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Andrikopoulos, A.

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Hospitality and Immigration in a Greek Urban Neighborhood: An Ethnography of Mimesis

APOSTOLOS ANDRIKOPOULOS
University of Amsterdam

Abstract

This article uses the concept of hospitality to examine the relations between native-born Greeks and recently arrived immigrants in a Greek urban neighborhood. Beyond romanticized notions of hospitality as a moral obligation or national virtue, this article considers hospitality as a power relation and a control mechanism of social behavior and cultural production. Although relations between hosts and guests are interpersonal, their (perceived) statuses are often enmeshed in macro hierarchical structures. The concept of hospitality helps us to shift scales and examine host-guest relations at the micro-level of a neighborhood in relation to wider political and economic constellations. However, the scalar dimensions of hospitality have limitations. This ethnographic study shows that ethnic Greek ‘repatriates’ from the former Soviet Union, despite their ideological incorporation in the home of the Greek nation, are treated by native-born Greeks, at the neighborhood level, as guests who must comply with the rules of hospitality. At the same time, regardless of their legal exclusion and stigmatization in official discourses, Albanian immigrants, who have accepted the role of guests and imitate the socio-cultural patterns of their native-Greek neighbors, are received better than Greek ‘repatriates’. [hospitality, immigration, mimesis, assimilation/integration, Greece]

Encounters with strangers in contemporary Greece: An introduction to hospitality

Unwelcome guests and hostile hosts

In June 2012, New Democracy’s leader and later Prime Minister of Greece, Antonis Samaras, vowed that his government, if elected, would “retake our cities from the immigrant ghettos.” Shortly after the formation of a coalition government under Samaras’ leadership, a series of large-scale police operations took place aimed at arresting and deporting legally unauthorized migrants. Sex workers, drug addicts, homeless people and immigrants who socialized in city squares and public spaces became the first targets of police action. The government named these operations “Xenios Zeus” after the ancient Greek god of hospitality. In a TV interview, Nikos Dendias, then Minister of Public Order, explained why the operations were named after the god of hospitality: “The country, the society, has the right to offer hospitality to those it wants to host. That’s the meaning of the name. We are not obliged to offer hospitality to anyone who wants to cross the borders illegally”.¹

Generous hosts and deserving guests

In the last few years, especially since 2015, an enormous number of Syrian and other refugees arrived by boat in Greece on their perilous journey to seek asylum in Germany and other European countries. The commitment of many Greeks, who despite the economic crisis in their country, assisted refugees upon their arrival and provided them with material aid has been acclaimed by local and international media. In numerous TV interviews, refugees expressed their gratitude to Greeks and praised them for their “very good hospitality”. While a German reporter was interviewing an elderly Greek couple, who regularly opened their house to refugees for fresh drinking water and a shower, a female refugee approached them, sought the attention of the camera and then kissed the hands of the couple. This act of gratitude, which caused all to burst into tears, was not only directed to the couple but also performed towards a European audience. Like these two pensioners, many other Greeks opened their house and offered shelter to refugees. One of them, Dora Chrysikou, tearfully explained her motivation and experience: “You think that your life is difficult until you realize that the lives of other people are much more difficult. . . I think that we, who opened our houses (to refugees), gain much more than they do. They are so grateful to Greek people. And I am grateful to Greek people too because the truth is that no other people that passed through this hardship— economic, moral, cultural—would react in that way. . . And they (the refugees hosted by her) always say that I am their angel.”²

Esteemed visitors and servile hosts

Oinousses is a small Greek island in the Aegean Sea. In anticipation of the arrival of the first commercial cruise ship visit to the island, the Municipality of Oinousses made an announcement to inform the residents about its importance: “On 8/10/2013 from 14.00 until 23.00, the cruise ship *EUROPA 2*, of the German company HAPAG LLOYD, will be moored in the port of Oinousses. For first time in the history of our island we have such a visit. This is a *trial* visit for the cruise ship company. *If the visitors are satisfied, more visits will follow*”. The announcement gave detailed instructions to islanders in preparation for the travelers’ arrival. It continued: “*We should take care: (. . .) Appearance of faces and services: prepare yourselves (shaved, clean, decently dressed). Smile! Good morning! Hospitality! Willingness! Warmth!*” (Emphasis in the original).

Appreciative guest and caring hosts/kin

Klajdi Llupa is a musician, songwriter and producer of pop/house music, often with English lyrics and Latin-American influences. He is known in Greece as Claydee. He was born in 1985 in Albania and at a young age migrated to Greece with his parents. In the 1990s, the flow of migration from Albania to Greece was massive, with most Albanians crossing the border clandestinely in the hope of a better future in Greece

(Lambrianidis and Lymperaki 2001; Hatziprokopiou 2003). During an interview in 2012, Claydee replied, in flawless Greek, to the question of the interviewer, as to whether he had achieved “the Greek dream” like many other Albanian immigrants: “I was very lucky because I met Greeks who helped me a lot, like my godmother and my godfather who baptized me when I was little, and helped my family as well. Greeks are a very hospitable people. For good people and those who want to do things with their lives, Greeks are certainly there to help them. This exists. I really noticed this when I was little and it has subconsciously entered inside me”.³

The above vignettes briefly describe four different moments of hospitality in contemporary Greece. The first and third refer to situations in which Greek authorities deal with foreigners, either with hostility, when they are considered undeserving guests, or with servility, when they are seen as worthy visitors. In the second and fourth cases, Syrian refugees and an immigrant from Albania express their gratefulness and appreciation for the generosity and help they received. In the second case, refugees’ gratitude to Greeks seems to be addressed towards a European audience as well, which has a particular importance for Greeks in the present period of economic crisis and of tense relations with Europe and especially Germany.

Beyond the obvious differences, these four cases also share some important similarities. All four concern asymmetrical relations between persons, groups or institutions in which the appeal to locality plays an important role in how the parties involved perceive and establish their status. Their unequal status affects the way they relate to each other and results in varied performances of culture and social behavior. Taking this as a starting point, this paper examines the politics and practices of hospitality in contemporary Greece while emphasizing the power discrepancies between hosts and guests. Taking cues from various anthropological approaches,⁴ I analyze hospitality, not simply as a moral value,⁵ but as a power relation and mechanism of social control. In this consideration, hospitality is an asymmetrical exchange relation between the host who offers shelter, and the guest who receives it. Guests are expected to honor their host and follow the rules of hospitality that are imposed by the hosts. Cultural practices alien to the host are welcome only when the host allows them. In the context of hospitality, the host is the one who has the authority to control and evaluate the guest and their socio-cultural practices.

The four introductory vignettes show that the treatment by hosts is not identical for all guests. Michael Herzfeld argues that the symbolic status of the guest, or of the group that the guest is perceived to represent, designates the terms, the motivations and expectations in relations of hospitality. As described in his 1987 essay, Western tourists in Greece were offered generous hospitality and were encouraged to act “as in your own house” (“*san sto spiti sou*”). Recognition and grace, in return for hospitality, was highly valued when it came from Western tourists who

were seen as representatives of powerful and wealthy nations. But hospitality, for Herzfeld, “signifies the moral and conceptual *subordination* of the guest to the host. In this way, it ‘englobes’ the visitor, to the substituting moral advantage for political subordination” (1987, 77). And, in the wider context of global political hierarchy in which Greece was under the shadow of the ‘West’, the act of hospitality placed European and American tourists, especially poor backpackers who could not materially reciprocate their hospitable reception, in a morally inferior position to their Greek hosts. In that regard, although relations between hosts and guests are interpersonal, their (perceived) statuses are often enmeshed in macro hierarchical structures. The concept of hospitality helps us to shift scales and examine the interactions between hosts and guests in relation to wider political and economic constellations.

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Up until relatively recently in Greece, the ideal of hospitality was mobilized and reproduced through the interactions of Greeks with tourists, mainly from Western countries. In the 1990s,⁶ following the fall of socialism in Eastern Europe, massive migration flows transformed Greece into an immigration country and modified the population dynamics of cities that were the first place of settlement for most migrants. For the first time, Greeks came into regular contact with foreigners who were neither tourists nor citizens of wealthier nations. Large cities like Athens and Thessaloniki became sites where daily interactions with migrants were taking place. In this article, I aim to look at this historical shift by examining the social relations among inhabitants of various ethnic backgrounds in a neighborhood of Thessaloniki where migrants from Albania, the former Soviet Union and West Africa arrived throughout the 1990s and lived side by side with local Greeks.

This article suggest that hospitality can be a useful analytical concept for the study of immigration, a concept that can be used as a basis of comparison for other regional settings and historical periods as well as for the comparison of the relations between the same host and different guests. More specifically, this article aims to explain the different reception of Albanian migrants and ethnic Greek ‘repatriates’ from the former Soviet Union. Using the concept of hospitality, this article intends to analyze the paradox that despite the ideological incorporation of Greek-origin migrants in the home of the Greek nation, Albanian migrants have been more welcomed than ‘repatriates’ at the neighborhood level.

This article is based on fieldwork I carried out in the area around Antheon Street (pseudonym) in Thessaloniki, a city in northern Greece. The district I studied is located between the eastern part of the city and the city center. I lived in that area from 2001 to 2006 but systematic ethnographic fieldwork was conducted for eleven months in between 2004 and 2005. Apart from my participation as a resident in the social life of the neighborhood, I conducted interviews with native-born and migrant residents and shopkeepers. In order to have a clearer picture of the demographic characteristics of the area, with special reference to ethnicity, I

TABLE 1. POPULATION IN ANTHEON ACCORDING TO REGION/COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

Regions of Origin	Total number and percentage of each region	Terms used by "diacheiristes" (administrators)	Number according to the terms used by administrators
Greece	1979 (82%)	"Ellines"/"Ntopioi"/"Apo edo" (Greeks, Natives, From here)	1979 (82%)
Albania	239 (10%)	"Alvanoï" (Albanians)	215 (51%)
		"Voreioipirotes" (North-Epirutes)	24 (6%)
Former Soviet Union (FSU)	141 (6%)	"Rösopontioi" (Russian-Pontics)	92 (22%)
		"Rosoi" (Russians)	12 (3%)
		"Pontioi"/"Ellinopontioi" (Pontics/Greco-Pontics)	9 (2%)
		"Apo Rosia" (From Russia)	6 (1,5%)
		"Georgianoï" (Georgians)	13 (3%)
		"Armenioi" (Armenians)	9 (2%)
West Africa	18 (1%)	"Mavroi" (Blacks)	15 (4%)
		"Afrikanoi" (Africans)	3 (0,7%)
Others	13 (0,5%)	"Kyprioi" (Cypriots)	13
		"Roumanoï" (Romanians)	
		"Voulgaroi" (Bulgarians)	
		"Filippinezes" (Filipinos)	
Total	2390 (100%)		2390 (100%)

Source: fieldwork survey

carried out a survey in all the apartment buildings around Antheon Street (Table 1).

Each apartment building has its own administrator ("diacheiristēs") who is in charge of collecting from each household a monthly fee for the communal expenses of the building (e.g. electricity, elevator maintenance). I asked administrators of Antheon apartment buildings about the total number of occupants per building and their origin, letting them use their own terms and categories. If administrators had resided in the building for many years, I also asked them questions about the history of the building and the previous tenants. Last, I accessed the baptism archive of the Christian Orthodox Church located in the area which contained important information about the ethnic origin of the baptized persons, their parents and their godparents (Table 2 and 3).

The fieldwork took place just after Greece joined the Eurozone and was experiencing fast growth. GDP per capita almost doubled from \$11,396 in 2000 to \$21,624 in 2005. The Greek government claimed that the economic growth of the country transformed Greece from "a

TABLE 2. ALBANIANS' BAPTISMS (2000–2005)

Albanians' Baptisms (2000–2005)				
Origin of Godparents	2000–2001	2002–2003	2004–2005	2000–2005
Native-born Greek	100 (93,4%)	87 (92,5%)	44 (84,6%)	231 (91,3%)
Albanian	7 (6,5%)	7 (7,4%)	8 (15,3%)	22 (8,6%)
Formerly Soviet-Union (FSU) migrant	0	0	0	0
Total	107 (100%)	94 (100%)	52 (100%)	253 (100%)

Source: Baptism Archive of Agion Panton Church

TABLE 3. TOTAL BAPTISMS, 2000–2005

Origin of both parents	Years 2000–2005		
	Godparents		
	Native-born Greek (N)	Albanian (A)	FSU (F)
Albanian & Albanian (AA)	228	21	-
FSU & FSU (FF)	25	-	18
Native-born Greek & Albanian (NA)	3	1	-
Native-born Greek & FSU (NF)	1	-	1
Native-born Greek & Other (NO)	3	-	-
Total number of Godfathers/godmothers	260 (AAN+FFN+NAN+LON)	22 (AAA+NAA)	19 (FFF+NFF)

Source: Baptism Archive of Agion Panton Church

Total number of baptisms: 540

Total number of immigrants' baptisms: 301 (55,7%)

AAN + FFN + NAN + NON = 260 (86,4%)

AAA+NAA + FFF + LFF = 41 (13,6%)

poor relative of Europe" into an equal member of the European community. In addition to this, the organization of the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens and the victory of the Greek soccer team in the 2004 European Championship drew international attention and boosted the national pride of Greeks, especially during the period of my fieldwork. Only a few years later, however, the sudden economic crisis and subsequent austerity measures that were imposed, impacted the quality of life for Greeks, who soon realized that a gap existed between their country and Western Europe, and it was growing.

The study of immigration and the gifts of hospitality

Immigration scholars have long been concerned with the process of how immigrants adapt to their new social environments. The city has had a prominent position in the study of immigrant relations with non-immigrant populations and their incorporation into local social life. The Chicago School urban sociologists saw the city as a site where multiple contacts take place, resulting in new forms of communal life. Robert Park (1950) and his colleagues theorized assimilation as the end product of a process achieved when newcomers and other settled groups have passed through a sequence of earlier stages (contact, competition and accommodation). Since then, assimilation has become the dominant prism for scholars to look at the relations between immigrants and locals in and beyond cities. "Straight line assimilation" (Warner and Srole 1945), "structural assimilation" (Gordon 1964), "melting pot" metaphor (Glazer and Moynihan 1963), "bumpy line theory" (Gans 1979), "segmented assimilation" (Portes and Zhou 1993) are some of the most important approaches to assimilation that have been developed to analyze the varied trajectories of immigrant incorporation.

Critics point out that in the assimilation paradigm, immigrants are seen as distinct and homogeneous groups in a process of incorporation into larger, vaguely defined entities ('society', 'primary groups' 'mainstream')⁷ (Wimmer 2009; Schinkel 2013; Baumann 2007). Furthermore, approaches to assimilation consider assimilation as a desirable outcome of an end-stage process and are not able to explain why some immigrants are expected to assimilate more than other immigrants. The abstraction and specificity of particular dimensions of the assimilation paradigm are related to the context in which the concept of assimilation was conceived and demonstrate the scholars' vision for the type of society they favor. As Narotzky (2007, 403) notes for the genesis of other analytical concepts, "though they are abstract, their main force lies in their social, cultural, historical, and spatial situatedness".

Similar to other trajectories of social theory (Connell 2007; Comaroff and Comaroff 2012), the assimilation paradigm crossed American borders and became the dominant theoretical paradigm for the study of immigrant incorporation in very different and varied settings. The assimilation paradigm, which was first modeled to study urban social processes in the US, has been applied to societies of the global periphery where the dynamics of power in the relations between established and newcomer populations are present in different ways. For example, as the second introductory vignette indicates, the relation of Greeks with Syrian refugees is also shaped by the turbulent relation of Greece with Germany and the EU. For many Greeks, the welcoming reception of Syrian refugees contributes to the construction of a national self-image as generous and possessing high humanitarian ideals. This image contrasts starkly with Greek stereotypes of Germans as stiff, authoritarian and inhumane. Therefore, the prism of assimilation cannot fully capture the complexities of Syrian refugees' incorporation because it directs our attention to their socio-cultural behavior and practices and not to how their social engagement and cultural practices are shaped through their interaction with local Greek residents, whose behavior is also formed in a globally unequal framework.

In this article, I examine the social relations between native-born Greeks and immigrants, intentionally avoiding the sociological lens of assimilation and its associated notions (integration, incorporation, acculturation, etc.). Instead, I take the concept of hospitality (in Greek "philoxenia", literally love for foreigners), which is used both by native-born Greeks and immigrants to frame their relations. By engaging the concept of hospitality with other anthropological literature, I suggest that hospitality can be an alternative and useful analytical concept for the study of immigration and the participation of immigrants in their societies of settlement. Rosello (2002) cautions against the use of hospitality as an analytical tool and claims that the consideration of immigrants as guests entails the danger of forgetting the metaphoric use of the term. Nevertheless, the insistence that hospitality is a metaphor when used in an immigration setting undermines the naturalness with which people think about their bonds with the places they live beyond their actual

house, like a neighborhood, a city, a state—either as “hosts” or as “guests.” This ethnographic study pays close attention to the way people experience and talk about their “home” and at the same time looks critically at the production of locality and how people claim sovereignty over particular places.

Hospitality is primarily a power relation between hosts and guests and a mechanism for the regulation of social behavior and cultural production

Hospitality is neither a romanticized social relation nor only a moral or national value. Hospitality is primarily a power relation between hosts and guests and a mechanism for the regulation of social behavior and cultural production. In this view, it can be a useful analytical scheme that has valuable merits for the study of immigration.

Firstly, hospitality is a relational framework and places power asymmetries in the forefront of an examination of the host-guest relations. The gift of hospitality establishes a hierarchy and reinforces the already unequal relation between hosts and guests. The return of the gift of hospitality may take place in a latter occasion, when the current guests could act as hosts in their own sovereign space. Yet, as in other gift exchanges, the time lapse between the gift and the counter-gift “makes it possible to experience the objective exchange as a discontinuous series of free and generous acts” (Bourdieu 2000, 192). The two-fold truth of the gift, and in that case of the gift of hospitality, is that on the one hand, the act of hospitality is experienced as an act of disinterested generosity and on the other hand, guests are expected to return the gift or at least to grace their hosts and acknowledge their hosts’ moral advantage. Expectations can be different from guest to guest depending on the symbolic status of the guest and the possibilities of reciprocation. Hosts ultimately evaluate their guests according to the rules of hospitality they themselves have set (Papataxiarchis 2006, 2014; Pitt-Rivers 1968; Herzfeld 1987).

Failure by guests to obey the rules of hospitality, for example, if they insult their hosts or make themselves ‘at home’ without being invited to do so, can create tensions between guests and their hosts (Pitt-Rivers 1968, 27–28). Tensions can also be generated when the guests are reluctant to appreciate what they have received from their hosts. One such case is when guests do not honor and acknowledge their hosts. Another reason for conflict can be a dispute about someone’s legitimacy to act like a host. Such a dispute will raise a question of sovereignty (Shryock 2012). “A host is host only on the territory over which on a particular occasion he claims authority”, Pitt-Rivers reminds us (1968, 26).

Hospitality requires a sovereign territory in which hosts, as the masters of the house, can take care of strangers. Although sovereignty is a requirement for the exercise of hospitality, at the same time, the practise of hospitality constitutes the hosts as sovereign over the place they claim as home. Hosts can only exercise their right to offer hospitality within the limits of their home (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000, 55). The meaning of home can range from an actual house and household, to larger entities, such as the nation-state (Bell 2010; Duyvendak 2011). In each consideration of home, sovereignty is established in different ways, for instance, through property rights, kinship ties and nation-state ideology. The national state has a powerful role in legitimizing the authority

of a population over a place by producing national ideology and granting the members of the nation territorially-bounded rights and obligations (Malkki 1992; Sassen 2006). But can a nation-state ideology always secure the participation of all of its citizens in the imagined community that claims the exclusivity of the role of the host in the house of the nation-state?

A second merit of hospitality as an analytical framework is that it looks at gift-giving practices and directs our attention to the production of intimacy (Eriksen 2013). Hospitality is a mechanism that regulates social behavior and cultural performance and involves close interaction between hosts and guests. Through the practice of hospitality, strangers, who are potentially dangerous, are transformed into controllable guests (Selwyn 2000, 19; Du Boulay 1991). As Pitt-Rivers aptly wrote, hospitality “makes the unknown knowable, and replaces conflict with reciprocal honour” (1968, 25). In Thessaloniki, many migrant domestic workers, who often stayed with their employers as live-ins, became member of their household and their employers developed trust for them. It should not be forgotten, though, that the reciprocity of hospitality, produced in a hierarchically structured framework, is fragile. Intimacy created through exchange relations between hosts and guests is not unconditional and certainly not innocent: “intimacy always carries the possibility of danger” (Herzfeld 2012, s214). For instance, stories that circulated about home break-ins in Thessaloniki often emphasized that the thief must have been a person close to the household because that person knew everything about the house.

Lastly, the basic components of hospitality—sovereignty, exchange and inequality—are clearer than key notions in the assimilation/integration paradigm, such as society, culture and adaptation. This relative clarity makes hospitality, as the relation between hosts and guests, a more precise concept for the study of immigration, one that can be the basis of comparative analysis in different regional and historical contexts. Instead of measuring whether immigrants are integrated or not, social scientists can study and compare how guests transform into hosts in different settings, with different ideologies of hospitality. Furthermore, apart from the cross-cultural comparison, hospitality can be useful to analyze the different reception, in the same home, of different categories of guests. The comparative scope of this article is especially concerned with this latter perspective and examines how, at the local neighborhood-level, immigrants from Albania are more welcomed than Greek-origin immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

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A Greek city in the making: Thessaloniki and cultural diversity

Thessaloniki is the second largest Greek city after Athens, with a population of about a million residents. Thessaloniki was under Ottoman administration until 1913, when it was annexed to

Greece. Ottoman Thessaloniki was known as the “Jerusalem of the Balkans” due to its large Jewish community. According to the first Greek census of 1913, 39 percent (61,439) of residents were Jewish, 29 percent (45,867) Muslims and 25 percent (39,956) Greek Orthodox (Dimitriadis 1983). In subsequent years, the population composition and the urban landscape transformed dramatically so that today Thessaloniki barely resembles the cosmopolitan and culturally diverse city of the Ottoman times. In 1917, a huge fire burnt down a large and central part of the city where the Jewish population was mostly concentrated. About 50 thousand Jews became homeless. Greek authorities dealt with that disaster as an opportunity to relocate the Jewish population to the outskirts of the city and to rebuild a modern city center with a strong Greek character. In place of the destroyed Jewish district, a large square was built named after the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (Hastaoglou-Martinidis 1997, 495–7). In 1923, Greece and Turkey signed the Lausanne Treaty and agreed to exchange their Muslim and Greek Orthodox populations respectively. All Thessaloniki’s Muslims (about 25 thousand) were forced to relocate to Turkey and a disproportionate mass influx of Greek refugees (117,000) arrived from Turkey and settled in the city (Hastaoglou-Martinidis 1997, 498). As a result, the city grew larger and the Greek presence was heightened. At the same time, Ottoman buildings and mosques closed down and minarets were demolished. Names of streets and districts altered into Greek ones. The city population changed once again in the 1940s, when the Nazi powers sent Thessaloniki’s Jews to labor camps. Only a few survived the Holocaust and returned to Thessaloniki (Lewkowicz 2006). After World War II, an important part of the rural population, especially from northern Greece, relocated to Thessaloniki and other large cities, and contributed to the further growth of the city. Within a few decades, a series of historical events and political interventions in the urban landscape completely altered the city population and transformed Thessaloniki into an overwhelmingly Greek city (Mazower 2004). In the 1990s, after the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe, Greece began receiving, for the first time, a massive number of immigrants. Voluminous migration flows from Eastern Europe would modify one more time the population of Thessaloniki. A large number of these immigrants (about ten percent of the city’s population) were from the Balkans, especially Albania (31,611 people according to the 2001 Census); and the former Soviet Union, mostly of ethnic Greek origin (51,139 people according to MMTH 2000).

The area in which I did ethnographic fieldwork was also affected by the population changes and urban renewal projects that have taken place in the past century. This area, located east of Thessaloniki’s center, was the first settlement outside the walls that surrounded Thessaloniki until the late Ottoman period. Known at that time as “Exoches” (countryside), it was first inhabited at the turn of nineteenth century. Thessalonikians of various ethnic origins and religions, but all of them bourgeoisie, relocated to the luxurious and spacious houses of that area (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Villa Joseph Modiano and Villa Hadji Michev built in the late nineteenth century when *Exoches* was inhabited by Thessaloniki's bourgeoisie (Photo: Apostolos Andrikopoulos, 2008). [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

The Dönme, Jews who converted to Islam, funded the construction of Yeni Cami in the area, an impressive mosque, designed by an Italian architect, which combined European and Islamic architectural styles with some added Jewish elements (e.g. decoration with Stars of David). According to the census of 1913, 36 percent of the residents in that area were Jewish, 32 percent Muslims (including Dönme), 24 percent Greek Orthodox, 2 percent Bulgarian Orthodox and 5 percent others (Dimitriadis 1983, 59). After the great fire of 1917, the Jewish presence grew stronger due to the relocation of many Jews from the burnt parts of the inner city. In 1923, the Muslim residents were obliged to leave, including the Dönme who very reluctantly departed to Turkey (Mazower 2004). Yeni Cami temporarily hosted Greek refugees who arrived from Turkey. Its minaret was torn down and in the following decades the building hosted Thessaloniki's archaeological museum. The street in front of Yeni Cami was named "Archaeological Museum Street", a name that remains the same up until today. After the German Occupation and the Jewish Holocaust, the area around Antheon Street was largely evacuated. In the 1960s and 1970s, in the place of the old Jewish houses and empty pieces of land, high-rise blocks of flats ("polykatoikies") were built and hosted immigrants from other parts of Greece, who moved to Thessaloniki for work or studies. Data from the 1991 census show an overrepresentation of professionals (education, scientific professions, services) among the residents of that area and a concentration of high school and university graduates (Maloutas 2000, 46, 52). Around that time, the first migrants from the Balkans and the former Soviet Union started arriving, followed some years later by migrants from Africa. According to the results of the survey (see Table 1) I conducted, 18 percent of Antheon residents were immigrants and most of them came from Albania and the former Soviet Union. A small number of West Africans also settled around Antheon Street.

Population changes in the city of Thessaloniki and the wider area of Antheon over the last century do not confirm the widely-held image of a "homogeneous society" that existed before the arrival of migrants. In the Antheon area, as in other parts of the city, there is hardly any intergenerational population continuity from the time the area was first settled until

now. This no-second generation phenomenon is quite common in urban settings, and makes the process of homemaking in the city an interesting theme to study. How do people claim sovereignty over an urban area that constantly changes? On what basis do people claim the right to offer hospitality in an urban neighborhood where they settled not so very long ago? In the case of Antheon, Greek national ideology entitled Greek residents to act as hosts over this small part of Greek territory. But how was Greekness experienced at the micro-level of this urban neighborhood?

Becoming a “ghetto”: reconfigurations of Greekness and everyday “superiority”

Instead of being a homogeneous society, it was Greek nationalism and national politics that eventually caused Greece to become “historically addicted to the projection of cultural homogeneity” (Papataxiarchis 2006, 8). Before the 1990s, collective representations of Greekness and Greek society as a whole, had been produced in juxtaposition with Western nations and Turkey. The contrast with Western Europeans and Turks was mostly on a rhetorical level, with the exception of encounters that brought Greeks into physical interaction with tourists. An important difference between these national “others”, is that Europeans were seen as hierarchically superior and thus worthy of being imitated (Bakalaki 2005). The word “xenomania” in Greek refers to the excessive admiration of foreign (“xeno”) virtues and the imitation of foreign manners. Although “xenomania” refers to the admiration of “xeno” in general, in reality what was always referred to was the West and modernity.

The demographic transformations of the 1990s had a tremendous impact on the way Greekness was experienced and understood in everyday life

The demographic transformations of the 1990s had a tremendous impact on the way Greekness was experienced and understood in everyday life. In daily interactions with immigrants, Greeks started using ethnic identifications as categories to organize their culturally diverse social environment. Although I approached my informants in Thessaloniki as residents of Antheon and not as members of a particular ethnic community (see Baumann 1996; Wimmer 2004) most of the time they described social life in their neighborhood using ethnic categories (“We, the Greeks”, “Albanians do not do this”). Once when I asked a Greek shopkeeper about his customers—without mentioning ethnicity—he immediately replied: “Rōsopontioi⁸ tend to buy alcohol, Albanians do not mind the quality but the quantity, they buy cheap ham and cow-milk based feta cheese. Blacks do not consume a lot”. Ethnicity became an important category through which people comprehended social life in their neighborhood, and it either downplayed older social categorizations or ethnicized them. This was particularly noticeable in the narratives of old residents of Antheon who described the social relations among neighbors in the pre-1990s period using social markers, while contemporarily, ethnicity was almost always mentioned. In that way, previously established social categorizations like “the poor”, “the doctor”, “the drunkard”, “the

elderly” became less important than “the Albanian”, “the Greeks”, or “the foreigners” in the everyday interactions and social life in the neighborhood. Some social categories remained in use but took on an ethnic element. For example, “the drunkard” became “the Rōsopontios drunkard,” or the manual worker became a synonym for Albanian (“That’s heavy work, why don’t you get an Albanian to help you?”).

Another change, and probably the most important one, was that the way of life and the values of locals, seen as elements of Greek identity, became a model to be imitated by the newly arrived migrants. Next to practices of imitation of Western lifestyles (“xenomania”), native-born Greeks, through the practice of “philoxenia” (hospitality), became worthy of imitation by immigrants, who were thus attributed the inferior status of guests. Native-born Greek residents of Antheon expected their immigrant neighbors not only to respect, but to imitate their lifestyle and cultural patterns. Greek language acquisition was a must and Greeks constantly evaluated their interactions with immigrants. My neighbor, an immigrant woman from Georgia, recounted: “When my sister came from Georgia, she was always speaking to me in Russian. Ahh! I said to her ‘Please don’t talk to me in Russian! When we are outdoors, only Greek’. One day I was on the bus and I was talking on my phone (in Russian) and one woman asked me ‘What language is this?’ (with an angry expression). I felt so ashamed. Now I sit in the bus and do not reply to phone calls, or I do it only in Greek”. Similarly as with the woman on the bus, native-born Greeks felt entitled as members of the Greek nation to make such remarks to immigrants who, as guests in the house of their nation, were expected to show more effort in adapting to local cultural patterns.

Many Greek residents of Antheon claimed that the arrival of migrants had negative consequences for the social life of the neighborhood. They often told me that they no longer felt it was safe to let their children play in the street. Many residents, especially the elderly, were afraid of immigrants, they saw them as poor, needy and potentially ready to attack and steal from the Greeks. This feeling of insecurity emerged together with a feeling of superiority: immigrants could steal from Greeks who had apparently more resources (Bakalaki 2003). The feeling of insecurity, which was blamed on the immigrants, led many residents of Antheon to claim that their neighborhood had been transformed into a ghetto. “We became a ghetto with all those foreigners! You are afraid to walk in your neighborhood!” native-born Greeks complained. “We became like the ghettos in America, what you see in movies” a middle-aged man observed indignantly. The perception that the neighborhood had turned into a ghetto made Greeks think that they had become what for years they had been imitating. Although becoming a ghetto was framed as something negative, the reference to American ghettos especially, and not Jewish ghettos or ghettos in the Global South (Wacquant 2004), placed their city on equal terms with modern American cities. Indicative of this ambiguous consideration of the ghetto was the opening of a bar in the area with the characteristic name “Ghetto Lux” and an advertising poster stating “Road to Detroit”. Even though Greek

inhabitants of Antheon claimed that their neighborhood resembled an American ghetto, this was far from reality: the immigrant population of the area was less than 20 percent of the total population, which was overwhelmingly white (only eighteen Africans in a population of 2400 inhabitants), and most of them were employed, either formally or informally. The stereotypes of immigrant-as-a-thief and the neighborhood-as-a-ghetto—and indeed American—enabled Greeks, on the one hand, to imagine that they had superior life standards to immigrants who were desperately trying to become like resourceful Greeks; and, on the other hand, to think of their society as part of what they saw as the modern and “developed world” (Bakalaki 2003, 2005).

Hospitality, mimesis and social interactions in Antheon

The new immigrant residents of Antheon came mainly from three geographic regions (Table 1): Albania, the former Soviet Union countries (especially Georgia), and West Africa (especially Nigeria). Those from the former Soviet Union were mostly ethnic Greeks (from now on FSU Greeks) who arrived with “repatriation visas” and upon their arrival in Greece, applied for citizenship as they were entitled, due to their ethnic “origin” (Voutira 2004). A great number of FSU Greeks who settled in Antheon originated from the region of Tsalka, a municipality of ethnic Greek, Turkish-speaking villages in mountainous Georgia (Aklayev 1988; Eloeva 1998). Throughout the 1990s, Albanian residents settled in Antheon and the majority of these did not have resident permits until the first amnesty program in 1996–7 (Lambrianidis and Lymperaki 2001; Hatziprokopiou 2003). Nigerians and immigrants from various African countries were the most recent migrants (late 1990s to early 2000s) to arrive in Antheon. They worked as street vendors and many of them had a temporary legal status as asylum seekers (Andrikopoulos 2013).

From a legal perspective, ethnic Greeks from the former Soviet Union were the most privileged among all immigrants (Voutira 2004; Triandafyllidou and Veikou 2002). Not only did they hold Greek citizenship but they also benefited from various affirmative action policies addressed exclusively to them (interest-free loans, a special quota for their employment in the public sector, etc.). Moreover, their collective representation in the mass media had been relatively positive, in contrast with the rather negative representation of Albanians and other immigrants. A discourse analysis of Thessaloniki’s local press confirms this disparity between the way Albanians and FSU Greeks were depicted in the press throughout the 90s, and notes that “repatriates cherish special sensitivity by the press for their problems” (Pavlou 2001, 146). Albanians were in a much more disadvantaged position, and were often blamed for criminal and other illegal activities. In the 1990s, the discourse on

Albanian criminality contributed to the production of what was termed “Albanophobia” and made “Albanian” one of the most stigmatized social categories in Greece.

However, at the local level of the neighborhood, the perceptions of immigrants by the native-born Greeks were diametrically opposite. Many native-born Greeks commented that their Albanian neighbors and residents of Antheon were peaceable, “hard-working like dogs”, “family guys” and in general “they are one thousand times better than all the others”. FSU Greeks, on the contrary, were portrayed as “lazy”, “drunkards”, “troublemakers”, “aggressive” and “violent to their women, who work the entire day”. These reverse local representations of Albanians and FSU Greeks were not exclusive to Antheon. Another ethnography (Pratsinakis 2014) in Nikopoli, a district of western Thessaloniki, documents strikingly similar opinions amongst native-born Greeks.

An important reason for the more sympathetic view of Albanians was that they accepted the role of the guest and tried to meet the expectations of native-born Greeks. Some changed their names to Greek ones, choosing names that sound similar to their Albanian names (e.g. Leonardo became Leonidas), or asked their Greek godparents to choose a name for them. A number of them who were Muslims or non-practicing Christians were baptized in Orthodox Christianity. Atheists or Muslim Albanians also opted to baptize their children in Christianity because they thought that this would be better for the social life of their children. As in the introductory vignette of Claydee, it was common that the godfather/godmother was a local Greek, often an employer, friend or neighbor (Lambrianidis and Lymperaki 2001, 174; Hatziprokopiou 2004, 326). The archive of the local Orthodox Church in Antheon shows that between 2000 and 2005 the godparent was a local Greek in 91.3 percent of all Albanian baptisms (Table 2 and 3). In Greek tradition, a godfather/mother (“nonnos/nonna”) is symbolically responsible for the spiritual guidance of the person baptized (“baphtistikos”). Albanians gave native-born Greeks this role, aiming to show their respect and appreciation. For some Albanians, the selection of their employer as a godparent was a strategy to maintain or develop a good relation with them. In that way they secured help from their employers for their legalization in amnesty programs and for the renewal of their residence permits on the basis of stable and continuous employment.

Pavlos was an elderly Greek man who was in bed for more than a year due to an illness. On one of my visits to his apartment, I found him with his sister Anna, a woman in her 60s, and Sotiris, an Albanian handyman who used to work for him. Sotiris was legalized in an amnesty program and Pavlos had assisted him with all the necessary documentation. Pavlos was also the godfather of Sotiris’ daughter. Sotiris had just told Pavlos and Anna about the excellent grades of his daughter at school and both of them congratulated him. When Sotiris left, Anna asked Pavlos about Sotiris religious beliefs. Pavlos replied that he had never seen him in the church. Anna said that many Albanians who are atheists or Muslims hide their beliefs and recalled a conversation she had with an

Figure 2. Residents of Antheon play cards in the street (source: Google street view, April 2011). [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

Albanian couple: "I asked her man 'So, do you believe in something?'. He said 'Well, to be honest I read the Koran'. I said 'That's good! It's better to believe! You see some people praying to a rock but that's better than no religion at all'." Pavlos agreed that it's important to have a religion. Anna continued: "Then his wife, she is smarter (laughs), says 'I am a Christian. I have been baptized'." Pavlos laughed and commented with an expression of disbelief "Well, Christian. I can imagine!". Anna reacted: "Yes, but at least she says that!", showing some satisfaction for the woman who, no matter what her inner belief was, declared that she had the same religion.

As this observation shows, mimetic practices of immigrants were well received, in fact expected, by native-born Greeks. Albanian immigrants often demonstrated a willingness to resemble local Greeks and in numerous circumstances they sought their advice on social issues (e.g. problems with their kids in adolescence). In Antheon, Albanian appreciation of local Greeks could be seen in the use of urban space. Albanians used the space of the neighborhood in a way similar to the native-born Greeks, drawing a very clear boundary between what was seen as public and as private. FSU Greeks showed little interest in following patterns of "Greek local life," as was expected by their native-born Greek neighbors. On a daily basis, roughly ten to thirty FSU Greek men, along with other non-Greek FSU male immigrants, were to be seen hanging around at different spots along Antheon street, drinking alcohol, playing cards and dominos, repairing their cars, and often getting drunk and fighting with each other (Figure 2).

Native-born Greeks found these habits disrespectful and accused them of appropriating the street as their own space.⁹ "Mercy, go to your homes!", "Shut up animals!", "There are people who work and must wake up tomorrow! We want to sleep!", "I'll call the police and they will arrest you all!", are some of the phrases I heard native-born Greeks shout to FSU Greeks hanging out in the street.

It was early morning and I went to a grocer's store in Antheon Street to buy bus tickets. A grey-hair Greek man showed the shopkeeper and another customer the dozens of empty beer bottles and three chairs left on the pavement at the corner of Antheon Street, by FSU Greeks the previous night. 'They think that it's their home', he remarked and started complaining about FSU Greeks who hung around in the street. The other customer in the store was an Albanian male immigrant in his early thirties. He nodded his head while the Greek man was complaining, patiently waiting for him to finish his indictment. Then he said that he fully understood the irritation. He opened his bag and showed him the beer he had just bought and remarked: 'I also drink beer but I take it home to drink'.

The efforts made by Albanians to imitate what was seen as "Greek lifestyle" and the respect for the local (and thus "Greek") social order made them more sympathetic to native-born Greeks than were the FSU immigrants. Not only did the FSU Greeks not show similar respect to the "local Greek lifestyle" but they also disputed the role of native-born Greeks as their hosts and claimed to be equal hosts with them on the basis of their Greekness (see also Pratsinakis, 2014). A local Greek woman whose seventeen-year old son was injured in a fight with an FSU Greek commented: "Greece opened its doors to them and they must appreciate this. They must understand that they are guests here. (But) they came here and they want to impose their own rules, their moral rules. But this can't happen. We have squeezed our legs for them to stretch their dirty feet!".

An issue of concern, for FSU Greeks, was having to prove their Greekness to native-born Greeks, this in turn would enable them to gain the privileged status of host. When arriving in Greece, they soon realized that their descent, on the basis of which they acquired a "repatriation visa" and Greek citizenship, was not enough for native-born Greeks to accept them as fellow Greeks. It was clear to them that, in addition to their citizenship and ethnic origin, native-born Greeks expected them to demonstrate their Greekness culturally in order for them to be treated equally as co-hosts and not as guests. Although FSU Greeks did not accept the exclusivity of local Greeks to act like hosts, their performances of Greekness were always directed to local Greeks who were in turn the evaluators of it. For example, FSU Greek men sang traditional Pontic Greek songs while they were drinking and socializing in the street. During the UEFA EURO 2004, FSU Greeks celebrated each victory of the Greek soccer team in the street and joined other Greeks in the public celebrations, holding Greek flags. Those Greek flags were hanging in the terraces of their apartments in Antheon for days after the championship. Likewise, they placed Greek flags in their windows and on their balconies during Greek national celebrations, as other local Greeks did (Figure 3 and 4).

Another instance of performing Greekness for those who could speak Pontic Greek, was to show off their linguistic abilities. But for most of them, Greek was only a foreign language that they were trying to learn.

Figure 3. October 28th National Day, Antheon (photo: Apostolos Andrikopoulos, 2008). [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

An alternative way for them to claim a Greek identity was through their ancient Greek names (e.g. Makedon, Orestis, Ellada) or their Christian names (e.g. Konstantinos, Foteini, Kyriakos) (Voutira 2004, 541). Once they could manage to prove their Greekness culturally, then they could be considered equals (or almost equals) to the local Greeks of the neighborhood. One such case was that of Kostas, who was born to Greek parents in Adjara, Georgia and came to Greece with them at the age of six. At the time of my fieldwork, he was a university student and lived in a small apartment in one of the apartment buildings in Antheon. His fluent Greek, his friendliness and his similar-to-native-born-Greek use of public spaces were appreciated by his native-born Greek neighbors, who often had discussions with him and exchanged opinions on an equal basis about “the problem with foreigners” in Antheon.

Conclusion: xenophobia, philoxenia, xenomania

The arrival of immigrants in the 1990s had a great impact on the self-understanding of Greek residents in Antheon, as it did for many other Greeks. Through interactions with immigrants, Greekness became an important category of everyday life. Some years earlier in Antheon, the same people who would have seen themselves, and be

Figure 4. Satellite dish up, flag upside down (photo: Apostolos Andrikopoulos, 2008). [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

primarily categorized on the basis of their social and economic characteristics, came to identify themselves as “Greeks” and to categorize their neighbors along ethnic lines. Nevertheless, the settlement of immigrants in Antheon does not explain *per se* why ethnicity became more important than pre-existing social, economic and other cultural distinctions. Under the perceived threat imposed by the newly arrived immigrants, who were portrayed as criminals, backward and in need, native-born Greek residents started imagining themselves as a whole. Such stereotypes of immigrants allowed native-born Greeks to feel an everyday superiority and to see Greece as part of the modern developed world. For Greeks, their “understanding that ‘foreigners’ have left their countries of origin to seek a future in Greece affirms that the distance between Greece and the ‘West’ has been shortened” (Bakalaki 2003, 219). On the local level, the idea that ‘Greek society’ became modern and closer to the West implied that Greeks were transformed from imitators (“xenomania”) into models of emulation for others. The act of hospitality (“philoxenia”) in the home of Antheon, and in extension in the home of Thessaloniki and Greece, placed immigrants in the subordinate position of guests expected to comply with the wishes of their host for cultural similarity.

The illusion that Greece became part of the ‘developed world’ collapsed a few years later. The onset of the government-debt crisis and external loans strengthened the political dependence of Greece on Northern EU countries and made the subordinate role of Greece in Europe more apparent. The changing position of Greece in the EU and the global political hierarchy has in turn affected the relation of Greece and its citizens with immigrants. Hostile xenophobia and generous hospitality (philoxenia) are two responses to this development that are “two sides of the same coin, despite their reverse orientation—the first towards

*The changing
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closure and social exclusion, the second towards openness and social inclusion” (Papataxiarchis 2014, 49–50). Either by projecting migrants and refugees as morally inferior to Greeks (for instance, the Minister who was in charge of ‘Xenios Zeus’ operations stated that Greece has “immigrants of tragic quality”) or by providing generous assistance and shelter, Greeks attempt to restore their hurt pride and their relation to Europe and the rest of the world.¹⁰

The concept of hospitality, in contrast to assimilation and integration, allows us to study relations between immigrants and locals while simultaneously taking into consideration important parameters of the global political economy. Even when our field site is the micro-setting of an urban neighborhood, hospitality enables us to examine relations at the local level as they are enmeshed in broader configurations. Although the assimilation paradigm considers the wider context of the city or even of national politics in the incorporation trajectories of immigrants, its analytical focus misses the changing dynamics and interplay of power asymmetries at micro and macro levels. In contrast, the lens of hospitality invites researchers to critically examine the production of locality and the different scales of home. In the case of Antheon, Greek national ideology legitimizes Greek residents in their claim of sovereignty over this part of Greek territory and allows them to act as hosts towards the recently arrived immigrants. Offering hospitality as Greeks in the micro-setting of Antheon implies that the expectations of immigrants as guests and the rules regulating relations with them are formed not only by the local conditions but also by national and global constellations.

Despite the changing population dynamic in the urban area around Antheon, Greek national ideology has powerfully established the sovereignty of Greek residents in the locale. The role of hosts held by native-born Greeks on the basis of their nationality seemed self-evident to them and to their immigrant neighbors. Paradoxically, Greek nationalism did not have the same successful outcome for FSU Greeks in Antheon. Contrary to their incorporation in the nation by official discourse, they were treated by local Greeks as guests and not as fellow-hosts. However, this should be understood as a contradiction of Greek national politics which, on the one hand, projected the Greek nation as a culturally homogeneous unit of people with the same descent, and, on the other hand, included a culturally differentiated Greek diaspora in the imaginary community of the nation. For native-born Greeks in Antheon, Greek identity was not only a matter of ‘blood’ but also of culture. This implies that despite the tense relations between FSU and native-born Greeks in Antheon, FSU Greeks were in a more privileged position than other immigrants. When FSU Greeks achieved cultural similarity with locals, they were upgraded to the role of hosts (as happened with the case of Kostas); while for other immigrants, such as the Albanians, cultural similarity could only gain for them the attribution of the role of good guests.

NOTES

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¹Nikos Dendias, interview by Antonis Sroiter, *Autopsia*, Alpha, October 4, 2012.

²Dora Chrysikou, interview, *Kalimeroudia*, Mega, April 6, 2016.

³Claydee, interview by George Satsidis, *Movies and Stars*, MTV Greece, September 26, 2012.

⁴For a review of anthropological perspectives of hospitality: Candea and da Col 2012; Selwyn 2001; Lynch et al, 2011.

⁵Hospitality has been central in the collective representations of Greeks and the construction of Greek character as generous, open and proud. In national discourses, the consideration of hospitality as a key element of Greek identity provided a link with Ancient Greece where hospitality was sacred and protected by Xenios Zeus (Friedl 1962, 106; Zinovieff 1991, 127; Rozakou 2012, 565).

⁶The fall of socialism and the transition to a market economy in Eastern European countries dramatically increased their unemployment rate and created social insecurity. Many of their citizens, especially the young and unemployed, migrated in search of greener pastures.

⁷The segmented assimilation approach (Portes and Zhou 1993) added some complexity to the analysis of migrant adaptation. Without questioning whether migrants are assimilated, it asked what segment of society do they become integrated with. Although a segment of the society is a more specified unit it is still seen as a self-evident pre-existing whole.

⁸Derogatory term for ethnic Greeks from the former Soviet Union (FSU Greeks).

⁹Rozakou worked with a group of leftist volunteers in Greece who approached refugees “in the street” and attempted to reverse the established hierarchy of hospitality by treating them as hosts. Despite their motives, volunteers did not succeed in transposing their unequal roles with refugees. Rozakou concludes that “even on the micro-level of everyday human interaction, entrenched understandings of citizenship and state ownership still dominated, and hospitality emerged as the privilege of the citizen performed on the noncitizen, the refugee” (2012, 573)

¹⁰Of course, the assistance to refugees is not motivated only by a desire to restore the damaged Greek pride. As rightly pointed out by Agelopoulos, an anthropologist involved in solidarity initiatives for refugees in Greece, “the continuous support provided by most Greeks to the refugees is to be understood as a gift involving various recipients: the refugees, the present day Greeks, their early twentieth century ancestors, and

the European public as well as the activists throughout the world" (2015, 10).

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