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Greece: Xenophobia of the Weak and Racism of the Mighty

“Progressive” rhetoric and reactionary practice

Scholars who engage in the state of minorities and racism in Greece are faced with an interesting phenomenon: the harmonious coexistence of a “progressive” rhetoric with a reactionary practice. The inconsistency between rhetoric and practice has become the canon for both individuals that represent state institutions and authorities and certain organizations in society.

It is not a form of institutional schizophrenia removed from logic. On the contrary, it is a form of systematic and to a large degree successful handling of an existent network of racist discriminations. A handling, which, after all, aims at the unobstructed reproduction of this network and the timely absorption and assimilation of every reaction as well as the expulsion of alternative radical suggestions to the social and political margin.

This is the kind of handling that the ruling political class has attempted after the fall of the fascist regime in 1974, since:

1. It has incorporated in its rhetoric elements of the progressive discourse simply as rhetoric schemata - consequently, it has incorporated the anti-racist discourse as well.
2. It has supported by all possible means (e.g. by offering university positions and funds) the advancement of scholars who are willing to serve any political leadership participating in multiple mechanisms of manipulation.

3. It has created with the assistance of those scholars a virtual reality in order to present issues relating to minorities and racist discrimination.

For the construction and acceptance of this virtual reality, in particular, there are networks that function with the participation of government executives and local authorities, as well as university members, educators and social workers, leaders of temporary non-governmental organizations, media staff, and others. This collaboration offers participants personal gain and also constitutes the necessary framework of agreement for the cover up of racist phenomena. Of course, it would be wrong to consider that all individuals involved in such intricacies have a clear understanding of contributing to the reproduction of social injustice. Apart from the self-interest that prevails in these intricacies, another decisive factor is the influence of a powerful ideology of cultural racism and colonialist paternalism on at least certain of the social actors involved.

In the era of mass and uncontrolled immigration from countries that starve to countries that prosper, consequently, to Greece as well, these phenomena are accompanied by:

1. An expansion and multiplication of forms of exploitation of the poor and the weak, the peak of which are the almost slave possessive relations in the sector of paid work.
2. An escalation of the chasm between the official discourse on the respect of human and social rights and the reality experienced by immigrants, refugees and members of many minorities.

At the same time, with the harmless handling of the social problem that racism is recognized to be, there has been an intensification of the use of theories through which a “natural” interpretation of negative phenomena is offered.¹

¹ The origin and spread of such theories follows a characteristic route from the center of power to the periphery. They are born in places and countries where political authority is powerful and they are carried to areas and countries where political power is reinforced with the support that such “valid scientific theories” bring to bear. In relation to this, it could be proven very useful to read anew, to reformulate and adjust to new data the model proposed by Galtung (1971) about the types of

The introduction above seemed necessary in order to illuminate the framework in which some facts of the Greek reality concerning racism should be comprehended.

Immigrants in Greece

Impressive economic growth in the past twenty-five years has converted Greece from a traditional country of origin to a host country of immigrants. From the time of deep political changes in Eastern Europe, Greece -a country of about 10 million citizens- has accepted more than a million immigrants. Most of those immigrants crossed the Greek borders illegally. Some of them legalized their status later but many have remained illegal.

The continuous illegal mass entry of immigrants is documented daily in a tragic way: with deaths at the steep mountainous areas at the north borders of the country with Albania and Bulgaria, deaths at mine fields that cover part of the east borders with Turkey, deaths by drowning at frequent wrecks at the Aegean Sea.² There are not detailed elements but the number of people who enter Greece illegally is the biggest among the countries of the European Union. This is due to the fact that Greece has broad borders with three of the countries of the former eastern bloc and it also has hundreds of islands which neighbor with the Asiatic coast and thus lend themselves to illegal landing.

The reference to Greek islands neighboring with Asia does not exclusively concern geography: it also concerns the political and economic situation that prevails in the countries of this area and forces millions of people to become refugees or immigrants. Thus thousands of Kurds from Turkey, Iraq and Iran. Afghans; Pakistanis; Indians; Palestinians; Filipinos; and people of other Asian countries seek shelter in Greece. To those, refugees from various African countries are added.

The biggest number of immigrants and refugees, however, come from countries of Eastern Europe: mainly from Albania, the Republics of the former U.S.S.R., Bulgaria, Poland, and Rumania. Among these, members of native Greek minority groups in the

imperialism associated with center-periphery relationships, in which special emphasis is given to the significance of communication and culture.

² See Tsiakalos 2000, where many such incidents are recorded. The number increased radically in 2001, particularly after the beginning of military operations in Afghanistan.

former U.S.S.R. and Albania represent a particular case as they become legal rather easily. Individuals coming from Greek minorities of former U.S.S.R. countries acquire Greek citizenship quickly.³ On the contrary, many limitations apply in the case of all other immigrants and refugees, the result being that many hundred thousands live in Greece illegally.⁴

It is a common belief that the Greek economy has greatly benefited from the work of immigrants, particularly illegal immigrants.⁵ Indeed, it is considered that Greece managed to reach the economic indicators that were required for its participation in the united European currency due to their work. Their low wages, which by violation of

³ Greek-origin immigrants from Albania are not treated in the same way as Greek-origin immigrants from the former U.S.S.R., who acquire Greek citizenship easily. The ulterior motive of the Greek government to maintain a large number of Greek minority residents in Albania confronts these immigrants with the following paradox: on the one hand, they are entitled to legalize their stay in Greece and acquire a status that gives them a privilege in relation to foreigners; on the other, however, it is much harder for them to acquire Greek citizenship (and therefore to become “Greek”) compare to other groups of immigrants. Thus they remain “foreigners” with significant negative consequences in their lives. Unlike Greek citizens, they are not entitled to freely immigrate to more prosperous countries of the EU.

⁴ A publication of the Jesuit Refugee Service Europe (Barrett 2001, 37) refers to the ways and difficulties of legalization: “The regulation campaign in Greece started in 1998. The first phase was that of recording the foreigners and lasted for 5 months. Anyone missing the deadline was not allowed an extension. Those recorded were allowed to stay, work legally and proceed to the second phase that of acquiring the ‘limited duration residence permit’, or ‘Green Card’. In order to acquire the Green Card, one of the conditions was to have collected a certain minimum number of social security stamps, very difficult for those working ‘of the books’. The Green Card is issued usually for 1 year, but considerable delays in the process meant that not all applications were considered within a year of being made. In order to renew a much higher number of social security stamps were needed. Few migrants are able to provide that, and so very many were expected to fall back into irregularity once more”.

⁵ See Sarris and Zografakis, 1999.

the law are by far below the legal limit, allowed the Greek economy development rates much higher than its inherent possibilities and mainly allowed its growth in sectors, such as agriculture, tourism and construction, which would have stagnated without the cheap workforce of immigrants.

This reality is obvious not only in the economic indicators but also in the everyday life of even the most distant villages. With their work, immigrants revitalized economic units that had been threatened with extinction and contributed to the creation of new ones, thus producing surplus value and consequently prosperity. Moreover, many middle-class Greek families have been given the opportunity to improve their standard of living by taking advantage of the cheap services offered by immigrants (house cleaners, house maintenance and repair, etc.) that under different circumstances these families could not afford.

Nevertheless, it is also true that parallel to the many people who have benefited from the illegal work of immigrants, there is also a smaller number of Greek population that has suffered economic damage. According to Sarris and Zografakis (1999), the illegal occupation of immigrants in the Greek economy has contributed to an increase of the income chasm between the poor and the rich. The same scientists estimate that 37 percent of the Greek population that live in urban households and whose head is one inexperienced worker suffer loss from the illegal work of immigrants, while all other groups of the population benefit.⁶

The public discourse on racism

The question, Is there racism? raised in Greece is usually related to the question What should or has to be characterized as racism? The answer offered by Greek society is not different from other European societies -where often the question about the existence of racism is answered negatively due to the choice of a very limited definition of racism.

In Greece, the spontaneous response is that there is no racism. This is a common response despite the large number of attacks against immigrants -attacks justified by

⁶ The above speculation refers to illegal occupation and not to the occupation of immigrants, in general.

the offenders on the ground of the victims' origin.⁷ The refutation of even the suspicion of the existence of racism is usually based on a simple deliberation: racism is incompatible with Greek civilization. The arguments offered in support of this deliberation are:

1. "Traditional Greek hospitality has never in the history of the Greek nation allowed racism to appear".
2. Racism has long been condemned as a heresy by the Greek Orthodox Church, to which most Greek people belong.

Of course, everyone can judge if the above arguments justify the deliberation on the basis of which the existence of racism is refuted. It is true, however, that such a deliberation often obstructs processes of collective self-knowledge and obliges to a state of censorship and self-censorship all those who do not want to risk a clash with their social environment by declaring the opposite.⁸

Contrary to denying the existence of racism, the view that the Greek society is characterized by strong "xenophobia" is widespread. This fact may surprise as controversial but it is easily explained if we consider that for Greek language users the two words are differently charged -both semantically as well as emotionally.

In the case of racism, the concept is exclusively associated with negative facts that happened abroad: such facts are mainly the racism of Nazi Germany, the apartheid of South Africa, the racial discriminations of past times in the American South. In all

⁷ See Tsiakalos 2000.

⁸ That this is not just a matter of speech becomes obvious from the following incident: On February 2, 2001, the three-member trial court of Athens sentenced the architect Sotiris Bletsas to fifteen months in prison and a fine for "dissemination of false news". His "crime" was distributing a chart of languages spoken in Europe issued by the European Bureau for Less Used Languages (EBLUL), an EU institution that functions due to a decision of the European Parliament and funded by the Commission. In this chart there is a reference, which is false according to the plaintiffs, and the court decision, to the fact that in Greece, "except Greek and parallel to it" the native population also speak Turkish, Slav Macedonian, Arvanitika and Vlahika. A member of the Greek Parliament, among others, lodged the complaint. Of course, the existence of these languages is known not only to linguists but also to all Greeks and the thousands of people who speak them as mother tongues.

cases the concept is associated with unfair, aggressive behavior exclusively originating from victimizers.

On the contrary, the word “xenophobia” is a neologism even for Greeks. Although it is made up of two Greek words, it does not draw its origin from the Greek language but it is a loan from abroad. As a neologism it does not bear any historical luggage and is understood by Greek language users only etymologically: “the fear caused by strangers”. In this case, if there is any aggressive behavior, it comes from the individual who causes the fear and not from the individual who feels fear. It is, in other words, a concept in which both victims and victimizers are not defined in the same obvious way as in the case of racism; indeed, in some cases the roles appear reversed. In the case of xenophobia, the xenophobe may be accused for unjustified fear. However, the proof of the fact that the fear is not justified falls as the obligations of other individuals. This proof is usually the responsibility of strangers themselves, of those who support the presence of strangers and finally of those who allow the entry of strangers⁹.

From the above, it becomes obvious that in the Greek context, the choice of the word “xenophobia” as opposed to the word “racism” is not innocent but has a particular function, which goes hand in hand with the function the concept has acquired in the rest of Europe. Indeed, one can hardly deny the significance the concept of xenophobia has acquired in the European political and scientific discourse - to a large degree as a result of the fact that in most texts of the European Union and the European Council as well as in the official political discourse it almost always accompanies the concept of “racism”. Nevertheless, the use of the two terms as an unbreakable pair -“racism and xenophobia”- evokes the impression that racism is a result, almost the “next phase” of fear caused by the presence of strangers.

Thus in an almost self-evident way two forms of racism become inferior or are completely abolished in the frame of public discourse:

1. Racism resulting from self-interest as a behavior consciously chosen because it yields profit.
2. Institutional racism: the racism of the state and its services.

⁹ In everyday language, people use the word “stranger” as a synonym for “foreigner”.

These are very significant omissions with serious repercussions in the study of racism and its confrontation. This is particularly true of the second case because (1) institutional racism is the strongest and most painful form of racism and (2) it nourishes and legalizes the xenophobia of simple people.¹⁰

These omissions are not random. They are the result of the prevalent view concerning the bearers of racism, according to which racism concerns just individuals who have no correct knowledge of the facts associated with a particular group of people (e.g., immigrants and those who have a socially unacceptable attitude toward this group). According to this view, this incorrect knowledge and the socially unacceptable attitude results in a negative behavior of the particular people, which in terms of the dominant perspective is conceptually identified with racism. Consequently, in this framework, prevention and confrontation of racism restricts the modification of incorrect knowledge and the alteration of attitudes individuals hold for the particular group.

One realizes that to the degree this theoretical framework is inadequate or incorrect, as it does not include institutional racism and racism born out of self-interest, the corresponding activities for handling racism will be equally inadequate and ineffective.

Racism, xenophobia and the concept of the “Other”

The attempt to describe the extent and nature of racism in Greece with the assistance of scientific research studies that have been conducted to this day reveals the absence of relevant studies. In addition, there are not any reports by governmental services about racist discrimination in everyday life, neither about assaults with racist motives against immigrants and members of minority groups -despite the fact that the media often report incidents¹¹ like the following one:¹²

“In a village of 5,000 people, in Kriekouki, Attica, two dozen villagers took wood and iron clubs and rifles and took it upon themselves to ‘correct’ the economic

¹⁰ See Tsiakalos 1983.

¹¹ See Tsiakalos 2000. An effort for systematic report of racist discriminations and assaults is made by certain NGOs (e.g. Greek Helsinki Watch), which are funded for this purpose by international organizations, including the EU Commission.

¹² See Tsiakalos 2000.

immigrants. On the night of May 17th the ‘army’ assembled as if in a conspiracy. ‘Twenty to twenty-five people,’ says Thanassis G., and another villager adds: ‘They took a fifteen year old boy with them to show him how they beat people.’ They ran wild to the old houses where Albanians sleep and began to hit whoever they happened upon. ‘They broke the jaw of a 17 year-old Albanian, the heel of another one.’ [...] On the next evening, 18th of the month, the incidents were repeated but to a smaller extent. The commander of the police station did not have evidence in his hands so he could not move the procedures. ‘If they press charges, I will start the preliminary investigation,’ he said”.¹³

The practice of governmental authorities of not documenting racist attacks and consequently not publishing relevant reports is in complete opposition to the practice applied in the case of documentation and publication of crime. Crime is reported and publicized on the basis of the ethnic origin of suspects. This is also true of Gypsies, who are Greek citizens and who in educational matters are denied ethnic distinctiveness by the Ministry of Education and the educational authorities, thus being denied the right to be taught in their mother tongue.¹⁴

¹³ ELEFTEROTYPIA, May 21, 1993 (a daily newspaper with the largest circulation in Greece).

¹⁴ The view of the person in charge of Special Programs for the education of Roma children is quite characteristic. To the question of educators if Roma constitute a minority and consequently if they have the right to their mother tongue (Romane), he answered: “Greek Gypsies are a part of the Greek people and the Greek nation both through time and at present. They are not a minority. Therefore, we do not talk about a minority. (...) Some of the Greek Gypsies are Muslims in their religion. Muslim Gypsies are officially protected by the known treaty, which defines minority educational matters in Greece” (Ethnicity and Intercultural Education 1998, 67-68).

With the last sentence, reference is made to the Treaty of Lausanne between Greece and Turkey, in effect since 1923. This treaty determines, among other things, that “Muslim minorities” in Greece and “Christian minorities” in Turkey have the right to be taught in their mother tongues. The executive of the Ministry of Education considers that when Gypsies are Muslims they are a minority and therefore, have the right to their mother tongue. On the contrary, Christians or atheists belong “through

Consequently, it is impossible to draw conclusions about the extent of racism in Greece based on official data. On the contrary, there are many reports concerning xenophobia -in reality, certain views and attitudes. These are usually “asserted” through questionnaires including hypothetical questions of the type, Would you like your child to attend the same class with foreign children? or spurious questions of the type, Which of the following groups don’t you trust?¹⁵ There are numerous such research studies, which fill newspapers and trigger comments by government officials. These comments usually include an appeal for tolerant behavior and a reassuring statement confirming the will and ability of the government to check every possible danger caused by foreigners.

A characteristic example is a research study conducted by Eurobarometer (funded by the European Union) in the fall of 2000. The media publicized in the strongest possible way (e.g., front-page coverage, TV and radio shows) the results of this study, according to which Greece had a 38 percent, the highest percentage of xenophobia in Europe, the average being 15 percent. According to the study, 21 percent of Greek people are bothered by the presence of people with different religion (Belgium: 26 percent, Denmark: 31 percent, Ireland: 8 percent), 24 percent are bothered by the presence of people of different race (Belgium: 27 percent, Denmark: 23 percent, Ireland: 20 percent), 38 percent are bothered by the presence of citizens of different nationality in their country (Belgium: 24 percent, Denmark: 24 percent, Ireland: 17 percent).¹⁶

Equivalent coverage was given to other similar research studies, which yielded similar results. A good example is the discovery that only 36 percent of the Greek people agree to the statement: “It is positive for a society to be made up of different

time and at present to the Greek nation”. Since they are not “protected” by international treaties, it is not possible to be considered by either scientists or educators a distinct cultural, social language minority with a distinct mother tongue.

Then again, the same people are considered and are automatically recorded as minorities when they are involved in crimes.

¹⁵ It is difficult to claim that this method succeeds in recording true attitudes. What it records is the subject’s view about his or her attitude.

¹⁶ Obviously in the presentation of the study results, the media identify xenophobia with the negative assessment of the presence of other nationalities in the country.

racism, religions, and cultures” (Austria 52 percent, Germany 53 percent, Belgium 56 percent, Sweden 77 percent).

An engagement with the inevitable contradictions of the results of these research studies, which would definitely yield much more interesting results than the mere presentation of percentages, does not concern this chapter¹⁷. Xenophobia is recorded by the media and political leaders in Greece as a negative phenomenon that needs to be confronted. A proof of the relative interest of political leaders is the funding of intervention programs and the support of NGOs that are active in this field.

However, it is self-evident that a disturbing phenomenon cannot be dealt with on the basis of a simple record of answers to certain questions. For this purpose, a theory is required, which would help interpret facts and reveal the reasons underlying the disturbing phenomenon. In the face of a public denial of the existence of racism, on the one hand, and public disturbance by xenophobia, on the other, there is such a theory.

A review of literature and of public discourse unfolding in the media promotes a theory that interprets racism and xenophobia as product of a problematic relationship of an individual with the Other. Most representatives of this theory locate the beginning of the problematic relationship in a strong distrust towards strangers as a result of their education or of their personal inability to reject classifications that applied only in the past. Serious studies within this framework lead to identification of the role that central ideological constructions of the Greek ruling class have played, the most prevalent of which is the central significance given to the concept of the Greek nation and the particular religion in all ideological institutions and especially in

¹⁷The complete lack of such a discussion is a sign of limited interest in the real phenomena, which could be revealed through comparison, analysis, and interpretation of data of all relevant studies.

Similar studies during the same period of time detect different attitudes when the question concerns the personal relationship of the interviewee with foreigners. Thus in a study conducted by KAPPA Research in February 2001, to the question, “Would it bother you to associate with people of different nationality”, 92,1 percent replied they would not be bothered and only 6,2 percent claim the opposite. Similar were the results concerning religion and people of color (87,4 percent vs. 11,5 percent and 91,2 percent vs. 8,1 percent correspondingly).

school. Other studies locate the problem in the absence of personal experiences with the Other or the inadequate knowledge about the Other.

All studies, given that in relevant polls the percentage of disturbing answers is higher among people with low educational level and is reduced as the educational level of interviewees increases, point to the same conclusion: handling the problem is just a case of certain changes in education aiming at the proper information about the specific groups of strangers who are the target of xenophobia. These changes would center on the school with the advent of intercultural educational programs and also on the wider society with corresponding intercultural activities of “educational character.”

Indeed, closer observation reveals that the concept of the Other does not correspond to a distinct representation in people’s minds. On the contrary, when people think of the social categories and groups against which xenophobia is directed, they use exclusively special and distinct terms (“Albanians,” “Turks,” “Blacks,” “Muslims,” etc.). They resort, that is, to social classifications using certain features that have acquired specific content in their lives, such as ethnicity, religion, or skin color. These are both real features and social constructions that have acquired a character of real features. Nevertheless, the Other as a distinct concept does not exist in their minds. Social scientists are the people who for their own purposes (e.g., economy of language) put the common umbrella Other over the above terms. In other words, the Other does not exist as a social construction but only as a sum of social categories without, however, characterizing an entity with new qualities. That is why social actors use it just as a synonym of its parts (Other means “the Albanian”, “the Gypsy”, “the Muslim”, the “foreigner”, even “the stranger” in the sense of the unknown or the one not belonging to the particular group.)

These observations have practical value. In the past, new and refined terms without real content were often used in social sciences simply to impress. Most of them have disappeared without any consequences for science or society. There have been, however, cases, and this is one of them, where the use of such a term is pregnant with danger.

The use of the concept of the Other in a way that refers to something self-existent allows certain representatives of this theory to locate the start of this problematic relationship in the very nature of the human being. In other words, it allows them to consider disbelief, fear, even aggressiveness in the relationship with the Other as a biological disposition. In this framework, it is quite characteristic that the bibliography

recommended for intercultural and antiracist education in Greek schools includes the book *On Human Nature* by the founder of sociobiology E. O. Wilson.¹⁸ The same book holds a distinct position in the small library of the “FORUM of Social Organizations ALL DIFFERENT-ALL EQUAL,” which has been funded by the Greek government and the European Community and in which governmental services and anti-racist NGOs participate.

The prevalence of the concept of the Other in Greece follows trends in the relevant public discourse in almost all other countries in Europe. Indeed, attempts to define racism as a product of erroneous views and unacceptable attitudes and to locate the reasons for its existence in a problematic relationship with the Other seem to be common in most European countries.

A characteristic example is the insistence of politicians who participated in the International Holocaust-Conference in Stockholm (January 2000) to describe the Holocaust as an example of lack of tolerance and understanding of the Other, the “Different,” the “Stranger.” Obviously this is a case of an unintentional effort to reconcile the historical facts with today’s predominant theory about the origin of racism.

However, the Holocaust itself contradicts the views that at the beginning of the process towards racism lies a problematic relationship of the individual with the Other or an inadequate knowledge of the “stranger” and the “different.”

A closer look at the experience of the Holocaust reveals that the victims were “the next-door neighbors.” People who, until the appearance of the racist propaganda and the establishment of the racist regime, nobody had considered “strangers” or “others.” They were neighbors, fellows at school or work, colleagues, fellow players in orchestras and in athletic groups, comrades-in-arms in the German army, decorated national heroes. They were often spouses.

In other words, the moral we can reach from the study of racism of that period is that it is not some different, some strangers, some Others who are the target of racists and become first victims of discrimination and later victims of genocide. It is not particular characteristics of the victims that cause the racist brutality but, on the contrary, it is the racist brutality that constructs often nonexistent and invisible differences and turns “our people” to “other people”.

¹⁸ For a criticism of an alleged biological basis of xenophobia, see Tsiakalos 1982.

It is characteristic that racist scientists recorded as “the most dangerous biological feature” of Jews “their adaptability to the people of the country they lived, so that they did not differ from them.” Thus the “certificate of Arian origin”, which was considered a prerequisite for marriage license or for professional practice, was given after investigation of the origin of ancestors up to seven generations back -because nothing visibly different, strange, or Other existed to justify the racist discriminations and the racist crime, it had to be discovered in the distant past.

An argument of our time against the theory that xenophobia is the result of an a priori rejection of the Other constitutes the spontaneous reaction of Greeks to boat people: in every case of mass landing, the residents with their reaction of solidarity obliged authorities to provide hospitality and permanent stay. In other words, what is an illegal immigrant for the authorities and what is the Other for social scientists, for common people are human beings in danger, who cause spontaneous feelings of solidarity.

Despite all the relevant facts, it seems that ruling political classes and the scientists who share their views like to blame the responsibility for racism and xenophobia either on human nature or on innate human inadequacy to experience the “Other”, the “stranger”, the “different.” Greece does not seem to deviate from the prevalent trends.

However, the experiences until now, and in particular those of the Holocaust and apartheid, oblige the adoption of a perspective that takes into consideration all forms of racism and the ways racism associated among them.

Forms of racism and xenophobia

Historical experience forces us to understand racism as a network of views, attitudes, behaviors, and/or established measures that obliges people in subordination only because they belong to a distinct social category.¹⁹ As an excuse for the discrimination, the distinctiveness of the group is often used, to which it is often attached a supposed inferiority and/or dangerousness.

In relation to the above definition of racism, three points need to be stressed:

¹⁹ A distinct group is not the same as a visible group, and its existence does not assume the existence of a real feature. The distinct group is often a construct.

1. Racism is detected in the discriminations that result in subordination. Consequently, a basic element is the behavior against the distinct social category and not the views about it and the attitudes toward it. Even if there is usually a harmonious relationship among views, attitudes, and behaviors, it so happens that racist behavior does not necessarily presuppose the existence of negative views and attitudes, and conversely negative views and attitudes do not always lead to negative behavior.

2. A necessary element for the appearance of racism is the ability of exercising power against a distinct social group. Thus, racism may emerge only in conditions of unequal distribution of social and/or political power and it is exclusively initiated by the mighty. On the contrary, members of socially and politically weak groups may develop racist behaviors only against members of weaker groups and only on the condition that they do not face the opposition of a stronger form of power, such as the state authority.

3. The spectrum of subordination is wide: it ranges from derogatory expression to murder. In social life, however, its very core is always exclusion from public and social goods or unequal participation in them.

On the basis of this perception, careful observation reveals that racism appears in Greece, as well as in other European countries, in three different ways:

1. Racism = negative views + negative attitudes + negative behavior + power, the result being the subordination of the group subjected to the negative behavior.

2. Racism = personal profit + negative behavior + power, the result being the subordination of the group subjected to the negative behavior.

3. Racism = institutionalized measures of discrimination + exercise of power on the part of authorities, the result being the subordination of the group subjected to the negative behavior.

In Greece, when in the public discourse there is reference to “xenophobia and racism”, as a rule the first form of racism is meant. Nevertheless, the other two forms of racism are more frequent and more intense. Moreover, they constitute the basis for

the construction of negative views and attitudes and the framework of tolerance of the racist behavior of individuals and groups.

The examples below may illustrate the way in which the institutional preservation of many immigrants in an illegal status and the “self-evident” unequal distribution of power foster racism.

Case 1: Status of illegitimacy and subordination to the employer

The way in which employers exploited the illegal status of immigrants to avoid paying wages for months was already reported in the 1980s. On October 17th 1984, the newspaper AVGI reported:

There is a large network of employers-policemen that jointly exploit illegal workers from Pakistan and India. Certain employers employ these illegal foreign workers with ridiculous payment and when payday approaches, the employers call the police. The unprotected and illegal foreigners, well aware of their precarious status (they have no work permit), flee to the mountains and gorges to hide and the last thing they care about is their payment.

Immigrants today face similar problems. This applies more in the case of female illegal immigrants who are forced into prostitution. When they turn to the police they are the first ones to be punished with deportation for their illegal entry into Greece. Their deportation means the following:

1. They will never be given the right to enter Greece or any other European Union country legally.
2. They cannot testify as witnesses against their procurers at the trial that follows.
3. They usually fall back in the hands of the procurers of their country and after an exemplar punishment for their insubordination they are sent back to the same or another country.

In other words, the illegal status becomes a framework in which coercion develops, which in turn perpetuates subordinate and undignified living conditions.

Case 2: Unequal distribution of power and subordination to the local community

Since 1991, approximately 150 Albanian workers with their families had lived and worked in the village of Loutra in Lesvos. The coexistence of Greeks and Albanians presented no problems until June 29, 2001. On that day, a group of young Albanians, irritated at being denied entrance to a disco, beat and wounded four Greek peers. At once the police deported the Albanians who participated in the incident, and the local authorities decided to expel all Albanians and their families from their village (even though they had no legal right to do it).

The municipal council of Lesvos, to which the community of Loutra belongs administratively, “despite their reservations for the decision, characterize the reactions justified and deem the decision worked positively since no outrages were committed on the part of the indignant villagers.”²⁰

A few days later, the president of Greek Republic expressed the view that the discrimination committed by institutional members against a whole group of people not only does not constitute a racist act but, on the contrary, functions as a shield against racism. During his visit to the island, he stated that the group expulsion of 150 people on the mere grounds that they were Albanians “was not an expression of racist sentiments. If it were for such feelings, [the villagers] would not have accepted [the Albanians] from the beginning. It was merely the expression of a reaction and indignation for an action which was considered an insult against local people and their kind behavior.”²¹

The assessment of the above action by the president of Greek Republic is characteristic of the prevalent view for the concept of racism: racism, as it follows from the above statement, is for the ruling political class the expression of negative sentiments that exist in the relationship of groups before their first meeting and manifest themselves with negative behavior and rejection from the first moment.

With this in mind, one can understand the phenomenon described in a previous section, that is, to reject the view that there is racism in Greece and at the same time, to admit that there is strong xenophobia.

²⁰ TA NEA, August 18, 2001

²¹ ELEFTEROTYPIA, August 16, 2001

Indeed, if such a conceptual framework is acceptable, it makes sense that cases such as the following are not labeled racist:

1. “Armed residents in Gianitsohori, Ilia, beat, wounded, threatened and humiliated 25 young Albanians, because, according to information, some of them asked a decrease of working hours (they worked from dawn to dusk, i.e., 12-13 hours a day) and better wages.”²²
2. “The communal council of Poulitsa, Korinthia, decided to forbid the selling of alcohol to Albanians and determined the highest wage for them the amount of 5,000 drachmas (i.e., much lower than the legal limit).”²³

From these examples, one can easily realize that through unequal distribution of power within the boundaries of a local community, Greek people profit and immigrants are condemned to subordinate living. It is a relationship that is condemned in words, but in practice it obviously enjoys the acceptance of the ruling political class.

The fact that the contradiction of rhetoric and practice is a political choice becomes evident with the third example.

Case 3: Legalization of immigrants’ residency and award of employers’ illegal action

The process of legalization of the thousands of illegal immigrants is used for the returns of social security contributions, which were lost since the immigrants’ work was illegal. In order to acquire a green card, one of the conditions was to have collected a certain minimum number of social security stamps, very difficult for those working “of the books”. However, for legalization purposes, the immigrant is entitled to buying stamps by paying the equivalent, without having to prove that he or she actually worked and without having to name certain employers.²⁴ The process has particular significance because the equivalent that the immigrant pays in order to buy stamps is mainly paid by the employer in the case of legal occupation. Thus

²² METRO, May 1998.

²³ METRO, May 1998.

²⁴ For the legalization process of 2001, stamps equivalent to 250 wages within 12 months were required. A figure, which in reality is never reached by any worker.

immigrants are not only paid by employers far below the legal ceiling but at the same time they are charged with the employer's contribution to social security.

The above procedure essentially secures the influx of contributions in social security fund but at the same time, for employers, it secures that the cost of work remains exceptionally low. Consequently, from the particular form of legalization, profits ensue for the social security fund and the Greek employers of immigrants, while on the contrary, the economic cost is awfully high for immigrants. In essence, the illegitimacy of employers is prescribed and resources are transferred as a kind of fine from immigrants to social security fund.

The question raised is why immigrants are interested in this form of legalization. The answer is simple: mainly in order to avoid a sudden deportation that may occur any time they are in the status of illegal residency.²⁵ Indeed, illegal immigrants commonly stay and work, the police being in the know, but they are not arrested or deported. Police officers who decide to act of their own accord are usually opposed by employers of illegal immigrants. Employers, through networks of clientele relations with local authorities and politicians, usually manage to escape punishment as well as to impose complete inertia on the part of police and consequently, the de facto recognition of illegal occupation. This, however, is overthrown from time to time, because the police proceed to extended operations of discovery, arrest, and deportation of illegal immigrants after a decision of the central administration, usually the Ministry of Public Order. These operations have an exclusive goal: to create the impression that the state fights illegal immigration. Thus, immigrants who are arrested, are taken by buses back to the borders and are deported from the country -always accompanied by TV crews and with public statements by governmental executives for the harsh punishment of illegal immigration.

All the above illustrate the ways in which the following significant but contradictory goals are reconciled in practice:

²⁵ In a poll conducted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, to the question "What problems does legalization solve in your everyday life?" 43,9 percent of the immigrants answered "I will be able to move freely, without fear," 32,9 percent "I will be able to work legally," 28,9 percent "I may come and go to my country as I please," 16,7 percent "I will have social security/health care," 13,2 percent "I will be able to live with my family" (ELEFTEROTYPIA, July 6, 2001).

1. The interest of Greek employers and the Greek economy in general for the illegal occupation of immigrants.
2. The need to avoid large deficits in the social security fund.
3. The interest of the state to appear powerful, competent and determined to protect the law and to fight illegal immigration.

The blend of these contradictory goals may satisfy many targets of the economy and the state, but it also has a significant collateral consequence: the creation of feelings of fear and insecurity among a part of the indigenous population.

Status of illegitimacy and emergence of xenophobia

As actions of power display, police operations of mass arrests and deportations of illegal immigrants usually occur as a reaction to incidents of criminal acts in which foreigners appear involved. In addition, in everyday language these police operations are called “operations sweep” and they largely contribute to the formulation of views, attitudes and behaviors in relation to immigrants. For a part of the population, indeed the part that formulates views under the influence of the media and in harmony with the behavior of the state authorities, the police operations constitute an indication of the dangerousness of immigrants. Moreover, their arrest and deportation in a mass way establishes the impression that immigrants as a social category constitute a direct threat, which justifies emergency measures.²⁶ Consequently, the source of fear of strangers, which occupies a part of the Greek population, may be located very easily: it is the activity of the state against illegal immigrants.²⁷

²⁶ This behavior on the part of authorities offers socially acceptable arguments to racist and fascist organizations so that they can consciously develop their activities. The latter will reinforce the activity of the state and contribute to rekindling a sense of insecurity and xenophobia.

²⁷ With reference to the way that public discourse for immigrants, even in the case of good intentions, may cater to fear and reinforce negative attitudes and racist behaviors, see Tsiakalos 1983.

This fear coupled with the fact that several indigenous workers are actually affected by the illegal occupation of immigrants - they are affected by the fact that many employers can occupy workers with very low wages and without proper social security- constitutes the basis of what several research studies define as xenophobia.

Conclusion

A closer look at racism and xenophobia in Greece makes us realize the significance of the distinction between the racism of the rich and mighty and the xenophobia of the poor and weak. The former grows and is preserved because of the self-interest and it enjoys the protection of the state in many ways. The latter is the fear born and fed out of the former and can turn into racism in state-provided conditions.

It is obviously significant to gain an insight of nature of racism and its function at a time when profit constitutes the first and foremost criterion by which social phenomena are assessed. In this way we may explain, without resorting to an alleged deficit of human beings, why racism exists and is sustained despite its moral condemnation.

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