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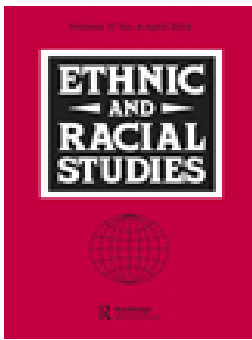
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Violence against migrants in Greece: beyond the Golden Dawn

Lena Karamanidou

Department of Sociology, City University London, UK

ABSTRACT

Violence perpetrated against migrants by Golden Dawn was rarely investigated or prosecuted by Greek authorities and was discursively constructed as exceptional, contrary to the norms of Greek democracy and committed by marginalized individuals and groups. The article argues that state responses have been shaped by racialized discourses and policies on migration and racism. Anti-migrant violence has been legitimated through three interlinked discursive strategies: a narrative of 'isolated events'; the denial of its racialized nature; and the rationalization of both state and non-state anti-migrant violence as a regrettable yet understandable defensive reaction to the threats posed by migration.

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KEYWORDS Migration; violence; racism; discourse; Greece

1. Introduction

Violence against migrants increased during the Greek austerity crisis, in parallel with the political rise of the extreme right party Golden Dawn (*Chrysi Avgi*) (Dalakoglou 2013; Human Rights Watch (HRW) 2012; Ombudsman 2013). Physical assaults, attacks against migrant properties and verbal aggression were directed at predominantly Muslim, non-white migrants of Asian, Middle Eastern and African origin (HRW 2012; Racist Violence Recording Network (RVRN) 2013, 2014). While incidents of violence against migrants in socioeconomically deprived areas of Athens occurred initially in the context of residents' urban movements (Kandylis and Kavoulakos 2011), there is little doubt that Golden Dawn members and supporters were responsible for the majority of attacks between 2011 and 2013, often described as racially motivated by their victims (Amnesty International (AI) 2012; Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) 2013; RVRN 2013).

Bucking the European trend of increasingly legislating and policing racist violence (Bleich 2007) Greek authorities showed reluctance to Department

CONTACT Lena Karamanidou  lena.karamanidou@gcu.ac.uk

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of Sociology, City University London investigate and prosecute racially motivated attacks (CHR 2013; Xenakis 2013). Under considerable domestic and international criticism, the government introduced specialized police offices and a phone line for reporting racist violence (Ministry for Public Order and Citizen Protection (MPOCP) 2012a; Ombudsman 2013). An internal affairs investigation into the infiltration of the police by Golden Dawn was ordered in 2013, following the assassination of a left-wing activist by Golden Dawn members in 2013, and several members of the party, including elected representatives, were arrested. Investigations and prosecutions of assaults against migrants, however, remained rare (Ombudsman 2013; RVRN 2014).

The Minister for Public Order (hereafter MPO) of the coalition government led by the conservative New Democracy party referred to anti-migrant violence as a 'new phenomenon', a 'terra incognita' for the Greek police (MPOCP 2012b). While admitting a 'considerable increase of racist attacks over the last period' (Government of Greece 2013a, 1) the government claimed that they were committed by 'specific individuals and groups' whose ideological beliefs are 'foreign to our political culture, the values underpinning Greek society, our history and democratic traditions' (Government of Greece 2013b, 2) and who were disaffected by austerity measures (Government of Greece 2013a). PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement), the centre-left coalition partner, similarly rejected the violence as incompatible with the norms of liberal democracies (2013). Racially motivated violence was thus represented as alien to Greek political life and the principles of liberal democratic states, and racism constructed as an ideology of marginalized groups and individuals.

This discursive framing of violence perpetrated by the Golden Dawn obscured the extent to which violence against migrants has been exercised – and expansively documented by human rights organizations and the media – by both by state and non-state actors, during and before the crisis. It equally obscures the long-term reluctance of the Greek state to address it (AI 1992, 2012; Baldwin-Edwards 2005; FRA 2013). I argue that government's discursive strategies drew on existing representations and strategies of legitimization of state and non-state violence against migrants, embedded in discourses and practices of securitizing migration that dominated the transformation of Greece into a country of transit and settlement, and in domestic social constructions of security institutions as protectors of the imagined nation against internal and external enemies. While the significance of these contexts for tolerating hostility is acknowledged in recent scholarship (e.g. Cabot 2014; Dalakoglou 2013; Triandafyllidou and Kouki 2014; Xenakis 2013) there is little systematic analysis on the actual content and argumentation of political discourses on violence against migrants.

To this end, I perform a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of a corpus of 138 documents containing political discourse and argue that anti-migrant violence was legitimated through three interlinked discursive strategies

employed by successive Greek administrations: a narrative of 'isolated events' denying the systemic, institutional nature of anti-migrant violence; the denial of its racialized nature; and the rationalization of both state and non-state anti-migrant violence as a regrettable yet understandable defensive reaction to the threats posed by migration. I analyse these strategies following a discussion of the theoretical framework and methodology.

2. Theorizing violence against migrants in the Greek context

Greece was transformed from a country of emigration to a country of settlement and transit since the early 1990s, first for migrants from Eastern European and Balkan countries following the collapse of communist regimes, and later on in the 2000s, for migrants from predominantly Middle Eastern, Asian and African countries fleeing conflict and political instability (Cheliotis 2013; Triandafyllidou and Kouki 2014). At the same time, the expansion of the European Union (EU) migration and asylum regime rendered Greece an entry point to the EU and a first country of asylum to which migrants could be returned on the basis of the Dublin II (now III) regulation (Cabot 2014; Karamanidou and Schuster 2012). Policies prioritized control measures, short-term status tied to employment over long-term settlement and integration, and inhibited access to asylum procedures and refugee protection (Cheliotis 2013; Triandafyllidou and Kouki 2013). They rendered migrants vulnerable to economic marginalization and destitution – especially given the lack of reception infrastructure and welfare support – and undermined the realization of migrants rights (Cabot 2014; Karamanidou and Schuster 2012; Rozakou 2012).

Political and media discourses have been dominated by the twin frames of illegality and securitization. Migrants were labelled *lathrometanastes* – illegal immigrants – suggesting their exclusion from lawful presence or refugee protection (Karamanidou 2007; Pavlou 2009). Migration was associated with increased criminality, seen as threatening the employment of Greek citizens, and challenging conceptions of Greek national identity (Pavlou 2009; Tsitselikis 2013). Migrants were represented both as culturally different and inferior – economically undeveloped and espousing non-western values that are incompatible with Greek or European culture (Pavlou 2009; Triandafyllidou and Kouki 2013; Troumbetta 2000). Hostile representations intensified during the crisis when media and political rhetoric – both by the mainstream parties and the extreme right – used migrants as scapegoats for social issues such as unemployment, economic and social marginalization, urban unrest (Cheliotis 2013; Triandafyllidou and Kouki 2014).

Nevertheless, Greek political actors have refuted the association between discourses and practices towards migrants and racism, whose existence in Greek society has been frequently denied in political discourse. Greek attitudes and behaviours have been represented as open and tolerant, guided

by a tradition (or myth) of hospitality (Cheliotis 2013; Rozakou 2012; Troumbetta 2000). Such denials of racism, observed in many national settings, establish both individuals and social collectivities as non-racist, reject racism as an ideology and reaffirm western values of tolerance and non-discrimination (Herzfeld 2007; Van Dijk 1993). In the Greek context, they have been accompanied by the construction of racism as an understandable response to the presence of a migrant, threatening Other (Cheliotis 2013; Herzfeld 2011; Triandafyllidou and Kouki 2014). While the socio-economic crisis accentuated intolerance and processes of Othering, it would be misleading to refer to an 'emergence' of racism (Triandafyllidou and Kouki 2014, 431) since exclusion, racism and discrimination towards the Other have a considerably longer history in Greece. National identity has been predominantly based on ideas of common descent – expressed through metaphors of 'blood' – religion and culture (Just 1989; Ventoura 2004). In the process of nation-building and constructing a homogeneous national identity, minorities – such as the Turkish, Roma, Macedonian and Jewish – were assimilated or excluded (Just 1989; Troumbetta 2000; Tsitselikis 2013). Although membership to the EU and the incorporation of human rights regimes led to a greater recognition of cultural difference and minority rights (Tsitselikis 2013), legacies of intolerance and exclusion of the Other inform policies and attitudes towards migrants in the post-1990 context (Papataxiarchis 2006; Ventoura 2004).

Violence against migrants is an extreme manifestation of racism (Solomos and Schuster 2002), perceived here both as an ideology and set of social practices that produce exclusion and inequality on the basis of the social significance attributed to biological, cultural or social characteristics (Miles and Brown 2003; Solomos and Back 1996). For Goldberg (2002), modern states are not overtly racist but racial because they govern through practices of administrative categorization and population control which draw boundaries and hierarchies around ethnicity, race but also national membership and citizenship status. State practices and discourses are thus crucial in racializing groups (Rattansi 2005; Solomos and Back 1996) and denials of racism are instrumental in denying that overt racism motivates actions or informing policies (Herzfeld 2007; Van Dijk 1993). Anti-migrant violence is therefore seen as racialized because it is embedded in regimes of migration controls, which exemplify practices of categorization, exclusion and sovereignty in modern states (Garner 2007; Soguk 1999; Weber and Pickering 2011). It is rooted in processes of racialization, by which social groups are designated as 'race-like', are socially differentiated and problematized (Goldberg 2002; Rattansi 2005). Since the modern state owns the monopoly of the means of violence (Weber 1978) its exercise can be defended for protecting its citizens against – often socially constructed – internal and external threats (Malesevic 2010; Wieviorka 1995). Violence against migrants is also racializing because its embeddedness in state practices reproduces migrants as threatening and different. This conceptualization of

violence challenges official narratives of anti-migrant violence as the product on individual motivations and pathologies (Blee 2005), since it sees violence as embedded in social practices and discourses.

Despite the lack of official data, there is considerable evidence that Greek security agencies have consistently exercised violence – verbal and physical, amounting in extreme cases to torture – in their interactions with migrants (AI 1992, 2012; Cabot 2014; Cheliotis 2013; CHR 2013). Violent practices such as preventing the arrival of migrant boats, forcible refoulement and shootings of migrants have been regularly observed during border controls (Amnesty International 2015; Christopoulos 2014). Similarly, mistreatment of migrants has been recorded during the exercise of internal controls such as identity checks, arrests for immigration or other offences, or arrest-and-deport operations such as *Xenios Zeus* in 2012 (AI 2012; Baldwin-Edwards 2005; Cheliotis 2013; CPT 2001; HRW 2012). While Greek security agencies also use excessive force against Greek citizens (AI 2012; Xenakis 2013), and they are not exceptional in engaging in violent practices, the systemic and institutionalized employment of violence against migrants is related to the social and historical functions of the Greek security agencies.

Historically, the police and the military have been tasked with protecting the nation against both internal, political enemies – such as communists post-war – and external threats (Antonopoulos 2006; Christopoulos 2014). Rooted in the authoritarian legacies of Greek democracy, these tendencies account for a culture of unaccountability and impunity since violence against migrants is seen as legitimate defence against an external threats (Christopoulos 2014; Tsoukala 2005; Xenakis 2013). In addition, a weak culture of human rights meant that since state institutions have prioritized collective interests and national security (Papapantoleon 2014). Accordingly, not only the police, but also the justice system have failed to systematically address violence against migrants, characterized by deficiencies in matters of investigating and prosecuting, lack of impartiality in administrative and judicial procedures, excessive delays and overtly lenient sanctions (AI 2012; CHR 2013; Ombudsman 2013; Papapantoleon 2014; Pavlou 2009).

3. Methodology

I adopt a CDA approach in order to explore how institutional actors in Greece have constructed anti-migrant violence and justified responses and practices related to it. For CDA discourses are articulated by social actors and institutions in specific historical, social and political contexts and are interrelated with social institutions and practices (Fairclough 2009; Reisigl and Wodak 2009). Not only do they shape the construction of social problems but they are also instrumental, through argumentation, in legitimating policy responses to them (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012; Reisigl and Wodak 2009).

The analysis draws on a corpus of 136 publically available documents covering a period of twenty years, from 1994 to 2014. The corpus includes three genres of documents:

- official responses to reports by the European Council against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Council of Europe's Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Other Degrading treatment (hereafter CPT) and Commissioner for Human Rights, and government submissions to the UN Human Rights Periodic review;
- press releases by the Ministry for Public Order and Citizen Protection and
- parliamentary proceedings including debates, oral and written government responses to parliamentary scrutiny questions.¹

These genres reflect discourses articulated by Greek governments² and institutions in addressing both international and domestic audiences and were identified as appropriate on the basis of previous research on migration in Greece. The main criterion for inclusion was relevance – containing statements by political actors on violence against migrants. Priority was given to statements made by government officials and Members of Parliament (MP); however, some parliamentary debates were included despite the absence of responses to statements by opposition MPs, since this occurrence was significant in itself. All official responses were sourced from the relevant organizations' websites. Parliamentary proceedings were located through combinations of the keywords 'racism' 'racist' 'violence' 'mistreatment' 'migrants' and 'police' in order to facilitate the location of texts where violence might not be referred to as racist. Identified texts were then searched internally using the Control + F function to confirm eligibility for inclusion. Some MPOCP press material was located in the same manner but since the website's search engine did not provide results from archived documents, I read through lists of press releases, excluding those that appeared unlikely to contain relevant content.³ While there is a likelihood that relevant material was overlooked, the processes followed produced a corpus is representative and sufficient for the research aims of this project, although text availability was limited in the earlier part of the examined period – the issue appeared to be less prominent at that time. A summary of the documents used is provided in Table 1. Supplementary texts including discursive constructions related to racism were drawn from previous research on the political discourse of migration and asylum.

The analysis focused on the main *themes* or *topoi* in representations of anti-migrant violence and the argumentation strategies (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012; Reisigl and Wodak 2009) speakers employ in legitimating policies and practices. I adopted a deductive/inductive approach to developing analytical categories – some ('isolated events' and 'denial of racism') emerged from the literature and others (e.g. 'no evidence'/'commitment to combatting

Table 1. Summary of documents analysed.

Genre	Number of documents
Government responses and submissions to human rights organizations	
European Commission against Racism and Intolerance	4
European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment	15
Commissioner for Human Rights	2
UN Human Rights Council	2
Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination	4
Total	27
Parliament proceedings	
Debates	36
Oral questions	32
Written replies by ministries	20
Total	88
Press releases – MCPPO	21
Total documents	136

violence') from the analysis of texts. Both digital – using NVivo qualitative software – and tactile (paper) coding were employed to ensure consistency in the application of the analytical themes. The *topoi* and argumentation resulting from the analysis were then organized into the three key narratives which are presented in this article. The analysis also aimed to ascertain continuities and disruptions between the long-term framing of anti-migrant violence.

The data analysis revealed that government actors – with the exception of official submissions to UN agencies – rarely bring up the issue themselves. They either respond to references to violence against migrants by other social actors – human rights organizations, opposition MPs or journalists – or sometimes, in parliamentary debates, they do not respond at all (HP 2004, 2009a, 2013a). The narrow focus on government-level has obscured to some extent, acknowledgements of racist violence and criticisms towards state agencies by left-wing opposition parties. However, it produced clear and chronologically persistent *topoi* and argumentation strategies, which are explored in the following sections.

4. 'Isolated events' and 'no evidence': violence as not systemic

A first narrative, identified in the relevant literature (AI 2012; Christopoulos 2014), constructs anti-migrant violence as a series of 'isolated events' rather than a systemic or social practice. While employed mostly in conjunction to violence perpetrated by security agencies, it is also adopted in relation to its exercise by non-state actors. In response to concerns raised by ECRI in 1999, the then PASOK government referred to 'very few and isolated instances of hostile behaviour by individuals outside the mainstream of society' (ECRI 1999, 24), mirroring the discursive framing of Golden Dawn violence as exceptional and marginalized.

Incidents of mistreatment by state agencies are referred to as ‘scant’ (MPO 2000, 23), ‘isolated’ or ‘individual’ ‘incidents’ (CERD 2009, 36; Government of Greece 2009, 12; MPO 2002), ‘very few’ (HP 2011a, 10848), ‘isolated cases’ (HRC 2011, 11) or, as stated in relation to the shooting of an Albanian migrant, an ‘unfortunate moment’ (HP 2001). The chronological spread of the narrative indicates not only its durability but also its employment by administrations of different political affiliations. Only the PASOK-led administration of 2009–2011 diverged from it by admitting the problematic nature of the unauthorized use of violence as a problem in parliamentary documents and ministry communications – although not in responses to international organizations. This departure from dominant narratives is attributable to both differentiation from the previous New Democracy (ND) government, criticized for its policies and practices towards migrants (CHR 2009; CPT 2009), and to plans at the time to reform the Greek police (HP 2009b, 2010).

Outright denials also occur on occasion, both in relation to specific cases (HP 1998a, 2009c) and for what appears to be rhetorical purposes – for example, a minister alleged that the security forces ‘never mistreat’ migrants (HP 2008a). Dismissing allegations of mistreatment as untruthful emerges as a position adopted by government MPs and ministers in the 2014 debates on the codification of immigration law. In defence of a proposed – and later withdrawn – clause allowing the deportation of migrants considered to have made false allegations, the Minister of Justice stated that such allegations can be ‘lies’ that migrants are ‘taught by smugglers’ to say (HP 2014b, 9086), a belief echoed by several MPs of New Democracy, one of whom referred to ‘an industry of complaints against coastguards and police’ (HP 2014a, 9092, 9089, 2014b).

Both outright denials and references to ‘isolated events’ are supported by claims of lack of evidence. Responding to allegations of mistreatment by CPT, the Ministry of Public Order stated that ‘[...] our country is being accused of maltreatment during arrest and interrogation with a series of generalisms (general and unclear allegations)’ which were ‘without any evidence’ (Government of Greece 2009, 13). In the extract above, noticeably sharper in tone than other government responses, the unfairness of such allegations is underlined by the emotive references to ‘our country’ as the recipient of such criticisms. Deflecting criticisms of police violence during operation Xenios Zeus, the Minister of Public Order similarly remarked that he did not know of ‘any policeman [*sic*] being sued by anybody with specific charges [of mistreatment]’ (MPOCP 2013a). The absence of formal complaints and reports is invoked to substantiate lack of evidence claims, and is legitimated by claims that appropriate systems are in place both at administrative (such as disciplinary procedures and Sworn Administrative inquiries within the police) and legal level, that investigations are conducted in an appropriate manner, and that officers are appropriately penalized if found at fault (CERD

2001, 2009, 2011; Government of Greece 1994, 2010; HP 1998a, 1999, 2005a, 2008b; HRC 2011; MPO 2000, 2002; MPOCP 2012a). This topos features prominently in the government's response to the 2014 CPT report: rather than denying or constructing anti-migrant violence as 'isolated events' – which in that context would be difficult to sustain – allegations of police violence are said to be investigated by the relevant authorities (Government of Greece 2014).

The topos of lack of evidence is further legitimated by references to an independent judicial system. Replying to a journalist's question on the absence of convictions for torture and mistreatment between 1996 and 2001, a PASOK affiliated MPO stated that 'the Judiciary ... in many cases issued non-guilty verdicts [...] the judiciary is independent and its decisions should be respected' (MPO 2002). Similarly, the formal response of a New Democracy administration to a CPT report stated that 'only the courts are permitted to judge' (Government of Greece 2009, 13) allegations of mistreatment against police officers. However, even data provided by the Greek government suggest that both administrative inquiries and legal prosecutions rarely resulted in guilty verdicts (CERD 2009; Government of Greece 1994, 2009). It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse the reasons for this. Suffice to say that while government speakers utilize the perceived independence and impartiality of the Greek judiciary as a delegitimizing device, research has shown that the justice system has not been historically independent from the executive, it tends to maintain the status quo, and its practitioners likely to be prejudiced towards migrants (Papapantoleon 2014).

In short, official framings of violence do not simply adopt a narrative of isolated events (Christopoulos 2014; Triandafyllidou and Kouki 2014), but a more complex argumentation claiming that there is no evidence to substantiate complaints, despite the existence of appropriate procedures. This allows political actors to downplay the systemic nature of violence against migrants. In a sense, the failure of state authorities in investigating and prosecuting incidents of violence is used as evidence that violence against migrants is not a significant social issue (see Goodey 2007; Solomos and Schuster 2002). However, the extensive reporting of violence against migrants over a period of twenty years suggests that it is an institutional practice tolerated through inaction (Christopoulos 2014; Papapantoleon 2014; Xenakis 2013). The persistence of this narrative is also linked to the institutional role of the Greek security agencies, and especially the police, whereby criticisms of police practices against migrants and political efforts to reform it are seen as undermining its protective role (HP 2008b, 2009b, 2013b). This 'culture of impunity' has had a legitimating effect on the employment of violence against migrants and the reproduction of racism in the Greek context (Pavlou 2009; Triandafyllidou and Kouki 2014).

5. Denying that violence against migrants is racist

A second narrative involves disengaging racism from the exercise of violence. A few days after collective violence against Albanian immigrants following a football game in 2004, MPs of left-wing opposition parties referred to the racism and xenophobia that informed these violent encounters (HP 2004). Ministers and MPs of the governing party did not respond, but the government stated elsewhere that the clashes 'should not be attributed to racial motivation, but rather to the fact that unfortunately football games are world-wide often accompanied by clashes between fans' (ECRI 2009, 59). Similarly, the shooting of migrant agricultural workers by their employers in 2013 was constructed by the MPO and MPs of the governing New Democracy party as an assault related to labour grievances and not, as left-wing MPs claimed, as underlined by racist attitudes towards migrants (HP 2013c). The racialized nature of these events, related to the unequal position of migrants in Greek society, was thus elided from official narratives.

The racial dimension of violence by security agencies is often implicitly rather than explicitly refuted through references to the human rights and anti-discrimination training received by security personnel, and to the commitment of the Greek state to 'combatting racism and xenophobia' and respecting human rights (CERD 2001, 2011; Government of Greece 2002, 2009; HRC 2011; HP 1997a, 1998a, 2005a, 2008b, 2013d). Equally it is refuted through a pattern of condemning racist violence (HP 2008c, 2012). Explicit refutations do occasionally occur. When questioned on the shooting of an Albanian migrant in 1997, the then MPO stated that 'there are no racist attitudes' among the police (HP 1997b, 419). Similarly, observations by ECRI on racist and anti-semitic attitudes among politicians and judicial personnel were refuted as 'unsubstantiated and therefore unacceptable', based on allegedly unreliable information provided by human rights NGOs in Greece (ECRI 2009, 59). The same strategy of denial also occurs in relation to operation Xenios Zeus, which according to the MPO, had 'no racial motive for action (MPOCP 2012c)'. By emphasizing in the same document that 'we don't care about the colour, origin, nation or religion of the illegals [*sic*]' (MPOCP 2012c), the minister explicitly rejected both biological and cultural forms of racism, reflecting the disavowal of racism in modern democracies (Goldberg 2002; Herzfeld 2007). At the same time, however, migrants are racialized on the basis of the illegalized status.

These denials of racism mirror the extensive use of this trope in Greek political discourses on migration (Triandafyllidou and Kouki 2014). Statements such as 'the Greek society has proven that it is not racist towards foreigners' (HP 2000, 540, a PASOK MP) or 'the Greek people cannot accept unfounded and unjust accusations of racism and xenophobia' (HP 2005b, 651–652) are illustrative of perception of the non-existence of racism in the Greek

context. Even in the context of rising violence against migrants, the MPO of the coalition government maintained the view that racism was not 'a generalised problem' and that 'Greeks have always been hospitable and cosmopolitan' (MPOCP 2013b).

Such denials of racism, as stated earlier, are commonplace features of political discourse in many European contexts and their effects in framing social issues, constructing identities and legitimating policies are considerable. They establish Greek society and state institutions as non-racist – in particular by using collective designations such as 'the police' or 'we' –, reject racism as an ideology, and position Greek society within a European value system (Herzfeld 2007; Van Dijk 1993). The refutation of racism among the police is not only discursive: Despite substantial evidence of the close links between the police and the Golden Dawn (Christopoulos 2014; Dalakoglou 2013), an internal affairs investigation on police corruption in 2013, following the murder of activist Pavlos Fyssas by the Golden Dawn, concluded within just one month that the Hellenic Police is not institutionally racist. Inadequacies in investigating attacks against migrants were attributed to the 'inaction and unwillingness' of demotivated officers (Hellenic Police 2013, 12). However, academic research and human right reports (Al 2012; Antonopoulos, Tierney, and Webster 2008; ECRI 2009; Papapantoleon 2014; Tsoukala 2005) found evidence of anti-migrant views among police and the judiciary. Thus, denials of racism legitimate violent practices by refusing to 'see' racism, and constructing it instead as a response to migration and its perceived threats, a narrative shared by police, judiciary and members of the wider public alike (Figgou and Condor 2006; Triandafyllidou and Kouki 2014; Tsoukala 2005). As the next section demonstrates this allows practices of violence to be legitimated as necessary for controlling migration.

6. Violence as defence against migration threats

Similarly to the conceptualization of racism as a reaction to migration, a third narrative frames anti-migrant violence as a response to the perceived threats. Acts of violence by the Greek public are attributed to fear and insecurity engendered by the alleged criminality of migrants. For instance, an ND-affiliated MP rationalized assaults on Albanian migrants, which he claimed did not 'reflect the hospitable feelings of Greek people', by referring to experiences of immigrant criminality – seeing their 'homes being burgled, their property being looted and their life threatened' (HP 1998b, 8037). The logic of uncharacteristic but understandable 'self-defence' is articulated more explicitly by far right parties. While rejecting the logic of taking the law into one's hands (*αυτοδικία*) a Laikos Orthodoxos Synagermos - Popular Orthodox Rally MP commented that having a 'shotgun by my bed' was an unsurprising response when 'I'm afraid for my home, or my wife and child' (HP 2011b, 153). Following

attacks on makeshift undocumented migrant camps in the city of Patra, the spokesman of Golden Dawn refused to denounce them because 'the illegal settlement of aliens would still be there and we would have more criminal actions and possibly more murders' (Flash Radio Station, 2012). Violence is thus constructed as an emotional response, drawing on fear and insecurities experienced by the public, but also seen as a 'virtue' (McKeever et al. 2013) of legitimate self-defence against subjectively experienced threats.

Similarly, state violence is rationalized by reference to the imperative of protecting citizens and society. Responding to a parliamentary question on police violence against migrants, the PASOK MPO juxtaposed 'three, four, five incidents' with the need to 'protect the security of the citizens' (HP 1997b, 420). Commenting on the prosecution of a border guard for shooting an Albanian migrant entering Greece irregularly, the minister condemned the action and reiterated the respect for the rights of migrants, but he also exhorted the role of border guards in protecting the frontiers of the country (HP 2008b). By referring to them as *akrites* – the army units guarding the borders of the Byzantine empire – he activated the topos of protecting the nation against external threats (HP 2008b). In a similar manner, MPO N. Dendias stated that he rejected 'criticisms for barbaric behaviour' of the police during operation *Xenios Zeus* stressing the aim of the operation was for the country 'to protect its borders [...] to protect its citizens' (MPOCP 2013a). This 'protectionist' narrative legitimates the use of violence within state-exercised migration controls as a necessary part of safeguarding collective security – a legitimate exercise of state sovereignty. Not only is state-exercised violence legitimated, but the police is extolled for its effort (HP 1997b, 2008b; MPO 2012a), praised for its humane behaviour towards migrants (HP 2007) and even constructed as needing protection against allegedly untrue or malicious allegations by migrants (HP 2014a, 2014b). Such arguments emerge mostly, but not exclusively, among ND ministers and MPs suggesting the conservative party's public order agendas and support for security-enforcing institutions.

The protectionist narrative brings in sharp relief the challenge posed by the Golden Dawn's usurping of the 'protective' function of the state. Informed by explicitly racist ideologies, it highlighted the state's failure in controlling migration and maintaining the rule of law and legitimate violence (Wieviorka 1995). The Greek state's response was, at least initially, not to penalize the actions of the Golden Dawn, but to discursively wrestle back the right to racialized controls. Responding to a journalist's question on inhumane conditions in detention centres, the coalition government MPO countered that his 'dilemma' was 'to leave things as they were [...] there was the threat of social collapse and imposition of the rule of Golden Dawn or the state had to protect itself and society and impose the law' (MPOCP 2013c). Reflecting similar sentiments, a PASOK-affiliated MP argued that the control operations

in the centre of Athens were necessary in order 'to protect the rule of law, to stop the violent squads which replace the state' (HP 2012, 1855). However, the discursive tactic of constructing violence against migrants as a public order issue to be solved by intensified migration controls rendered Dawn an extension to the state's migration control mechanisms (Dalakoglou 2013).

7. Conclusion: legitimating and reclaiming anti-migrant violence

Based on the analysis of political texts covering a period of twenty years, I argued that official discourses representing Golden Dawn's attacks on migrants as outside liberal democratic norms, individualized and contextual to the austerity crisis have obscured the long-term legitimization of violence against migrants, rooted in racialized discourses of migration and racism in the Greek context. Political actors and institutions have legitimated the employment of violence through three enduring discursive strategies: denying the social or systemic nature of anti-migrant violence, based mainly on a narrative of 'isolated events' and doubting the truthfulness of claims of mistreatment; disengaging violence against migrants from racism and rationalizing violence as a response to perceived threats posed by migration. While some changes were observed over the years – for example a shift to adopting the trope of 'pending investigations' in responses to reports by the CPT – these strategies are enduring in time and employed by both governing parties, New Democracy and PASOK. This refutes a left/right dichotomy (e.g. Triandafyllidou and Kouki 2013, 2014) and points to the racialized dynamics of migration control, informed by dominant and shared discourses of securitization and illegalization of migrants.

The reactions of the Greek political mainstream betray the contradictions inherent in the relationship between democracy and violence on the one hand, and the violence of relations between the state and migrants on the other. States simultaneously perpetrate violence against migrants, condemn it and designate it (or not) as a social issue (Goldberg 2002; Goodey 2007, Solomos and Schuster 2002). Since racism is disavowed in liberal democracies, migration controls are legitimated as necessary for safeguarding the national polity against the perceived threats of migration, and thus reproduces practices of sovereignty and the boundaries of the state (Goldberg 2002; Soguk 1999). Within this logic, violence has been tolerated as a response to the fear and insecurities created by the threatening migrant Other but also fed into strategies of neoliberal governance, which in times of crisis served at maintaining the cohesion of the in-group through targeting marginalized groups such as migrants (Cheliotis 2013). However, overtly tolerating violence by an anti-democratic, anti-establishment party suggest the failure of the state to legitimately exercise violence within the normative confines of

liberal democracy (Goldberg 2002; Wieviorka 1995). While the socio-economic crisis in Greece deepened these tensions, state responses and policies thus failed to designate violence against migrants as a significant social issue (Bleich 2007; Solomos and Schuster 2002) or protect migrants' rights. Instead, they legitimated racialized violence by reproducing migrants' as the threatening Other that needs to be controlled by violence if necessary.

There is no sufficient evidence to determine if the prosecution of Golden Dawn and the introduction of a new anti-racism law in 2014 has resulted in the decline of anti-migrant violence by individuals or groups. Recent reports by human rights bodies (CPT 2014; RVRN 2015) suggest that ill-treatment by security agencies and a culture of unaccountability have persisted despite policy reforms. It remains to be seen if the social impact of the politics of Golden Dawn will engender different discourses, policies and practices towards racialized violence from those deeply embedded in political and security institutions. Changing entrenched discourses and practices in times dominated by socio-economic crisis will not be an easy task.

Notes

1. This accounts for differences in document lengths: parliamentary debates are longer than oral questions (normally 3–4 pages) and written answers (normally 1–4 pages).
2. Led by PASOK (1996–2004 and 2009–2011), New Democracy (2004–2009) and two coalition governments (November 2011–May 2012 and June 2012–December 2014), the former a caretaker one and the latter led by ND, with PASOK as a junior partner.
3. For example, press releases on traffic accidents.

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