Hierarchies of deservingness and the limits of hospitality in the 'refugee crisis'

Abstract:

This paper discusses the concept of hospitality as a metaphor for thinking about the relationship between European publics and refugees. In particular, it explores how audiences in Greece discuss the European 'refugee crisis' and how, in doing so, construct hierarchies of deservingness of hospitality among different migrant groups reaching the Greek borders. Drawing upon empirical material from focus group discussions, the paper argues that these hierarchies of migrants draw upon media narratives, broader political discourses and cultural beliefs about religion, gender and class. Hospitality, as a metaphor for engaging with the stranger, is illustrated as embedded in national sociohistorical contexts, underlined by stereotypes both about the 'other' as well as the national self, and ultimately limited in constructing relations of solidarity between hosts and newcomers.

Keywords: focus groups, Greece, hospitality, mediation, migration, refugee crisis

Introduction

Debates on hospitality as a moral category for thinking about the relationship with the stranger have intensified since what has been largely described as the 'European refugee crisis' of 2015. Hospitality has acquired political currency as a discourse within which governments and institutions have framed their involvement in global refugee flows; it has been practiced by NGOs, volunteers and solidarity groups across Europe; and it has become the ultimate question posed to national publics and states about how to deal with the increased influx of migrants and asylum seekers reaching the European borders mostly through the Mediterranean. Campaigns such as #refugeeswelcome and the proliferation of refugee-supporting volunteer groups on the European borders demonstrate public willingness to embrace newcomers.

Alongside those, xenophobic attacks and the rise of far-right parties and political rhetoric have revealed divisions and challenges in hosting refugees in the European space.

This paper questions hospitality as an analytical metaphor for thinking about the relationship with the national other by exploring audience understandings of the 'refugee crisis'. Significant recent scholarship has illustrated how media narratives construct refugees as strangers or potential guests, and function as 'symbolic borders', representing and often marginalising migrants, while (re)negotiating communities of belonging (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017). How such media discourses enter the domain of everyday life and contribute to public understandings of the 'crisis' has hitherto remained largely unexplored. It is this lacuna that this article addresses by discussing how audiences in Athens construct meanings about questions of migration, as experienced over the last five years. Such understandings, as illustrated below, draw upon recognisable repertoires of media images and narratives about who the refugees are and what they experience. At the same time, however, hospitality, as a public ethical disposition towards newcomers in the national space, is embedded within specific socio-temporal contexts of everyday experience. As such, it is conditional upon national political and cultural discourses. These ultimately construct hierarchies of deservingness among different migrants, underlined by understandings of religion, gender and class, not only of the 'other' but also the national self. Hospitality and discussions about the stranger as 'guest' ultimately depend on implicit notions of home and the nation.

The article starts from a brief discussion of the concept of hospitality as a metaphor for thinking about the relationship with 'otherness'. After a short introduction to the Greek context of the research and its socio-political characteristics with regard to the 'refugee crisis' and a description of the research project, the discussion focuses on how migrants are constructed by participants' discussions as 'guests' in the national space, in a hierarchical way that re-affirms conditions for belonging. Ultimately, the article contributes to contemporary debates on

hospitality as everyday engagement with the foreigner, illustrating it as inherently limited. It also provides empirical insights into audience meaning-making processes adding to the body of studies on the mediation of the 'refugee crisis'. It thus contributes to a broader understanding about how public perceptions of questions of migration are constructed.

Hospitality and the refugee crisis

Hospitality, a concept with a long and interdisciplinary history, has acquired renewed analytical relevance within the current historical moment of increasing mobility and migration (Rosello, 2001: 2). As a theoretical construct and an analytical category, it poses the question of how to live with 'otherness' at a time, when the stranger is a constant presence both physically and through mediated encounters. Historically, hospitality has been understood both as a 'right' – of 'a stranger not to be treated in a hostile manner by another upon his arrival in another's territory' (Kant, 2006: 82), and an 'ethics' – which dictates 'to welcome *anyone*, any other, without checking at the border who he or she is […]' (Derrida and Düttmann, 1997: 8). Derrida (2003) has further distinguished between conditional and unconditional hospitality, the former juridical and reciprocal, the latter an ethical imperative in itself and with no obligation of reciprocity. Such a distinction points to the inherent ambivalence of the concept of hospitality: on one hand, it challenges the bounded nature of communities of belonging, asking for its expansion in order to include the 'stranger'; on the other hand, it reaffirms political communities by acknowledging their power to extent the duty to host the stranger (Friese, 2009).

Empirical studies on migration have illustrated hospitality as an always conditional and ultimately hierarchical structure, which constructs 'guests' as irreconcilably others, in ways that echo local hostilities (Carpi and Şenoğuz, 2019) and racist beliefs inherited by colonialism (Papataxiarchis, 2015: xxi). Hospitality structures and practices put in place by states, NGOs

and volunteer groups often re-enact power relations that not only reaffirm state sovereignty but actually produce and manage the alterity of refugees (Rozakou, 2012: 563). Enabling this power dynamic is the construction of refugees as worthy guests on the condition that they comply with the rules of hospitality set out by the hosts and are themselves apolitical subjects devoid of any agency (Carpi and Şenoğuz, 2019; Rozakou, 2012). Reaffirming the primacy of the host society, hospitality towards Syrian refugees has been used, for example, as a discursive device to promote state interests such as the promotion of regional leadership, as in the case of Turkey, or the organisation of welfare provision, as in Lebanon (Carpi and Şenoğuz, 2019). Hospitality is thus ultimately intertwined with concepts of national citizenship and belonging and is dependent on cultural perceptions of what counts as hospitality and who as a deserving guest (Molz and Gibson, 2007: 8–9).

Studies on the media coverage of the refugee crisis in different European contexts have reaffirmed the impossibility of a normative vision of media hospitality, which Silverstone envisioned as the moral imperative of openness of media institutions and narratives to the images and voices of distant others, the obligation to welcome the stranger in the symbolic space of the media (Silverstone, 2007: 139). Refugee voices have been consistently neglected in the coverage of the 'crisis', as journalists relied on national or European politicians as sources for their coverage (Berry et al, 2015). Such reporting enabled a partial, often distorted and ultimately hegemonic view of the crisis that reinforced the primacy of the national border. Through practices of de-personalisation, or even de-humanisation, of refugees, the media have facilitated their stereotyping either as powerless and dependent victims or as an imminent threat to European societies (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017). The latter trope has been exemplified in the representation of migrant men, vilified on the basis of an implicitly looming 'predatory sexuality and undisciplined male aggression' (Rettberg and Gajjala, 2016: 180), and enabled by the visual representations of refugees in groups of nameless bodies on boats, at

borders and reception centres that reinforced a political discourse of fear on the basis of an alleged threat of invasion (Krzyżanowski et al, 2018). The frame of victimization has constructed refugees as victims of international politics and brutal wars, smugglers and European policies (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017) but devoid of agency and political presence. Under such conditions of mediation, refugees ultimately remain an obscure presence in European media, voiceless and distant, despite their looming bodily presence. In that respect, the European press echoes the border logics of geopolitical borders and ultimately denies hospitality to refugees.

Such dominant media narratives constitute the discursive universe within which European publics encounter refugees and construct conditions of possibility for action, compassion and other forms of public engagement (Chouliaraki, 2008). However, the question of how media audiences and users engage with these narratives, appropriate or challenge them in the context of their everyday life remains open. Mediation is an intertextual process, given that 'social resources and experiences are drawn upon in the reception and interpretation of the media' (Fairclough, 1992: 204). In other words, audience engagement is dependent not only on media texts as representations, but also broader discursive frameworks people draw upon to make sense of them.

The very limited in number studies that have explored audience responses to the 'refugee crisis' provide a glimpse of how different media users engage with the issue in varied contexts. Mortensen and Trenz (2016) analysed discussions about the photograph of Alan Kurdi on reddit and concluded that discussants engaged with the image in different ways depending on their connection to the victim(s), politics and the media, which the authors categorize as emotional, critical-political, and reflexive. Nightingale and his colleagues (2017) analysed comments on asylum-seekers by listeners of a phone-in radio programme in Ireland and explored how callers 'deploy sympathy within an affective-discursive environment that is

prevailingly hostile or at best ambivalent' (Nightingale et al., 2017, p. 139), reiterating conditions for belonging and thus confirming the persistent power of the nation-state to exclude. Similarly, Cabañes's (2019) Filipino migrant research participants expressed a 'compromised solidarity' toward refugees, which reflected their own precarity as migrants in London.

It is such public responses, which need to be seen within the context of specific contingencies and against the socio-cultural backdrop within which they are embedded, that this article discusses. Despite the limitations and ambivalence of hospitality, the concept is employed here as an analytical metaphor for thinking about the relationship between publics in host societies and refugees. It is understood as an openness towards the stranger, in this case, the figure of the refugee, and a willingness to accept them in the national space. As a relational metaphor, hospitality allows us to reflect on how ideas both about newcomers and the home are constructed in audience discourses. Such an exploration further invites us to think beyond the duality of hospitable vs. inhospitable publics and consider the variety of ways engagement with refugees is expressed in everyday discourse. Hospitality, as the discussion below illustrates, is indeed hierarchical not only in juxtaposing hosts and strangers but also in differentiating between various perceived strangers. These hierarchies are conditional upon cultural beliefs and stereotypes, as well as ideas about national culture, which constitute the context within which people make sense of the 'refugee crisis' and relevant media narratives.

The refugee crisis in the Greek context

Greece has been at the limelight of the 'refugee crisis' since 2015, as the first point of entry for thousands of refugees fleeing war, persecution and deprivation in South Asia and the Middle East. As of August 2019, more than 88,000 people reside in Greece (UNHCR, 2019), a lot of them in overcrowded and ill-equipped hotspots (Asylum in Europe, n.d.), waiting for asylum

approval or resettlement in other European countries. As in most European countries, hospitality and support for refugees have been provided by NGOS, as well as volunteer solidarity groups. The latter have been at the forefront of rescue efforts and distribution of provisions and services to the newcomers. Acting in lieu and sometimes against government practices, they can be seen as a form of resistance against the state and an overt challenge to immigration and asylum policies (Rozakou, 2016).

The emergence of such forms of hospitality are starkly juxtaposed to the nationalist and xenophobic discourses best illustrated in the ascend to political power of Golden Dawn, the far-right, neo-nazi party that entered the Parliament in 2012, following a campaign exploiting and augmenting concerns about unemployment, rising levels of poverty, austerity and immigration. The presence of Golden Dawn in the public sphere has legitimised an exclusionary rhetoric of othering that has contributed to public debates about the 'refugee crisis'. Far-right ideas have found further expression in xenophobic acts, such as demonstrations against attempts to settle refugees in Greek cities (Edwards, 2018) or even destructive attacks against refugee hot spots (Kingsley, 2016).

Such competing discourses of humanitarian care expressed by the volunteering movement, and xenophobic sentiment illustrated and spurred by Golden Dawn, constitute important part of the public sphere within which the plight of the refugees is debated in Greece. The media contribute to this debate in ways similar to other European media, by reporting refugees in terms of 'flows', 'influx' and depersonalising numbers (Fotopoulos and Kaimaklioti, 2016). At the same time, research has shown that the Greek press has emphasised the geopolitical factors contributing to the refugee crisis more than other European media (Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017: 12). It has also differed from the press in other European countries in giving more voice to refugees, reporting citizen emotions almost as much as the refugees' and focusing more in

defensive measures and securitization, rather than humanitarian actions (Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017: 12).

Research outline

It is within this socio-political context that the mediation of hospitality towards refugees in Greece needs to be considered. The discussion that follows is based on focus group research conducted with members of the Greek public in the spring of 2018. The study was set out to explore how audiences engage with the 'refugee crisis' and the role of media in this engagement. Questions were consequently open-ended, focusing on participants' impressions and opinions over the arrival of refugees, their sources of information about the issue and their possible personal involvement.

Five group discussions, amounting to 25 participants in total, were conducted in Athens in May 2018. Participants ranged in terms of age, with two of the groups consisting of people in their 20s and the rest of participants in their late 30s and early 40s. They also varied in terms of socioeconomic status with two groups consisting of unemployed or low-paid and temporary employees, one of students, and two of professionals. Although by no means exhaustive, diversity in the focus groups has provided a range of opinions given the small scale of the research. Participants were recruited through snowballing sampling, whereby initially approached contacts gathered their acquaintances for research.

Focus groups were employed here on the basis that group conversation can illustrate 'not only what people think but how they think and why they think that way' (Kitzinger, 1995: 299). Using group interaction as empirical material, allows for the exploration of how meaning and knowledge are discursively constructed within social contexts. For the same reason, the focus groups consisted of peers, given that such groups have a social existence beyond the context of the research and therefore both support a more permissive environment for participants as

well as produce a debate that is likely to be reflective of the participants' social interaction, to the degree permitted by the constructed context of the research (Sasson, 1995: 20). In their discussions, participants drew upon varied media content, such as television news, documentaries and films, personal encounters and hearsay to discuss migration. Although these different levels of mediation become apparent in the analysis, the focus here is not on untangling them but rather on how, through discussing and arguing about the refugee crisis, research participants ultimately constructed hierarchies of hospitality differentially afforded to different groups of migrants.

Discussing the 'refugee crisis'

The open-endedness of the focus group discussions allowed participants to address the questions at hand in ways that were meaningful to them, and therefore focus on different aspects of the crisis. Although the number of groups does not allow for generalisable conclusions to be drawn, only small differences emerged between groups with different sociocultural capital. The group of unemployed and low-paid young people was the least engaged during the discussion and with the issue overall, as they claimed not to have discussed it extensively in their daily lives, whereas the group of students had actively volunteered in the previous years in refugee supporting schemes.

Gender, however, seemed to play a role in the way the 'refugee crisis' was discussed among participants. In most discussions, stories of individual refugees and volunteer initiatives, as remembered by the media or conversations with friends, were dominant topics. The use of emotional language to describe the participants' responses, such as *'shock'* and *'sadness'* characterised these discussions. However, the group consisting exclusively of professional men differed considerably both in terms of topics and the lack of affective language. They discussed the influx of refugees in terms of politics, focusing on political decisions and the responses of

the Greek or other European governments. These differences in the framing of the 'refugee crisis'[1] further constructed hospitality either as a compassionate response to a humanitarian question of suffering or as a political obligation, conditional on legal frameworks, state agreements and government choices.

The two frames were not competing or mutually exclusive. In some discussions, although emphasis was placed on the humanitarian emergency faced by the refugees, participants would sometimes draw upon political arguments in order to justify public discontent or their own inaction with regard to the emergency. These differences, however, echo findings of previous research that has revealed the gendered ways audiences engage with news of suffering (author, forthcoming). They are also illustrative of gendered patterns of political engagement and interests, themselves a reflection of gendered socialisation processes (Campbell and Winters, 2008).

Irrespective of how hospitality was discussed, however, in humanitarian or political terms, what was common among all discussions was its construction as differentially deserved by the diverse categories of newcomers. It is these hierarchies of deservingness, illustrating how participants positioned themselves in relation to refugees, that the rest of the analysis focuses on.

The politics of labelling: 'refugees' vs. 'migrants'

Underlying most of the discussions was an understanding of different levels of deservingness of hospitality towards newcomers on the basis of their perceived status as immigrants or refugees. These two categories were not always clear and were sometimes debated by participants. What such discussions highlighted was that the presence of different strangers

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[1] Framing is understood here as the selection of some aspects of the issue in a way that turned them more salient than others (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

within the national community is endowed with different moral demands. The following is an extract from the discussion with the group of men, who, focusing on the politics of migration, extensively debated the concept of the 'refugee' and its definition. The question in the following is whether desperation because of destitution or the threat of death are necessary conditions for someone becoming a refugee:

> Simos: I'm telling you, it's whether their life is in danger or not!
>
> Manolis: Is it OK, then, if they are just hungry? Are they then considered economic immigrants? And they are a refugee, if they are at risk of being shot?
>
> Simos: That's exactly it.
>
> Manolis: Isn't this weird, though?
>
> Pantelis: It's not weird, this is the distinction.
>
> Manolis: In other words, if someone's hungry and lives on the streets, their life is not in danger?
>
> Haris: No, the motivation is different! The distinction is now institutionalised. This is the UN definition.
>
> (FG3, male professionals)

Whereas the difficulties in labelling newcomers as 'refugees' or 'immigrants' due to the complexity of reasons that force people to migrate are pointed out, the discussion ultimately constructs a hierarchy of deservingness on the basis of a perceived hierarchy of motivations for leaving the homeland. Worthiness of hospitality is constructed as dependent on certain understandings of victimhood caused by war and devoid of agency and choice. The refugee is understood as the figure of absolute desperation, whose life is under immediate threat. It is this helplessness and desperation that provide their expectations of hospitality with legitimacy. On

the other hand, economic destitution is seen as inadequate cause to provide economic migrants' claims the same moral weight. Their motivation is seen as a choice and by extension as opportunistic decision-making. Deservingness is ultimately linked to different kinds of agency and preserved for those who are seen as having none.

This distinction was reflected in other discussions, as it was taken for granted by many participants and used to justify differential treatment of newcomers. In the following extract, one of the participants compliments the work put by Greek bureaucrats into deciding who is eligible for asylum:

> Dora: Not all of them have papers but they all claim to be Syrians. And through the interviews they realise a guy might be a Syrian, but he doesn't know the name of his village, what it borders with, the local customs.
>
> Lila: Especially in the beginning, everyone was talking about this! Afghans, Iraqis took advantage of the refugee issue, no matter whether they were economic migrants or there's war in their country […]!
>
> (FG2, low-income employees)

Interestingly, the category of 'Syrians' seems to be equated here with that of 'refugees', as asylum seekers *'all claim to be'* the former rather than the latter. The discussion reflects media reports participants remembered, which reproduced hierarchies between refugees and migrants and by extension among different nationalities. Afghans were constructed as immigrants, and by extension undeserving of hospitality, in most discussions, despite being the second refugee population in the world and the deteriorating security conditions in the country being acknowledged by UNHCR as grounds for driving people from their homes (UNHCR, 2018). Such a narrow understanding of the status of refugee reflects contemporary EU policies, which are discouraging granting of asylum to Afghans, especially during the context of the 'crisis'

(Sajjad, 2018), as well as relevant media definitions of who counts as a refugee. As visibility of refugees in the media has been low, if non-existent, before 2015, the issue has been almost exclusively linked in public discourse to the Syrian civil war. This point was reiterated by one of the participants, who described meeting an Afghan restaurant-owner in Athens and being surprised at finding out that he grew up amidst a war that has been ravaging his country of origin for '*40 years*', because '*we never hear anything about Afghanistan*' (FG1, female professionals).

The hierarchy in terms of deservingness of hospitality inherent in the distinction between refugee and immigrant, therefore, is reflected in a hierarchy between Syrians and other national and ethnic groups in the country. The 'European refugee crisis' as reported on and experienced through the media made Syrian refugees visible, while obscuring the plight of other asylum seekers, who have consistently fled the dire conditions in their home countries over several years and before the critical moment of 2015 (Guidero and Hallward, 2018). Media coverage of the refugee crisis since 2015 has reproduced stereotypes of migrants not only as 'threats' and 'victims' but also as almost exclusively Syrians. Such a narrow understandings of the category of refugee, as emerging from the focus group discussions, highlights how the perceived 'crisis' has functioned as a filter through which audiences came to (mis)understand the dynamics of global flows of people, distorting and obscuring the complex nature of global conflict and structural violence. It also illustrates the conditionality of hospitality on ideas of deservingness bound with the legal language of nationality and international politics.

Syrians as the 'deserving refugees'

The construction of Syrians as 'deserving' newcomers was evident in all discussions, as the term 'refugee' was used interchangeably with that of 'Syrian'. Despite the fact that conflicts among different ethnic migrant groups in the hospitality camps were mentioned in some of the

discussions, the homogeneity of the refugee experience as discussed in the media and exemplified in the figure of the Syrian refugee was never questioned by research participants, not even by the most highly critical and reflective among them. These conflicts were described as proof of the moral superiority of Syrian refugees, who *'don't like the others either. They consider them uncivilised'* (Dora, FG2, low-income employees).

The deservingness of the refugee, understood as the Syrian migrant, was constructed not only through a humanitarian framework, reflected on expressions of empathetic identification with suffering people, common in most discussions, but also a perceived common national experience of forceful displacement. Displacement has been part of the national collective narrative and traumatic historical past of Greece, mostly linked to the Greek populations that fled Asia Minor after the Turkish-Greek conflict of 1919-1922. This historic moment was discussed by participants as enabling expressions of solidarity and empathy with the Syrian newcomers:

> Dinos: I am certain that this experience, the somehow national experience, that a lot of people have refugee stories in their family, displacement as part of their family history, this has also been something that has contributed to how people reacted. To the solidarity and support expressed.

> (FG5, students)

Another group directly compared historic images of Asia Minor Greek refugees with contemporary media stories of Syrians:

> Dora: The parallelisms are exactly the same! The only thing that changes is the fashion of the time, isn't it?

> Thodoris: It's the same images! Children playing in the dirt! […]

Dora: The only thing that changes is the fashion of the era. Even the facial expressions are the same. Because parallels were drawn then, they [the media] had shown images from back then together with images of refugees now and even the faces had the same exhaustion.

(FG2, low-income employees)

The 'refugee crisis' is understood through the lens of the historical national narrative, which engenders empathetic identification with the traumatised newcomers. The past is being used to make moral evaluations and connections within the present. The evocation of collective memory in the discussion of the 2015 refugee emergency is illustrative of the way crises are often experienced as multi-temporal conditions (Kirtsoglou, 2018) bringing together points in time that are temporarily and often culturally disparate. Ostensibly, these temporal affective connections enable emotional connections with the newcomers and the extension of hospitality to Syrian refugees on the basis of the idea of a shared humanity. At the same time, however, they illustrate cosmopolitan empathy with the stranger as conditional on the national narrative (author, 2014). This exposes the limited and contingent character of hospitality, dependent on an understanding of shared experience. Furthermore, the space of empathy these temporal connections construct is limited to Syrian refugees. Their story of forceful displacement fits collective narratives of escaping war inscribed in national memory. Media images and reports reinforce these apparent similarities. It is cultural stereotypes about the national self and the 'other' that ultimately support them.

The hierarchical understandings of asylum seekers, therefore, do not just reflect media discourses dominant in Europe but also social and cultural beliefs, which are best understood when placed within the specific sociohistorical context of contemporary Greece and conceptualisations of national belonging and the national character. In the following, I will

illustrate how the deservingness attributed to Syrian refugees is intertwined with (mis)understandings and cultural ideas about religion, gender and class and the special place Syrians are thought to occupy within these dimensions. These ideas illustrate perceptions of assimilability due to perceived cultural proximity as central preconditions of hospitality.

'*Syrians are cooler people…*'

Shared experiences of displacement aside, Syrian newcomers were also constructed as 'better guests' in the national space due to perceived cultural similarities with Greeks. The idea of cultural proximity to Syria was mentioned in most focus groups. In the following, research participants argue that it is easier for Syrians to integrate into Greek society:

> Haris: Culturally, this is a long discussion. But if you want to start this discussion, yes, a Syrian is not the same as a Pakistani or an Iraqi.

> Simos: Syrians are cooler people in comparison to other Muslims.

> Haris: Syrians are closer to our own standards. Someone who has come from a place where life was cheaper, ok, it's much more difficult.

> Pantelis: I believe that Syrians are a people that is more secular, in the sense that they are the least fanatic in comparison to those over there.

> (FG3, male professionals)

The national (*'our standards'*) is used again as a way of identifying with the stranger, while the perceived ability to integrate is the criterion for deservingness of hospitality. This deservingness is juxtaposed to *'those over there'*, namely other Muslims, such as Pakistanis and Iraqis. Interestingly, it is attitudes in relation to religion that are used to create this dichotomy.

Religion was extensively discussed by another group, as an indicator of cultural proximity, when one of the participants made the claim that a lot of commonalities with Syrians rest on the fact that they are, in their vast majority, Christians. Despite being challenged by the rest of the group, she seemed unconvinced by their arguments. Later on, another participant said that her mother had made the same assumption:

> Dora: I would see my mother and many times when she would talk, she'd highlight the religious element. Meaning that they too are mostly Christian. And I was telling her that it doesn't matter whether they are Christian or not. They are a people that is suffering at this moment and families are fleeing. In general, because she's very religious, she would take it further, that the specific refugees are Christians, they are closer to me. That's it! A Muslim is in general evil! He has hatred inside of him.

> (FG2, low-income employees)

Misinformation and misunderstandings aside, evident in the discussions above are Islamophobic undertones, which construct Muslims as *'fanatic'*, *'evil'* and their lives as *'cheap'*. At different points in the discussion immigrants other than Syrians were also described as *'backwards'* or even *'savages'*. While such descriptions are used to differentiate Syrian refugees from other newcomers and emphasize that they are welcomed guests, they ultimately conflate various migrant cultures with religion and construct Islam as an incompatible other to Greek culture. Such 'culturalist thinking', assuming the existence of common beliefs and practices within discrete ethnic groups (Vertovec, 2011: 243), is symptomatic of a broader Orientalist and Islamophobic rhetoric in Europe, which has been the backbone of recent anti-immigration discourses, as well as media coverage of the 'refugee crisis' (Kirtsoglou and Tsimouris: 2018).

At the same time, the Muslim 'other' has historically and culturally played an important role in the configuration of the modern Greek state, which in effect is not secular in a liberal sense (Kirtsoglou and Tsimouris, 2018). Greece as a modern state was established in opposition to the Ottoman occupation and its dominant religion. As such, the national – Orthodox – self has been constructed against the Islamic 'other', which has historically been defined as Turkey, the eternal external enemy (Sakellariou, 2019). The separation between state and church has never been completed, as – Orthodox – religious education is part of the national curriculum and the Greek Orthodox church plays an important role in policy decisions, often by harnessing, cultivating or even inflaming public opinion[2]. Islamophobia in Greece takes, therefore, a particular character, at the intersection of historical, political and religious factors. Even when not explicitly expressed in the political discourse of the far-right or arguments against immigration, the idea of Islam as the ultimate national other is central in the understanding of national identity.

Although ideas about Islam underlined all discussions on migrant groups coming from Muslim-majority countries, Syrians were described as easier to integrate in Greek society because of their perceived distance from what participants saw as a fanatical Islam. Distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' Muslims, made on the basis of Western secular criteria, have proliferated after September 11 but can be traced further back in colonial and neo-colonial orientalist discourses (Mamdani, 2002). Ultimately, they employ the idea of culture, *'our'* – Western – *'standards'*, to both express fears about the alien and highlight assimilation as a precondition for hospitality.

'Savage' men and civilized families

The juxtaposition of Western 'secular' values to a fanatical and backwards Islam and related notions of assimilability were intertwined with gender ideas embedded in broader discourses

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[2] Illustrative of this are the delays in the building of a mosque in Athens, which, albeit a multicultural centre, remains one of the few European capitals without a mosque.

about Western modernity and the Greek 'way of life'. In particular, the figure of the Muslim migrant man was singled out as a threat, not only cultural, as an outsider with values foreign to Greek society, but even physical, his presence and dispositions threatening to women. In the following extract, a participant who had encountered refugees on the boat back from her island holiday some years back, describes how she found the presence of some of these refugees threatening:

> Lila: Some of them were savages. I mean, sometimes my boyfriend had to take me to the toilet. Both their faces and the way they were looking! Their eyes popped out, cos they saw a woman.

> (FG2, low-income employees)

Such assumptions about the inherently sexually repressive nature of Islam, which by extension render Muslim men threatening, were present in other discussions too. In the following, a participant is explaining his comment that he gets annoyed with some migrants he sees on the beach:

> Haris: Young women come to the beach dressed in a peculiar way…Well, when 2-3 men start going behind them, OK, then there is an issue. They are a bit more conservative on some issues and this becomes evident. But not in their majority.

> (FG3, male professionals)

These arguments echo broader anxieties about gender, articulated within immigration debates in Europe, especially after the Cologne incidents of alleged sexual assaults. They are also characteristic of a broader racialised framework of constructing Islam that renders attitudes towards gender and sexuality as central markers of difference between Western modernity and Islamic parochialism, ultimately stigmatising Muslim men (Farris, 2017).

It is exactly because they personify these broader anxieties about immigration as well as (neo)oriental attitudes towards the perceived inferiority of Islam that young Muslim men ultimately constitute synechdochical representations of Islamophonia (Kirtsoglou and Tsimouris, 2018: 1881). At the same time, not abiding to the conformist and socially respectable framework of familial life, singe migrant men are seen as 'untamed' and 'undisciplined', not only harder to assimilate but also threatening to social order (Rozakou, 2015: 347–348).

In this context, it is families, women and children, that abide to the normative framework of the 'good refugee'. Templates of media reporting have set the parameters of this framework of understanding of what being a refugee looks like. In the extract below, participants argue that questions of migrants are addressed differently, depending on whether they are from Syria or not:

> Athina: Personally, it might be a phobic reaction, but I would very hesitantly approach, let's say, an Afghan man as opposed to if I would see a family.

> Meropi: Maybe this has played a role. That when there was the influx from Syria, you would see families, you wouldn't see just men.

> (FG1, female professionals)

As they go on to discuss stories of – Syrian – families that were attempting to reunite in Northern Europe or had left members behind, participants pointed out the melodramatic nature of Greek television news, which are *'emotionally charged, with music and stuff'* (Artemis, FG1), focusing on dramas of specific families. It is, therefore, again, the relative visibility of Syrian refugees, represented in the media as families rather than individuals, during the 'refugee crisis' that constructed and reproduced a template for the 'deserving refugee' and conditions of hospitality.

'People with good jobs and money'

Besides their perceived relative secularism and progressiveness in terms of gender relations, there was a third dimension that emerged in the discussions as seemingly distinguishing Syrian refugees. This had to do with their perceived economic status as middle-class subjects. The group of students are trying to make this point in the extract below, in order to point out what they see as public misconceptions about refugees:

> Korina: […] we all think that these were pitiful, extremely poor people, when they were all people with good jobs, with money, I mean.

> Dina: Yes, this too, that they're Third World people.

> Korina: What about the basic fact? That one needs about 4,000 euros to come here!

> (FG5, students)

Material wealth and occupational status are used to differentiate among migrants and single out Syrians as people that are more advanced than other groups crossing the borders. In another discussion, one of the participants tried to explain why he does not necessarily connect poverty with the refugee experience, drawing upon encounters he had with refugees walking from the Elliniko encampment to the nearby beach:

> Haris: The refugees that made it here, you see them being more well-off, in cleaner clothes, their mobile phones are better. And obviously they have whatever they managed to bring in terms of money…

When later on in the discussion he is asked to clarify what he means, he hesitates:

> Haris: I mean, you see some shabby, poor people…those sit [differently]. OK, it might sound a bit weird the way I am saying it.

Simos: These look more noble?

Haris: Yes…noble…

Manolis: Basically, they are like us, say it! As if we were to leave our countries now! And went sunbathing in another country. Like us!

H: Yes! I know it doesn't sound good…

(FG3, male professionals)

The conversation is interesting both for the hierarchy it constructs among migrants, as well as the research participant's hesitation to openly express it, knowing that *'it sounds bad'* to distinguish between *'shabby, poor people'* and Syrians. Nevertheless, what transpires is that Syrians are ultimately seen to be *'like us'* due to their embodied performance of middle-class status. Bodily postures and attire are taken as signifiers not only of dignity and respectability (Chouliaraki and Musarò, 2017: 542) but also of cultural similarity with the Greek hosts and by extension assimilability. Embodied economic capital, in this case, is seemingly equated to the cultural capital at the basis of national belonging.

This embodied performance of class was extensively debated in another group, where one of the participants brought up her surprise at meeting a Syrian woman so 'well-groomed' that she had tattooed her eyebrows:

Lila: I had only found out a month ago that you could have your eyebrows tattooed! I mean, you can imagine how ahead of the times she was. I am sure all of them were educated, 300%. She used to be an optician at her country. Obviously educated, somewhere in Europe, somewhere definitely more advanced than Greece, since she had her eyebrows tattooed.

(FG2, low-income employees)

Elements of bodily performance are identified once more as indicators of middle-class status, as well as more *'advanced'* lifestyles, which the participant perceives as interlinked with high levels of education. More interestingly, she equates such advanced lifestyles and education with Europe. Later in the discussion, another participant also attempted to differentiate Syrians from other migrant groups in Greece by emphasising their more progressive attitudes:

> Thodoris: But the headscarf and stuff were only implemented lately in Syria. I've seen photos from Syria in the 70-80s and…Syrian women look European! I mean both in terms of money and education. It's only lately, because of the wars, that Islam has imposed headscarves and distinctions. Syria used to be very advanced.

> (FG2, low-income employees)

It is particularly in this last quote that the gendered and class dimensions of Orientalist perceptions about Islam, as discussed above, are best illustrated. Markers of socioeconomic status (money and education) are discussed alongside symbols of gender emancipation (lack of headscarf); both types are equated to Western lifestyles (*European*), constructed as *'very advanced'* and by extension closer to Greek culture. Constructing a hierarchy between the West and countries of Muslim migrants, the discussion further reflects a hierarchy among migrants that are perceived to be closer to Western standards and those that are not. Public perceptions of Islam combine here with neoliberal ideas that equate value with economic success (Kirtsoglou and Tsimouris, 2018) in creating narratives of the 'assimilable' and therefore deserving other.

Conclusion:

Hospitality, as a metaphor for engaging with the stranger, is illustrated in the focus group discussions as underlined by stereotypes both about the 'other' as well as the national self. Its main precondition is the assimilability of the stranger in the national space. As such, it is

ultimately limited in constructing relations of solidarity between hosts and newcomers. Research participants constructed hierarchies of hospitality, which not only reflected the power dynamics between host societies and their newcomers but also perceived differences among migrant groups. At the basis of these hierarchies are ideas about the national community and its way of life, which are employed as evaluative criteria for the assimilability of different newcomers and, by extension, their deservingness of hospitality. These criteria centre around three main discourses, namely religion, gender and economic capital. Within these three axes, some migrants were categorised as more parochial and threatening than others and, by extension, less assimilable with hegemonic ideas of what constitutes Greek culture and society. Ultimately, the focus group discussions revealed semantic processes that designate some national strangers 'as *stranger than others*' (Ahmed, 2000: 6; emphasis in the original). Hospitality in this context is bound with national identity and ideas of cultural proximity and, by extension, assimilability and social control (Molz and Gibson 2007).

These understandings of hospitality are constructed at the intersection of different kinds of mediations. They are expressive of lay understandings of international asylum policies, which are employed as formal criteria of deservingness among different groups of migrants. They are framed by cultural stereotypes and prejudices, which echo broader postcolonial ideas of Western superiority and Islamophobia, as well as prejudices based on narrow definitions of national culture. They are also informed by direct encounters and interaction with migrants in physical spaces of everyday life. They are, finally, mediated by media narratives that have variably reported on the refugee experience over time and among different groups of migrants. This coverage was important in framing audience understandings of migration and asylum not only in terms of the type of images present in the media, often stereotypical in character, but also in terms of significant absences of representation. As discussed above, the framing of the 'refugee crisis' as an issue concerning virtually exclusively Syrian refugees has contributed to

a limited understanding of the conditions of contemporary displacement. Ultimately, it is under these complex dynamics, embedded within specific national and cultural contexts, that hospitality needs to be considered.

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