to emigrate to a different country, are the less privileged migrants, on whom the crisis has had the most acute impact. For nationals of new EU member states in particular, their countries’ recent accession opens up a range of new mobility patterns that may provide alternatives as circumstances in Greece deteriorate (e.g. Hatziprokopiou and Markova 2014, on Bulgarians in Greece considering to return). Albanians, too, severely affected by rising unemployment, may take advantage of proximity and the recent visa-free travel regulations to move back to Albania for some time before migrating to a new destination, or to engage in circular movements linked to seasonal work in Greece; return migration does take place but seems to be a rather ambivalent project and not necessarily a definitive one, especially for the second generation (Gemi 2013; Michail 2013; Kapetanaki 2015).¹⁰ At the same time, leaving Greece is also an option, necessity or fate’ for migrants from more distant lands, since deportations and ‘voluntary returns’ of undocumented migrants, predominantly from Pakistan and Afghanistan, have intensified in the last few years (Dimitriadi 2013: 19, 25; Yousef 2013: 21-22).

The crisis thus signals a turnaround of Greece’s migration transition. Emigration flows in the post-2009 period appear to be comparable in size with those of the much earlier post-war decades. There are however significant differences in their characteristics, with the current emigration wave taking place simultaneously with ongoing immigration to or through the country, and being much more diverse than in the past, in terms of the ethnic background of emigrants, their social class, qualifications, demographic features and destinations abroad.

Enter counter-urbanisation: shifting patterns of internal migration?

Besides international migration, the crisis also appears to have influenced patterns of internal mobility. Although the centralised geography of the Greek population, productive and employment structures still holds, affecting continuous internal movements towards Athens and other major urban centres, a new trend of counter-urbanisation seems to be gaining pace in the context of the crisis. Even though outside of the paper’s main focus, this needs to be noted here, drawing on a number of recent studies, in an attempt to integrate internal and international migration in the way proposed by King and Skeldon (2010).

Once again, placing internal mobility in a historical continuum is necessary before discussing contemporary trends. Urbanisation in Greece was only loosely linked to industrialisation (generally the case in the ‘developed’ world), but has been rather determined by major historical conjunctures (Leontidou 1990). The arrival of nearly 1.5 million refugees from Asia Minor in the 1920s, who settled in their majority in the main urban centres, heavily impacted urban growth and laid the foundations of the post-war urban structure. The civil conflict that followed the Second World War not only was in itself cause of vast population movements, but also left a devastated countryside, resulting in a stagnant rural economy unable to sustain the rural population in the early post-war decades. The period between 1951-

⁹ Citizenship acquisitions could have been another possibility for such declines, but this is not confirmed e.g. in available EUROSTAT data for the nationalities in question.

¹⁰ According to the Albanian Institute of Statistics, the average annual number of returnees from Greece in the period 2009-2011 is more than three times higher than that of the period 2001-2008 (Gemi 2013: 10, Table 1).

1971 was one of rural exodus, triggered by poor livelihoods and limited opportunities in the countryside rather than by ‘pull factors’ in the cities, and was closely related to emigration abroad often as a stepwise process (Kotzamanis and Michou 2010). During this time, Greece’s urban population almost doubled and by the end of the 1970s nearly one out of three Greeks lived in Greater Athens. Rural-urban migration continued mostly towards medium-sized and smaller cities and towns, as population growth rates in Athens and Thessaloniki have been slowing down since the 1970s.

In the 1980s, there are already statistically evident signs of the declining volume of internal migration, alongside a trend towards a reversal of direction, from rural-urban to urban-rural mobility (Kyriazi-Alisson 1998), owing partly to returning internal and international migrants (Kotzamanis and Michou 2010). It is around this period when suburbanisation emerged as the main feature of internal movements, which later took the form of urban sprawl, especially in the case of Greater Athens spreading to the periphery of Attica region. Yet the role of Athens and Thessaloniki as major recipients of internal migration flows has been declining. Apart from special occupational categories (military professionals, public servants, students), most rural-urban migrants tended to be women, young people (20-34) or unemployed (Kyriazi-Alisson 1998), while the majority of urban-rural movers appeared to be pensioners leaving the large urban centres for the countryside (Gavalas and Kostopoulou 2011). In the meantime, rural communities and economies – especially semi-mountainous and coastal – were revitalised in the context of resources coming from the EU (subsidies) and, particularly since the 1990s, through the settlement and work of substantial numbers of immigrants from abroad (Kasimis and Papadopoulos 2005; Kasimis et al 2010).

Even if limited, some migration of urban residents to rural areas has been observed already since the 1990s, mostly in places of natural beauty with employment opportunities in tourism, seeking the quality of life they missed in the city or driven by ideological factors and an idealisation of rural life (Labrianidis and Bella 2004). This trend became statistically evident in the 2000s: in analysing internal migration data from the 2011 Census, Anastasiou and Duquenne (2015) documented an observable exodus from the two main urban centres towards other regions, particularly islands, although most such movements appeared to be short distance. It was, however, only in the context of the crisis that a public discourse on the so-called ‘return-to-the-rural’ or ‘back-to-the-land’ movement has emerged in parallel to that on ‘brain drain’; whereby the former is portrayed positively, e.g. praising rural resilience and viewing the countryside as a refuge from urban-focused difficulties (Anthopoulou and Petrou 2015; Remoundou et al. 2016), in contrast to the negative connotations of the latter. A study commissioned by the Greek Government (Ministry of Rural Development and Food 2012) involving residents in Athens and Thessaloniki revealed that almost seven out of ten respondents have thought of moving to rural areas in Greece, more than half of whom are between 25 and 39 years old and almost 20% had already started organising their relocation.

Drawing on in-depth interviews with urban-to-rural migrants, Gkartzios (2013) underlines the emergence of a ‘crisis counterurbanisation’ in Greece triggered largely by unemployment at the urban origin, rather than pro-rural motivations and idyllic constructions of rurality. Migrants’ stories also highlight the importance of the extended family in counter-urban movements, in terms of both destinations (usually the place of the family’s origin, sometimes entailing ownership of property or land) and the multiple support offered once there. Subsequent studies, also building on qualitative and ethnographic methods, confirm Gkartzios’ findings on an emerging trend of crisis-led counter-urban movements, mostly of young or unemployed urban residents, who often see this option as alternative to emigration, yet do not necessarily move towards agricultural occupations (Anthopoulou and Petrou 2015; Daudon and Vergos 2015). While their results also point to the importance of origin, family

networks and property ownership, they are cautious in picturing this trend as a viable solution for either internal migrants or rural localities, underlining its complex and ambivalent character and the highlighting integration difficulties, and long-standing problems of both the agricultural sector and rural communities (e.g. low productivity, subsidy dependence, declining service provision, lack of infrastructure). Although there seems to be quite a potential for this trend to become more prominent (Remoundou et al. 2016), further research is necessary to enquire into the characteristics of this migration as well as to into how different mobility alternatives are considered and pursued at times of crisis.

Concluding remarks

In this paper, we started out by sketching the new, diverse and ever-complex migratory landscape which is in the process of taking shape in Greece and is largely determined by a multifaceted crisis. From the country's debt crisis that escalated after the 2008 global financial crisis, whose neoliberal management involving extreme austerity has led to an ongoing recession with severe social and political consequences, attention then shifted to the so-called 'refugee crisis' that dramatically unfolded in Europe's Southern borders during the years 2015-16. Immigration has, in the past three decades or so, monopolised public attention, media discourses, state policies and academic research – and rightly so; yet a shift appears to be underway as emigration is back on the agenda. Even if a good share concerns immigrants' return or outward movements, there is growing evidence that shrinking opportunities and life chances push many Greeks out of the country too, especially younger and educated ones, but increasingly people in need. At the same time, Greece continues to be home for significant numbers of immigrants and a major entry point to Europe in the extremely perilous journey taken by various categories of moving populations. On the other hand, a reshuffling of internal migration patterns also appears to be underway involving diverse yet ambivalent counter-urbanisation movements driven by the crisis.

These developments blur the image of Greece as a country that has transitioned from emigration to immigration, and in which internal movements have stabilised on a macro-level, calling into question the hypothesis of mobility transition – or at least calling for it to be revised. Our analysis also highlights the insufficiency of mono-causal explanations that treat migration solely as an economic phenomenon. For instance, the simultaneous increase of emigration and immigration in Greece at the outset of the financial crisis, appears to be largely shaped by the country's EU membership and by governmental decision-making drafted at the EU supranational level. On the one hand, the implementation of the Dublin II Regulation, providing for the processing of asylum applications in the EU country of initial entry, combined with the retreat to nationalist agendas in specific member states and border controls over the past couple of years, means that a considerable number of immigrants who moved with the aim of migrating to northern European countries are now blocked in Greece. On the other, the implementation of free mobility of Greeks in the EU since the 1980s is now enacted in practice for growing numbers of people, not only highly skilled young professionals, for whom emigration to northern Europe is an easier mobility strategy to pursue.

In practice, it appears that Greece has turned into a 'storage-house' for immigration that is unwanted by the countries of the north, while also helping these same northern countries partly fill their needs for highly skilled labour through migrations from the European South. The former highlights Greece's re-emergence as a country of transit for mixed migration flows, and one of the major ports of entry into the EU at times of tough controls and sealed borders amidst what has been described as the largest 'migration crisis'

after the Second World War. The latter evokes memories of post-war emigration; yet, while this earlier outflow was largely about low-educated young males moving to Northern Europe to feed an expanding industrial machine, it now apparently concerns diverse groups of people comprising primarily young graduates taking a similar route to seek opportunities and prospects in dynamic sectors of the knowledge but also service economy in North European cities.

In this context, the current Greek migration experience points to an emerging European map of migration that seems to be moving towards an ever-more complex stratification of ‘core-periphery’ relations within and beyond the EU (King 2015). To avoid misunderstandings pointing to the retreat to yet another binary distinction such as those we have rejected earlier in the paper, we need to stress exactly the multiple and complex stratification layers of the unequal spatial divisions of labour between and within EU countries, as well as in their relations with the rest of the world. These need to be understood not only in conjunction with the institutional and policy context at national or EU levels, but also in relation to the agency of the migrants themselves. Their motivations, aspirations, practices and experiences render migration a rather ambivalent project, part of wider life trajectories, which are by no means linear or irreversible, as neither are the broader trajectories of the countries they come from, pass through, or are heading to. At the same time, as others have noted (Ghosh 2012; Smith and King 2012), the post-2008 global economic crises, and – we would add – new global geopolitical dynamics, are transforming global patterns of migration in ways that call for the development of new theoretical frameworks.

Can revised versions of the theory of mobility transition account for such a framework? The need to assess the political, socio-economic and spatial/geographic factors that generate and sustain the complex mobility patterns characteristic of our times ask for a broad definition of mobility and placing our studies within a wider framework that allows examining the interrelation of different kinds of mobilities. Theories of migration transition adopting broad definitions of ‘migration’ examine such interrelations and treat the spatial and the temporal dimensions of migration together. Taking into account the degree of abstraction necessary to account for long macro-level historical paths, such an all-encompassing framework seemed appealing on the outset. Yet even if refined to capture differentiation, local particularities, alternative pathways etc. and incorporating the (geo)political dimensions (e.g. Skeldon 1997; 2012; de Haas 2010), their determinism, implied linearity and embedded teleology falls short of grasping not only the simultaneity of different ‘stages’ and ‘phases’, or the co-existence of various types of flows and in various directions, but also the reversibility of such long historical trajectories and development pathways. Needless to point out, as others have done, the impossibility of a ‘grand theory’ of migration incorporating all types of migration, in all places and at all times (King and Skeldon 2010).

Even if our analysis here is limited in scope for making absolute claims for the abandonment of theories of transition in the field of migration study, the empirical material cited from the Greek case, exemplifying broader transnational trends, does call for parting with the distinction between emigration and immigration countries. Although the emigrant/immigrant distinction may still be still analytically valuable in highlighting the duality of migrants' affinities and allegiances (see Waldinger 2015), when this distinction is extrapolated at the national level it creates an artificial image of the world as neatly divided between states that attract populations and those that push their citizens out – an image that is particularly problematic in allowing us assess the current global migration patterns.

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