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Guest and Insecure: the 1973 crisis and the fate of the Greek Gastarbeiter in West Germany

Maria ADAMOPOULOU

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1/ Guest and Insecure: the 1973 crisis and the fate of the Greek Gastarbeiter in West Germany

Maria ADAMOPOULOU

ABSTRACT: *Crisis has a strong hermeneutical power, a potential to shape collective imaginaries and to provoke panic. In this article, I examine how the debates around the oil crisis of 1973 and the consequent recruitment halt in West Germany were framed in the Greek printed and audiovisual media. The Greek migrant workers are the focus group of this investigation and the questions asked are how the crisis impacted their status in the host country and how this disruption influenced their decision-making regarding settlement and return. The different stakeholders involved in the Greek Gastarbeiter migration, namely politicians, media, trade unions and migrants articulated their hopes, anxieties and critique, shaped and challenged the actual policymaking in the framework of the Cold War and the European enlargement project.*

ABSTRACT: *La crisi ha un forte potere ermeneutico, un potenziale in grado di plasmare gli immaginari collettivi e provocare il panico. In questo articolo verranno esaminati il modo in cui i dibattiti sulla crisi petrolifera del 1973 e il conseguente blocco delle assunzioni nella Germania occidentale sono stati interpretati dalla stampa e dai media greci. I lavoratori migranti greci sono al centro di questa ricerca e le domande poste vertono intorno alle modalità con cui la crisi ha impattato sul loro status nel Paese ospitante e come questo sconvolgimento abbia influenzato il loro processo decisionale in merito all'insediamento e al ritorno. I diversi attori coinvolti nella migrazione dei Gastarbeiter greci, ovvero politici, media, sindacati e migranti, hanno articolato le loro speranze, ansie e critiche, plasmando e sfidando l'attuale politica nel quadro della guerra fredda e del progetto di allargamento europeo.*

Introduction¹

January 1974, «Gastarbeiter in der Wirtschaftskrise» («Guest Workers in the Economic Crisis»). It is the title of a nine-minute-long reportage hosted in the TV program «Panorama» in the West German channel *Der Erste*. The first word that our ear catches is *Angst*, reminding Fassbinder's movie from the same year «*Angst essen Seele auf*» (translated in English as «*Ali: the Fear Eats the*

¹ My deepest thanks to the anonymous reviewers of the article for their precious feedback which greatly improved the manuscript. Special thanks to my dear friend dr. Nastazja Potocka-Sionek for her help in editing the final version of the text.

Soul»), the story of a romance that develops between Emmi, an elderly German woman, and Ali, a Moroccan migrant worker in West Germany.

Another word that in the 1970s was as “viral” as it is today, is *Krise*, the German for crisis. Crisis «refers to the critical act of judgment and thinking, which indicates a space of meaningful self-reflection»²; it can be considered as a violation of general assumptions and expectations. Uncertainty, discomfort, and stress are the natural outcomes of this insecurity³.

Back to our reportage, the viewer sees different close-ups, like Yugoslav workers travelling in a train to their homeland; an expert sharing his opinion on unemployment; some West Germans interviewed in the street about the place of foreign workers; social workers in an office helping the migrants with their paperwork; and finally, a gathering in a crumbled household where the laundry is hanging from the walls. The leitmotiv we hear is «Kein Arbeit in Deutschland» («no work in Germany») in different accents, coupled with the official jargon of bureaucracy present in the papers the workers show in the camera⁴. The aftertaste of those nine minutes is bitter; migrants have no safety net; migration is a fragile state of being.

Peter Leese in his 2022 book *Migrant Representations: Life Story, Investigation, Picture* suggests that «there is no one history. There are only histories [...] the ongoing, unresolved struggle for control of the migrant image. Life stories, investigations and pictures are equal facets of any sufficient representation»⁵. By using the media as the main source to map the debate, the present article is weaved around a double representation, the representation of the migrant workers and the representation of crisis. The sense of crisis brought to the fore intense emotions that encompassed equally the state, the society, and the individual. As argued in the book *The Shock of the Global*:

it was the 1970s that introduced the world to the phenomenon of “globalization,” as networks of interdependence bound peoples and societies in new and original ways. The 1970s saw the breakdown of the postwar economic order and the advent of floating currencies and free capital movements. Non-state actors rose to prominence while the authority of the superpowers diminished⁶.

² CARASTATHIS, Anna, SPATHOPOULOU, Aila, TSILIMPOUNIDI, Myrto, «Crisis, what crisis? Immigrants, refugees, and invisible struggles», in *Refuge: Revue Canadienne Sur Les Réfugiés (Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees)*, 34, 1/2018, pp. 29-38, p. 33.

³ SEEGER, Matthew W, SELNOW, Timothy L, *Narratives of Crisis: Telling Stories of Ruin and Renewal*, Stanford California, Stanford University Press, 2015, pp. 5, 11.

⁴ URL: < <https://www.ardmediathek.de/video/panorama/gastarbeiter-in-der-wirtschaftskrise/das-erste/Y3JpZDovL25kci5kZS8xZjYyZdiZS03ZTQyLTQ3ZDgtYmQ2Ny1mZTdhMWNhZDAwZWU>> [accessed on 26 June 2023]

⁵ LEESE, Peter, *Migrant Representations: Life Story, Investigation, Picture*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2022, p. 1.

⁶ FERGUSON, Niall, MAIER, Charles S., MANELA, Erez, SARGENT, Daniel (edited by), *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective*, Cambridge (MA), Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011.

As argued by Helen Thompson, «oil created profound disorder in the 1970s for the West. [...] Western oil consumption had run into the limits of the West's geo-political capacity to sustain it at a tolerable price. Without that capacity western economies were quite simply prone to crisis»⁷. The oil crisis of 1973 is also termed as a shock. However, as the authors of the 2016 book *Oil Shock* content «the major oil firms, as well as their home governments, were not merely unprepared for the oil shock. [...] The combined effects of the embargo, oil price increases and the collapse of the concession system abruptly ended the post-World War II petroleum order»⁸.

Matthew Seeger and Timothy Sellnow in their 2015 book *Narratives of crisis* propose that:

often, leaders, members of the public, and those experiencing a crisis are unable to make sense of what is happening. This paralysis often compounds the damage. [...] Many crises create profound confusion and disorganization for those experiencing the event firsthand as normal conditions are radically and rapidly disrupted⁹.

In this article, my intention is to examine how the oil crisis of 1973 and the subsequent recruitment halt of migrant workers in West Germany was discussed and represented at the printed and audiovisual media in Greece of the 1970s.

As suggested by Günel Incesu for the Turkish case, the Turkish press was anxious about a massive wave of return, while

the analysis of the coverage of the recruitment stop in the mass media of in Turkey and the Federal Republic of Germany confirms the hypothesis of an interdependence of German-Turkish relations and Turkey's efforts to join the efforts to join the European Communities¹⁰.

A very similar line of thought is guiding my investigation of the Greek reaction to the West German restrictions affecting labor migration throughout the 1970s.

As a part of the special issue on worlds of work and the welfare system in Europe, the main contribution of this article is the emphasis on labor migration as the *par excellence* field of negotiation about working rights, social protection, and welfare. As much as self-evident or

⁷ THOMPSON, Helen, *Oil and the Western Economic Crisis*, Springer International Publishing, 2018, p. 99.

⁸ BINI, Elisabetta, GARAVINI, Giuliano, ROMERO, Federico (edited by), *Oil Shock: The 1973 Crisis and Its Economic Legacy*, London, I.B. Tauris & Co., 2016, p. 121.

⁹ SEEGER, Matthew W., SELLNOW, Timothy L, *Narratives of Crisis: Telling Stories of Ruin and Renewal*. Stanford California, Stanford University Press, 2015, pp. 5, 11.

¹⁰ INCESU, Günel, *Der Anwerbestopp vom 23. November 1973 in der massenmedialen Öffentlichkeit der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Türkei*, in *Netzwerk Türkei Working Paper*, 8, Berlin, Netzwerk Türkei, 2010, pp. 1-41, p. 34.

redundant it might sound, it is essential to keep in mind that migrant workers make up a social group prone to precarity and insecurity, both due to their limited rights in the host country and their invisibility as an unacknowledged minority. The only difference between the times of normality and the times of disruption (supposing that we adhere to such black-and-white divisions) is not the nature of their labor per se. In principle, they are performing low-status and badly paid industrial piecework and they act as buffers to the high labor demand of the developed countries. Therefore, the real difference lies in the legitimation of their existence, or in other words, in the framing of their necessity to the economy and their place in the host society. Although becoming desirable or unwanted, irreplaceable or dispensable, is a daily reality the migrants face on the shop floor level, it is equally a matter of representation, an imaginary circulated by the media.

For the purposes of this article, I am asking how the different actors and stakeholders expressed their anxieties and hopes regarding the crisis? What were the tropes used to describe the consequences of the recession and the recruitment halt and what were the ideologies projected on it? Was the crisis a surprise or a predictable outcome of a fragile system? What were the promises of the policymakers and what was the daily reality the guest workers had to face?

The Greek state was governed by an authoritarian regime for seven years (1967-1974) and thus when the crisis first stroke, the Greek dictatorship presented it as an opportunity. It came at an opportune timing for Greece, in order to relieve the pressures from the limited labor supply in the Greek industry and as a badly needed sign of success regarding the Greek state's management of migration. The censored newspapers emanated a sense of *Schadenfreude*, a secret joy for the fate of the advanced Western economies to experience economic hardships as the countries of the South were suffering for decades.

When the dictatorship of the colonels collapsed in 1974, a right-wing government was elected, while the opposition was controlled by the socialist PASOK (*Panellinio Sosialistiko Kinima*, Greek Socialist Movement) and the communist KKE (*Kommounistiko Komma Elladas*, Greek Communist Party). As a result, the debate regarding migration and return in connection with the crisis complexified. The government and the business elite continued to see the crisis as an opportunity to regain the lost workforce and use it as a pressure towards European integration. The opposition was concerned with the rising unemployment in the aftermath of the crisis and lamented the neglect of structured return migration policies. The trade unions and the migrants themselves also articulated their views on the crisis as a protracted situation without any safety net for them.

Regarding the primary sources used to reconstruct the debates around the crisis and the recruitment halt, they are the Greek daily newspapers with the widest circulation during the studied period. The left-wing EDA (*Eniaia Dimokratiki Aristera*, United Democratic Left Party) was

publishing the morning newspaper «Avgi», circulating widely in the 1960s and offering much attention to the migrants' experience in West Germany. The official newspaper of the Communist Party of Greece, «Rizospastis», was firstly founded in 1916 and it was banned in 1947 during the Greek Civil War, but it renewed its circulation in 1974 and it was very active in covering the daily realities of the guest workers, publishing their letters, as well.

The Center is represented by the newspapers «To Vima» and «Ta Nea», published by the Christos Lambrakis House since 1945, while also the newspaper «Eleutheria» belongs to the same political sphere. These newspapers advocated for reconciliation and detente, away from polarization and extremism¹¹. The Center-Right is represented by main daily newspaper of Thessaloniki, «Makedonia», first published in 1911¹². The latter reported widely on migration given that was based in Northern Greece, sending more than 60 percent of the Greek emigrants to West Germany in the 1960s. Even as late as the years 1970-77, 68% of the emigrants left from the border regions in the North of the country¹³.

The Right is missing from the printed media because the major right-wing newspaper «Kathimerini» stopped its circulation during the dictatorship. Its publisher, Eleni Vlachou, issued a statement condemning the junta and then closed down her entire publishing group and left Greece. For the period after 1974, the newspaper issues are not digitized, and I had no chance to consult the paper version. However, since the government after 1974 and until 1981 was right-wing, the official statements of the different ministries in charge of migration compensate for this absence.

As a note regarding press censorship, during the junta, the attitude of Greek newspapers, which had enjoyed considerable freedom before the colonels, fluctuated. Some newspapers remained neutral, but some publishers closed their newspapers “voluntarily” and they left Greece. Newspapers that challenged the regime directly were closed down¹⁴.

As far as the structure of the article is concerned, first a brief overview of the Gastarbeiter system is offered, followed by the second part stressing the lessons not learned by the first recession of 1966-67. The third part explores what was the reasoning behind the surprisingly positive first Greek reactions to the West German recruitment halt. The fourth part counterposes a paradox adopted as the official stance of the Greek authorities, namely deeming return

¹¹ PAPANIMITRIOU, Despina, *The 20th-century Greek Press: Continuity and New Tendencies*, in DROULIA, Loukia (ed.), *La presse grecque de 1784 à nos jours. Approches historiques et théoriques: Actes du colloque international - Athènes, 23-25 Mai 2002*, Athens, Institut de Recherches Néohelléniques Fondation Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique, 2005, pp. 77-80.

¹² KANDYLAKIS, Manolis, *The Press in Macedonia and Thrace*, in DROULIA, Loukia (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 304-307.

¹³ FAKIOLAS, Rossetos, KING, Russell, «Emigration, Return, Immigration: A Review and Evaluation of Greece's Postwar Experience of International Migration», in *International Journal of Population Geography* 2, 2/1996, pp. 171-190, pp. 173-174.

¹⁴ ASIMAKOULAS, Dimitris, «Translating 'Self' and 'Others': Waves of Protest under the Greek Junta», in *The Sixties*, 2, 1/2009, pp. 25-47, p. 31.

migration at the same time desirable and unwanted. Finally, the fifth part showcases how the migrant workers felt in limbo because of their precarious status as foreign workforce in a state insisting that was not an immigration country and as expatriates of a country who had ambivalent feelings about them.

1. A short overview of the Gastarbeiter system

Postwar intra-European labor migration was initially conceived as a cheap solution for labor market shortages, while the migrant workers were seen as temporary guests. John Berger in the cover of his 1975 book *A Seventh Man* summarizes the innovation of the Gastarbeiter system, which followed the accelerated rhythm of modern life. Its density was concentrated in one generation which was called to make the leap from the slow rural world to the frantic Akkord-based industrial reality.

In principle, the migrants also saw their work and stay in Europe as temporary¹⁵. However, existing survey data from the early 1970s, showed rather the opposite: of the guest workers in the representative sample studied in 1973 by the *Bundesanstalt für Arbeit* (Federal Labor Office) who had been in the Federal Republic for more than 11 years, almost 50 percent wanted to stay permanently in the host country. The percentage increased for those who had been in the Federal Republic for more than 15 years, given that 83 percent wanted to stay for good¹⁶.

As argued by Emmanuel Comte, Germany through its hegemony created already in the late 1950s an open migration regime in Europe that favored German geopolitical and economic interests over the long-term. West Germany dominated the first migratory negotiations among the Six, and also integrated measures in the EEC Treaty to promote the establishment of independent workers and the penetration of foreign markets by German companies¹⁷. In 1965, the Federal Republic of Germany adopted a new legislation, replacing the 1939 Aliens Act, dating back to the Third Reich¹⁸. Article 2 of the 1965 law instructed officials only to grant or extend residence

¹⁵ PENNINX, Rinus, *Old Wine in New Bottles? Comparing the Post-War Guest Worker Migration and the Post-1989 Migration from CEE-Countries to EU-Member Countries*, in SCHOLTEN, Peter, VAN OSTAIJEN, Mark (eds.), *Between Mobility and Migration: The Multi-Level Governance of Intra-European Movement*, Cham, Springer, 2018, pp. 77-97, p. 79.

¹⁶ HECKMANN, Friedrich, *Temporary labor migration or immigration? Guest workers in the Federal Republic of Germany*, in ROGERS, Rosemarie (ed.), *Guests come to stay: the effects of European labor migration on sending and receiving countries*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1985, pp. 69-84, p. 81.

¹⁷ COMTE, Emmanuel, *The History of the European Migration Regime: Germany's Strategic Hegemony*, Abingdon/New York, Routledge, 2017, p. 50.

¹⁸ SCHMITTER, Barbara, «Trade Unions and Immigration Politics in West Germany and Switzerland», in *Politics & Society*, 10, 3/1981, pp. 317-334, p. 329.

where the foreigner's presence did «not injure the interests of the Federal Republic of Germany»¹⁹.

The guest worker system functioned as follows: in the sending countries, prospective employers and authorities advertised the employment opportunities abroad to candidate-emigrants. These candidates were to present themselves at a recruitment center where those that fulfilled the required conditions were selected. According to the needs at the receiving end, groups of candidates were called in for departure. After a final selection, these recruits were taken to their destination. The whole process was legally framed through bilateral and multilateral agreements between sending and receiving countries²⁰.

A second way was also available to workers with the issuing of work and residence permits after entering West Germany as a tourist. West German policy was needs-based, leaving open the second way, which started with the distribution of visas by German consulates or embassies when assurances were available from the Federal Republic of work permits and residence permits. This was not only tolerated by Germany, but even encouraged.

The Interior Ministry advised the prefectures that they should refuse passports in case there was a massive flow. There were hardly any limits to prefectures' room for maneuver. On the backstage, there was already a lively trade in 1960 between Greek agents and German firms with lists of workers' names, which could be obtained for the necessary assurances of getting into West Germany via the second way²¹.

German employers often utilized the third option, namely nominal recruitment, which entailed advantages such as fulfilling job vacancies faster than the standard procedure and assuring that their trained migrant workers would stay once joined by their spouse²².

Successful applicants were offered a working contract and a yearly residence permit, while their journey was organized and paid for. After the end of the agreed time, the migrant workers either could extend their work and residence permit if their working contract was renewed as well, or they had to leave the country²³.

¹⁹ TRIADAFILOPOULOS, Triadafilos, SCHÖNWÄLDER, Karen, «How the Federal Republic Became an Immigration Country: Norms, Politics and the Failure of West Germany's Guest Worker System», in *German Politics and Society*, 24, 3/2006, pp. 1-19.

²⁰ DE BOCK, Jozefien, «Of Employers, Uncles and Interpreters: The Diverse Trajectories of Guest Workers to the Belgian City of Ghent, 1960-1975», in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44, 7/2018, pp. 1233-1249, p. 1237.

²¹ STEINERT, Johannes-Dieter, «Migration and Migration Policy: West Germany and the Recruitment of Foreign Labour, 1945-61», in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 49, 1/2014, pp. 9-27, pp. 17, 22.

²² GONZÁLEZ-FERRER, Amparo, «The process of family reunification among original guest-workers in Germany», in *Zeitschrift für Familienforschung*, 19, 1/2007, pp. b10-33, pp. 12-13, 17.

²³ BERLINGHOFF, Marcel, «'Faux Touristes'? Tourism in European Migration Regimes in the Long Sixties», in *Comparativ Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung*, 24, 2/2014, pp. 88-99, pp. 97-98.

2. Crisis ante portas, yet business as usual

In 1967, following the consequences of the 1966-67 recession in the West German labor market Lutz Reyher wondered if the Gastarbeiter functioned as a buffer. As he observed, «the recession is here (and not yet over), and the number of employees has fallen drastically». Against this background, he asked, «was the assumption that the guest workers would serve as a buffer to absorb the economic setback justified? Have we exported our unemployment?»²⁴.

Indeed, a short-lived recession from 1966-1967 resulted in high unemployment and lower real wages. When the West German economy began to falter in 1966, around 1.3 million foreign workers lost their jobs. Employers also increased mechanization and production speeds and worsened working conditions to counteract their loss in profit²⁵.

In just a year, from the end of June 1966 to the end of June 1967, the number of Greek workers fell from 196.200 to 146.800. Bilateral agreements made no provision for illness and family benefits for family members who had remained in Greece and for the export of cash benefits to workers returning to Greece²⁶.

The crisis of 1966-67 in West Germany affected the foreign workers since one of the first measures was to cut off the extra working hours. Moreover, the price inflation meant that saving money became harder. As we read in early 1967, only 20.000 workers returned for the Christmas holidays and stayed only to settle some personal issues under the fear that they would lose their job and already had trouble with the border authorities upon their return²⁷.

The unemployment (650.000 unemployed in March 1967) made the position of foreign workers in Germany difficult. Opel fired 3.500 workers, and Volkswagen and Ford allowed the workers to work only four days per week²⁸. At the same time, due to the augmenting rates of unemployment in the Federal Republic, the psychological pressure on the migrants was great.

In summer 1968, the newly appointed Minister of Labor, Apostolos Vogiatzis, gave an interview to the West German television. The Ministry was not considering changing the recruitment agreement, and even though there was some pressure on the Greek labor market from the returnees from West Germany in 1966-1967 (55.000 from December 1966 to September 1967), the unemployment was at normal levels²⁹.

²⁴ REYHER, Lutz, «Gastarbeiter - Puffer in der Rezession?», in *Wirtschaftsdienst Zeitschrift für Wirtschaftspolitik*, 47, 12/1967, pp. 624-625.

²⁵ MILLER, Jennifer, «Her Fight Is Your Fight: 'Guest Worker' Labor Activism in the Early 1970s West Germany», in *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 84, 2013, pp. 226-247, pp. 230-231.

²⁶ COMTE, Emmanuel, *The History of the European Migration Regime: Germany's Strategic Hegemony*, Abingdon/New York, Routledge, 2017, pp. 77-78, 104.

²⁷ *To Vima*, 4 January 1967, p. 1.

²⁸ *Eleutheria*, 31 March 1967, p. 3.

²⁹ *Ta Nea*, 19 July 1968, p. 10.

The Greek representative on the *Ausländerbeirat* (Advisory Board for Foreigners) in Stuttgart³⁰ indicated that the Greeks did not want to be simply regarded as a workforce and that «they don't want to remain guest workers, but to become co-citizens, equal coarchitects of a new Europe». Along with the problems in vocational training, he identified the greatest hindrance to the integration of foreigners as the uncertainty of their length of stay³¹.

Another problem the guest workers faced was the few windows of opportunity for specialization, since they were mainly occupied with piecework. As Günther Wallraff explains:

Guest workers generally remain unskilled workers: At AEG-Telefunken, where more than one in five workers is a foreigner, there is not a single foreign foreman and only a few foremen. At Henkel in Düsseldorf (7.500 workers, 1.650 foreigners), there is not even a foreman. Of the 3.100 guest workers at the chemical giant BASF, only one, an Italian, rose to the position of foreman. At Bayer-Leverkusen (3.000 guest workers), the exact number is not known³².

At the European level, the years from 1969 to 1974 were characterized by vigorous promotion of the social dimension of the EEC by the German social-democrat chancellor, Willy Brandt. In Bonn, the Ministry for Labor, the Social-Democrat and former trade unionist Walter Arendt wrote in 1973 to the European commissioner for Social Affairs to appeal for additional initiatives from the Commission in particular with regard to co-determination and European-scale negotiation between social partners³³.

Thus, in this quite promising, post-1968 quest for social Europe, the 1966-67 recession seemed like an unpleasant bracket. The intra-European labor migration continued with its previous rigor and the employment of Greeks in Germany reached a peak in 1972. In the two years since September 1972, the number of Greeks employed in Germany fell by about 15 percent. OECD in 1975 predicted that even when the recession would be over, countries of immigration in Europe would not accept great numbers of foreign workers. Thus, the foreign exchange receipts from this source would stagnate, and the productive apparatus at home would not be able to provide sufficient jobs³⁴.

³⁰ Stuttgart had such an office as the capital of the state of Baden-Württemberg, which was one of the major centers of Greek presence in the Federal Republic. For a more detailed account of the Greek migrants' experience in Stuttgart see: KOLODNY, Emile, *Samothrace Sur Neckar: Des Migrants Grecs Dans L'agglomération De Stuttgart*, Aix-en-Provence, Institut de recherches méditerranéennes, Centre d'études de géographie méditerranéenne, Diffusion Méditerranée, 1982.

³¹ SPICKA, Mark E., «City Policy and Guest Workers in Stuttgart, 1955-1973», in *German History*, 31, 3/2013, pp. 345-365, p. 364.

³² WALLRAFF, Günther, *Neue Reportagen, Untersuchungen und Lehrbeispiele*, Cologne, Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1972, p. 64.

³³ WARLOUZET, Laurent, *Governing Europe in a Globalizing World: Neoliberalism and Its Alternatives Following the 1973 Oil Crisis*, London, Routledge, 2019, p. 38.

³⁴ OECD, *OECD Economic Surveys: Greece 1975*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 1975, pp. 14-15, 50.

3. A short-sighted Greek Schadenfreude

The OECD experts warned already in 1962 that there should exist

in principle an optimum level of emigration which should not be exceeded – a level beyond which further emigration losses would undermine the vigor and balance of the population. To be effective, any development program will require some redistribution and above all retraining of manpower for new jobs³⁵.

In 1964, the OECD report repeated that «by and large it seems that the short-term advantages (solving the problem of employment, inflow of earnings) of emigration may be cancelled out by very dangerous drawbacks in the longer run»³⁶.

Employers in Greece began to complain about labor shortages in 1972, suggesting that further economic development of the country was being threatened. Greek employers strongly supported a policy of importation of labor from African and Asian countries. This paradoxical situation, namely exportation of their own labor and importation of alien labor, indicated that something was decidedly wrong with the Greek migration policy³⁷.

According to the Secretary of Labor of the Greek military government, the number of foreign workers in Greece at the end of 1972 amounted to 15.000-20.000, most of them Africans³⁸. Domestic jobs were thus attributed to those from the Philippines, whilst the Poles and Egyptians sought seasonal agricultural work or factory work. In 1972, the situation was worrying enough for the Association of Greek Industrialists to announce that it was looking to hire 10.000 contract workers, based very much on the German Gastarbeiter system, and at the end of the same year the country was host to 20.000 foreigners³⁹.

These early observations come to explain why the Greek state, first under authoritarian regime and after 1974 as a liberal democracy, rejoiced when the actual crisis hit the Federal Republic and forced many Greek Gastarbeiter to return to their homeland. More specifically, after the announcement of the recruitment halt by the German Minister of Economy, Walter Arendt, in

³⁵ OECD, *OECD Economic Surveys: Greece 1962*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 1962, p. 39.

³⁶ OECD, *OECD Economic Surveys: Greece 1964*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 1964, p. 22.

³⁷ LIANOS, Theodore P., «Greece: Waning of Labor Migration», in *International Migration Review*, 27, 1/1993, pp. 249-261, pp. 258-259.

³⁸ FAKIOLAS, Rossetos, KING, Russell, «Emigration, Return, Immigration: A Review and Evaluation of Greece's Postwar Experience of International Migration», in *International Journal of Population Geography*, 2, 2/1996, pp. 171-190, p. 176.

³⁹ SINTÈS, Pierre, MONEY, Jenny, EDDISON, Samantha, STEPHENS, Caroline, *Chasing the Past: Geopolitics of Memory on the Margins of Modern Greece*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2019, p. 21.

November 1973, the Greek economic circles considered that it might have a positive effect on the Greek economy, because the manpower available was limited due to emigration. Thus, the return migration together with the many vacancies and the improved wages would benefit the Greek economy⁴⁰.

If West Germany would have a crisis like in the years 1966-67, that would mean that the emigration would be halted, and Greece would have the opportunity to balance its demographical problem and the offer of labor. Naturally, the remittances would be drastically reduced, but West German investment might cover the gap⁴¹.

As we read already in November 1972 in the centrist newspaper *Makedonia* published in Thessaloniki, «Germany will put a limit to the flow of workers». The newspaper reports that the country faces severe problems, while the social and economic pressures are serious. The reporter is curious about how the foreigners think and act and affirms that the crisis is deemed unavoidable.

According to the article, by the end of 1971 around 400.000 Greek workers with their families live in West Germany. Quoting the most telling excerpt here, one can say the definition of *Schadenfreude*:

it is pleasant for the Greek industry that West European countries face acute problems and after the xenophobia that took over the Swiss, the Germans might be the next. Thus, the migration flow will be overturned, and less Greeks will wish or be able to migrate and those abroad will return⁴².

The Greek dictators saw the crisis with their simplistic equilibrium, ignoring the fact that as Greece exported unskilled labor to be trained in West German industry, it will receive the same people – only more aged and more frustrated, this time – without any potential to implement the skills they acquired in the highly automated German factories.

One year later, in late November 1973, at the front page of same newspaper, we read that «Bonn will close its gates to the foreign workers due to the energy crisis». As the subtitle reads, the measure would be beneficial for Greece, because in this way the necessary workforce would remain in the country. The newspaper summarized the interview given by the West German minister of Labor Arendt regarding the recruitment halt, which was according to his statements a temporary and preventive measure that should not scare the migrants already present in Germany⁴³.

⁴⁰ *Makedonia*, 24 November 1973, p. 1.

⁴¹ *Ta Nea*, 26 November 1973, p. 7.

⁴² *Makedonia*, 12 November 1972, p. 20.

⁴³ *Makedonia*, 24 November 1973, p. 1.

In late November 1973, the newspaper *Ta Nea* announced the major decision for the recruitment halt and the potential consequences it would have for the Greek workers. The predictions of the article were part of the wishful thinking that already the better conditions in the Greek industry minimized the outflow of migrants. In the long term, if the West German economy experiences again a similar crisis as the one of 1967 the migration would stop altogether. This fact would eventually bring the desired demographic balance and equilibrium of labor supply and demand. Greece might lose the precious remittances, but it might well attract West German investment instead⁴⁴.

4. The incessant fear of mass return

Already during the 1966-67 recession, the Greek government's main fear was that the crisis can fuel a mass return migration. The Greek general consul in Bonn, Alexis Kyrou, in his correspondence with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Athens, was clear: the social order the political elites secured so far by exporting unemployment and social upheaval would certainly be threatened by the return of subversive elements and dissatisfied Greek migrants.

According to Kyrou, the new circumstances meant that massive dismissals were probable, while the recruitment of new workforce would stop almost completely. In its turn, return migration would accelerate and the communist propaganda among the workers would intensify. The threat was grave in the event of a massive return of workers fueled with anti-national and subversive credos⁴⁵.

In all official discourses addressed to emigrants by the Greek authorities, there was the constantly repeated invitation to return to the home country. Return was a rhetoric followed for reasons of national pride, but it also helped in preserving the "provisional" status of emigrants as residents abroad. A real mass return of Greek migrants would be economically upsetting because the scale of the re-entry would find the Greek economy unable to cope⁴⁶.

The Minister of Labor, Konstantinos Laskaris, in his message on the Bavarian Radio in May 1975, stated that despite the measures taken by the government, there were significant problems in the absorption of the return migration. The returnees created problems with housing, employment, health insurance and education, given that the infrastructure was limited mainly in the countryside. Return to rural areas would inevitably create internal migration towards the

⁴⁴ *Ta Nea*, 26 November 1973, p. 7.

⁴⁵ Document A022-41, Greek embassy in Bonn to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bonn, 2-01-1967, folder 1967_42/6. Diplomatic & Historical Archive of The Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Athens).

⁴⁶ FAKIOLAS, Rossetos, KING, Russell, «Emigration, Return, Immigration: A Review and Evaluation of Greece's Postwar Experience of International Migration», in *International Journal of Population Geography*, 2, 2/1996, pp. 171-190, p. 185.

cities. Given that the situation of the labor market in West Germany was alarming with 20.000 unemployed Greek migrants, the Greek government denied the massive return of the migrants and wished the smooth pace of it to continue also in the future⁴⁷.

In 1976, Laskaris accepted the invitation of the Federal Republic to visit the country and made some statements before he left regarding the purpose of his visit. One aim he had to accomplish was to materialize the promise of the Greek government to be beside the workers, in order to live their problems from up close, to listen to and examine their issues and to bring the warmth and the interest of the homeland to their side. After the exposure to their problems, the task would revolve around how to relieve, help and support the migrants until the moment they return again to the homeland⁴⁸.

Upon his return, the minister gave a short press conference regarding the results of his meeting with the West German Minister of Labor. He underlined that there was no danger at all for a massive return. This anxiety about the problems that would result from a mass of returnees was widespread. However, as the minister stated proudly, this danger did not exist anymore. He was also very satisfied with the absolute understanding and friendship the West German side showed throughout his visit. In his view, the Federal Republic might go through a period of temporary difficulties, which it calculated would last until the following spring. Nonetheless, it showed the utmost understanding regarding the Greek guest workers⁴⁹.

Two consequent articles in the newspaper *Makedonia* clarified that the assumption that the foreign workers would be forced to a compulsory repatriation was fake news. In the issue of March 2nd 1976, we read that the Greek workers are not pressurized to leave West Germany. The Ministry of Labor emphasized as false the information that 220.000 Greek workers were under hunt, but on the contrary affirmed that they would keep enjoying all the protection they were entitled to⁵⁰. The next day, March 3rd, 1976, the newspaper published in its frontpage the following announcement from the West German embassy in Athens:

the foreign workers are not expelled from Germany, nor there is the thought to reduce their numbers. The embassy's announcement came as a response to an article in the Greek press dating March 1st referring to the recruitment halt as a pogrom⁵¹.

Here, a brief but important clarification on the terms used during the 1960s and 1970s is needed, since the word *pogrom* is a powerful one, reminiscent of the Nazi-time cruelties. In the

⁴⁷ *To Vima*, 18 May 1975, p. 10.

⁴⁸ URL: < <https://archive.ert.gr/15303/> > [accessed on 26 August 2023].

⁴⁹ URL: < <https://archive.ert.gr/23379/> > [accessed on 26 August 2023].

⁵⁰ *Makedonia*, 2 March 1976, p. 6

⁵¹ *Makedonia*, 3 March 1976, p. 1.

context of Greek popular memory, the German enemy had remained a powerful stereotype. The Greek Left, represented by the newspaper «Avgi» and after 1974 also «Rizospastis», consistently employed terminology used by the Third Reich to stress the continuities with the not-so-far-forgone Nazi past. On their part, the West Germans were quite sensitive in terms of racial discrimination⁵².

In 1976, the representative of the Greek workers in the DGB (*Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*, German Trade Union Federation), Elias Chatziandreu, responded in an interview about the ongoing return migration and its consequences. He assured the interviewer that there was no real danger of a massive return of the Greek Gastarbeiter. In his view, the Greeks are not the workers that the Germans want to see leaving their country and their factories, given that, compared to other nationalities, they showed great adaptability, could be easily trained, and usually lived in harmony with their surrounding environment. Programs and plans that would face the returnee, not as a bare holder of remittances, but as a personality who has all the good will and necessary skills to contribute to the progress and the industrialization of the country.

Regarding Greece's accession to the EEC, Chatziandreu predicted that it would offer a new quality in the character of intra-European migration. First of all, the Greeks employed abroad would have equal rights and a full coverage and would not be foes of the yellow press and its exaggerations. He emphatically underlined that «it is important that the Greek side ensures the freedom of movement for its workers, because anyway this will not increase emigration, but on the contrary, it will force the local employers and industrialists to offer wages and benefits»⁵³.

5. Workers in limbo

On the 18th of January 1974, a reportage in the TV program «Zum Beispiel Sie» («For example you») of the Bavarian television engaged with the topic of jobs and xenophobia. The title «Diese Arbeit macht ein Deutscher nicht» («A German does not do this job») echoed Hartmut Berghoff's view that the Gastarbeiter worked the additional hours Germans spent in schools and colleges. They moved into jobs at the lower end of the labor market so that Germans were able to climb to the middle and top rank.

⁵² Triadafilopoulos and Schönwälder have written extensively on West Germany's guest worker program and placed it in the postwar effort of West Germany to appear as a liberal-democratic state respectful of human rights, away from its authoritative past: TRIADAFILOPOULOS, Triadafilos, SCHÖNWÄLDER, Karen, «How the Federal Republic Became an Immigration Country: Norms, Politics and the Failure of West Germany's Guest Worker System», in *German Politics and Society*, 24, 3/2006, pp. 1-19, pp. 13-14. For more details on the issue of racial difference in the Federal Republic, see: CHIN, Rita (ed.), *After the Nazi Racial State: Difference and Democracy in Germany and Europe. Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2009.

⁵³ URL: < <https://archive.ert.gr/11983/> > [accessed on 26 August 2023].

The reporter asked various guest workers trying to get different answers about their situation. To the question how he considered the quality of his job, the first interviewee answered honestly but with a fatalist attitude, «I am a foreigner, it doesn't matter. Construction site, street sweeper, other job [...] I don't care». He had been a street cleaner for nine years, and his colleagues were three Germans and six Turks. His family also lived in West Germany, and his wife was working as well in order to increase their family budget.

The reporter moved then to the usual meeting place of the Gastarbeiter, the train station. There a circle of men discussed and answered his questions. The most eloquent among the workers said that «the employer is happy with the foreigner, but people don't want to. The Germans don't want the foreigners to stay here. Because everyone thinks the foreigners are bothering us or something». To his colleague's comment that not all Germans were the same, he retorted that 80 percent of them were thinking like that.

A third man commented that their experience in the job market had to be

exactly the same as those of Germans. Because we are Europeans just like the Germans. Or do we have 2nd class people be the guest workers? [...] All foreigners go, go back to the south, back to your homeland. It's not that easy. Here in Germany, there are 3 million foreigners. It is not that easy⁵⁴.

In 1975, out of the 225.000 officially employed Greek workers in the Federal Republic, 20.000 were unemployed. This number represented the 8 percent of the total, which was the biggest percentage among the other foreigners who had an average of 6.3 percent⁵⁵.

Few days before the year turned 1976, the communist newspaper *Rizospastis* emphasized that the dependence of Greece to West Germany was greater than to any other imperialist country and wondered what would happen regarding the Gastarbeiter problem. The article appeared on the occasion of chancellor Schmidt's visit in Athens, and it enumerated among the reasons of dependence the trade deficit between the two countries, but also the Greek workers who, according to the communist press, were a trade-off of the Greek government who remained as always incapable to control unemployment.

As reported in the article, due to the crisis, in 1974, around 12.000 Greek workers returned. Between January and July 1975, the number of returnees was double compared with the emigrants. And generally, there was a lingering insecurity regarding the fate of the 220.000 Greek

⁵⁴ URL: < <https://www.br.de/mediathek/video/gespraeche-mit-gastarbeitern-1974-diese-arbeit-macht-ein-deutscher-nicht-av:5a3c52c8185c080018d1866a> > [accessed on 26 August 2023]

⁵⁵ *To Vima*, 18 May 1975, p. 10.

Gastarbeiter still present in the Federal Republic, since the recession seemed to affect the EEC and West Germany in 1976, as well⁵⁶.

Frida Bioubi, a reporter for the centrist newspaper «To Vima» provided in mid-February 1976 a reportage under the title «I saw happy workers in Germany». The problem of return migration was analysed by a migrant who attempted to return twice already and claimed that

there is so much talk about the problem of migration and that Greece is emptying and left without working hands and still when we return we find closed doors, low wages, almost inexistent social insurance, bureaucracy and many other obstacles. They shower us with sympathetic words while abroad and when we return they throw us a bone to lick. Greece wants nothing more from us rather than our precious German remittances. It is very hard after the security we feel here to return to the insecurity and the persecution that our country offers us⁵⁷.

Conclusion

In the early Cold War, the Greek government used the safety valve of the Gastarbeiter system to void the poor countryside from its unemployed youth, who, in its frustration, could be potentially threatening to the established social order. In parallel, the Federal Republic of Germany benefited from this imported cheap workforce to cover the increased needs of its booming economy. A first crash test of the Gastarbeiter system's balance occurred with the recession of 1966-67. In order to keep the system rolling, the main actors ignored the warnings and the signs and did not prepare properly.

From the early 1960s, the Greek press voiced a profound anxiety about the consequences of mass emigration for Greek society. Demographic concerns and ideological fears painted the background of the Greek migration to West Germany. When the two crises of 1966-67 and 1973 hit the West German economy and led the policymakers to impose a recruitment halt, the issue of return migration surfaced. While the press hoped that return migration would boost the Greek economy, it also showed deep concern about Greece's ability to manage return migration effectively.

As a matter of fact, this concern was justified, as proven by the significant difficulties of migrants to readjust. The policymakers' choice to turn a blind eye and take the situation as a *fait accompli*, deprived migrants of the necessary knowledge to act strategically and take calculated risks. The information provided to them came only late when the system entered a state of

⁵⁶ Rizospastis, 28 December 1975, p. 7.

⁵⁷ To Vima, 13 February 1976, p. 7.

emergency and the external pressures maximized. Neither the host country nor their homeland offered the migrants concrete answers, and they were left alone to figure their way between Scylla and Charybdis, namely settlement or return migration.

The main lesson to take away from the Greek experience regarding the guest worker migration and return in times of crisis is its paradoxical nature, coupled with the short-sightedness and unpreparedness of the authorities to tackle a problematic situation. Instead of following the experts' advice regarding excessive out-migration and its consequences to the demographic structure of the country, the state did not actively create new employment opportunities for the returnees. It sufficed expressing wishes for the migrants to return; in the meanwhile, the Greek state was advertising a made-up prosperity based on their remittances and their hard work abroad.

As the crisis of 1973 marks 50 years, this article is also a reminder that not just the policies introduced in times of austerity and restrictions but also the discourses about the desirability of migration are still with us in Europe. The contextualization of the Greek guest worker migration in the general framework of the Cold War and the European enlargement project serves as an indicator of the ideological part involved in the level of political discourse and decision-making.

Apart from the state, many actors were involved in the debates about protection and precarity. Being inclusive and multivocal is an important component of this case study. The methodological twist of this article is considering fear, anxiety, and panic as important gears in the complex process of evaluating a crisis. Finally, fruitful comparisons could be made among the rest of the Mediterranean and Southeast European sending countries by asking about their response to the 1973 recruitment halt and the subsequent transformation of the guest workers system it brought with it. Being a guest meant being insecure. The question remains: was there any way around it?

THE AUTHOR

Maria ADAMOPOULOU holds a Doctorate in History from the European University Institute in Florence. Currently, she is a Global Teaching Fellow at ELTE University in Budapest and an affiliated researcher at the Democracy Institute of the Central European University. Her monograph *The Greek Gastarbeiter in West Germany (1960-1974)* will be published in May 2024 by De Gruyter.

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