Contesting national belonging: An established-outsider figuration on the margins of Thessaloniki, Greece

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Writing a PhD dissertation is a rather lonely enterprise, yet one that crucially depends on the advice, feedback, encouragement, support and inspiration one draws from other people. It is also long journey – a journey that begins even before one consciously takes the decision to embark on it. You pass along a chain of people and events that guide you on a certain pathway, and which eventually leads to the production of your book. Writing the acknowledgements section is possibly the happiest moment in this long journey – the moment you are finally able to express your gratitude to those who helped make your dissertation what it is, and who made it possible in the first place. Before I turn to the wonderful people I have encountered on my academic journey so far, I first take this opportunity to thank my parents Pavlo and Lamprini, from the bottom of my heart, and for everything; not only for infusing me with curiosity, the will to learn and a spirit of critical thinking, but most importantly for all those years of love and support.

My engagement with the social sciences began during my studies in Geography at the University of the Aegean on the magical island of Lesvos. I wish to thank my teacher Lila Leontidou for enthusiastically dragging me into the world of social science, and my supervisor Dora Lafazani for shaping my academic interests in nationalism, ethnicity and migration. It was from her impassioned teaching and working groups that I truly learned how to do research and how to think as a social scientist; and it was in those meetings that I arrived at my decision to continue my studies. I also want to thank my teacher Theano Terkenli for being such an inspiring professor and a source of support, both throughout my years in Lesvos and also in subsequent phases.

The four dreamy years I spend in Lesvos are a beacon in my life. The memories I retain are a reminder of how I should always try to live my life. But that is not always possible. One thing that I miss from that period is the engagement with non-academics regarding my academic concerns. The PhD trajectory pushes you towards an introverted academic world. In Mytilene, I did not only study in classrooms; I communicated, practised, and tested the knowledge I obtained outside the academic world, with people in the streets and in the fields. I wish to thank all my friends from my Mytilene years who shared this experience with me; although I no longer see them often, I still feel them to be part of my family.

In order to expand my sociological knowledge in my fields of interest, I followed the MA program in Migration and Ethnic studies at the University of Amsterdam. My studies were supported by a Nuffic Hyugens scholarship. At the University of Amsterdam I found a very inspiring academic environment, and met great fellow students with whom I shared a rather intense year. I learned a great deal from them, as well as from my teachers, especially, Jan Rath, who also was the coordinator of the MA program, and Flip Lindo and Philomena.
Essed, my wonderful supervisors. The encouragement of those three professors was crucial to my decision to continue my academic career. Jan Rath and Flip Lindo later became the supervisors of my PhD project. To them I owe wise guidance, criticisms and comments, which helped me throughout this expedition. I also want to thank them for their support, interest and confidence in me and my research. I feel so privileged to have had them them as supervisors in my PhD journey.

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for making my participation in the GEITONIES project a joy and something I could happily combine with my own research.

Besides the academic community, I want to thank a number of people who were greatly important to me during recent years. Due to a series of unexpected events, at one point in the process I myself became an object of my own study. With that I do not mean that I was so immersed in my study that I could not separate my private life from my PhD, but rather that I myself became a migrant. I had to take a number of jobs, which people think of and speak about as ‘migrant jobs’, in order to support the final phase of my PhD project at a time when returning to Greece was not an option. Although academically this was an invaluable experience to better understand what I am studying, the lack of time resulting from this experience made life stressful. I want to thank Christina, my cousin Antonis, Thanasis, Yannis and Elif for helping me find my balance and retain my motivation in this period.

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