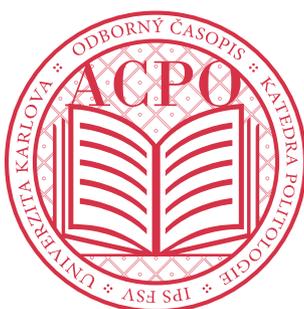


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Socio-cultural Aspects of Neo-nationalism in Crisis Contexts: An Empirical Analysis of Liminal Workers' Perceptions in Greece (2011-2015)

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Abstract:

This article deals with the socio-cultural elements and the hybridity of neo-nationalist discourses in the context of liminal working-class communities. Through the analysis of interview material collected from workers who experience an unprecedented condition of insecurity, volatility and economic hardship, we aim to understand the interplay between contradictory and yet interacting interpretative repertoires, emotional structures and social orders that either enable or hamper the permeability of neo-nationalism. To this end, we employ methods drawn from the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, focussing on collective identities, which (a) are constituted within representation, (b) are constrained by different structures of power and social actors and (c) are consolidated in emotional structures. The findings from the analysis are then linked to questions about nation and class, aiming at a more nuanced interpretation of the influence of the extreme right politics on the working-class members.

Key words: *neo-nationalism; working-class; critical discourse analysis; liminality; crisis*

Introduction

The resurgence of nationalism in the contemporary European environment could hardly be disassociated from the multifaceted crises that have been breaking out since 2008 almost everywhere in Europe, though in different magnitude and depth. Yet, a closer look at the cultural elements of the reception, adoption and appropriation of nationalist discursive patterns manifested through multiple individual and collective actions implies that the role of collective identities should not be overlooked during the current surge of nationalism. Through the analysis of different bodies of interview material, collected in the context of two research projects carried out during the most intense period of the Greek crisis (2011–2015), the present paper aims to show how certain communities of discourse shaped in liminal contexts and aligned with certain *social/moral orders* encompass competing and yet interacting narratives, emotional structures and interpretative repertoires.

The case-studies under examination are not sequentially but rather thematically presented. The first body of material stems from interviews conducted in 2013–2015 with male workers and unemployed in a highly de-industrialized area where nationalism thrives

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within a context of political disillusionment, cynicism and social discomfort. The respondents were asked to describe their life-courses and then to interpret the current crisis in the local and national context. The second body of material derives from field research conducted during the long strike that took place at the Greek steel company Hellenic Halyvourgia (HH) at Aspropyrgos (November 2011–July 2012). It consists mostly of interview and press material.²

The first part of the paper addresses the components of *neo-nationalism*, drawing from a social anthropologist's perspective. The de-composition of present forms of nationalism, and the exploration of their interplay with cultural elements of the everyday life, suggests a shift of our focus towards overlooked manifestations of collective identities appropriated from the working-class people. Then we attempt to integrate structures of emotions, interpretative repertoires and social/moral orders into socio-cultural building blocks, which enable us to identify the nexus between collective identity and collective responses to multifold crises. Finally, we analyse the two case-studies in the light of the previous conceptualizations.

Neo-nationalism in Context

National identity, as any form of identity, is above all the drawing of boundaries between self and the “*other*” (Edensor 2002: 24). In contemporary world, described as inherently uncertain, highly diversified, fragmented and fluid (Bauman: 2000), boundary drawing becomes difficult and therefore “*must reify difference, essentialise and fix it as rooted in space and for all time*” (Edensor 2002: 25). Edensor highlights this globalized context of modern national identities while he stresses his attention to previously neglected areas of popular culture and everyday practices. While the broadening of the sources of empirical material adds critically to our understanding of modern national identities, there is also a need to reflect on the concept of nationalism itself. Here we build on the conceptualization developed by Andre Gingrich, who proposed the concept of *neo-nationalism* as an enrichment of the traditional anthropological understanding of nationalism with new elements articulated as a basic tripartite hierarchical ideological pattern (Gingrich 2006: 199):

- i. A coherent, culturally essentialised form of “*us*” is positioned in the centre and is contrasted against two groups of “*them*”.
- ii. One group of “*them*” is constructed, in terms of power, as being “*above us*”: the EU authorities in Brussels and their mysterious associates elsewhere.
- iii. A second stratum of “*them*” is perceived as being ranked, in terms of status, ‘*below us*’: local immigrants and other cultural and linguistic minorities living in the EU, plus their ‘*dangerous*’ associates in Africa, Asia and elsewhere.

² The first research project is part of my ongoing postdoctoral research on the reconstruction of the working-class identity in West Piraeus. Along with the sixteen (16) semi-structured interviews conducted with underemployed workers from this sub-region of Attica, I have collected a body of material consisted of political parties’ announcements and press releases, statements made by local unionists, politicians and party activists, documentary films on the multiple crises of West Piraeus. The second research project started in November 2011 and was finished two years later. The basic source of material came from the fourteen (14) semi-structured interviews conducted with strikers during the big strike event at the HH company. In addition, I collected material from the press, information portals, documentary films, brochures, and other channels of communication (YouTube, TV shows, etc.) that provided information on the HH strike.

According to Gingrich's anthropological account on neo-nationalism, a major difference from the historical nationalism relates to its sociological premises: it is not the unemployed workers and the endangered farmers who adopt the recent versions of nationalism but rather the precarious employees from urban areas. The neo-nationalist embrace of the electorate of many European far-right movements concerns not only or even primarily the "losers of globalization", but also those who live with the fear of losing and experiencing downward social mobility (Gingrich 2006: 199). As scholars of the Greek case of contemporary right-wing extremism also indicate: "*voters with precarious employment situations are more likely than the average voter to cast their ballots for extreme right parties*" (Georgiadou 2013: 95).

However compelling, the argument made by many electoral analyses on the electoral profile of contemporary European extreme right parties suffers from oversimplification of the class experience and attitude. Working classes and particularly their most insecure and precarious segments, are depicted as passive agents of the neo-nationalist discourses or, in terms of electoral behaviour, as an over-represented section of the extreme right parties' electorate (Spies 2013; Dansygiel, Walter 2015). Among other things that are partly or totally ignored in many interpretations concerning the alleged turn of the working classes towards nationalism, one could stress the following: the cumulative class traumas associated with the shifts in the capital-labour relations; the disintegration of the working-class communities; the socio-psychological effects of the underemployment patterns that thrive in late capitalism (Castells et al. 2012); the overwhelming TINA ("There Is No Alternative") attitude coupled with an ideological attack against the revolutionary past of the working class at both the national and European level.

Taking into account this gap, we put special emphasis on the implications of the *liminal employment patterns* both at the West Piraeus shipbuilding industry and in the HH steel company, in regard to the renegotiation of national and class identity. The notion of *liminality* and its uses in social sciences has been exemplary discussed by Bjørn Thomassen (2009). As far as it concerns occupational spaces and identities, Spyridakis (2013) has employed "liminality" as a conceptual framework in his ethnographic study on three labour communities (shipbuilding workers, precarious bank employees, tobacco workers) that suffer from segmentation, insecurity and inherent contingency, which also mirrors the conditions of the communities examined by the present paper.

The above-mentioned approaches supplement critically the analytical framework of neo-nationalism, as applied here. As stated below, the very heart of the neo-nationalist phenomenon is bound within the identity formation mechanism ascribed in the "us" against "them", where "us" is articulated as a cultural, essentialist construction. The present analysis of the collected interview material suggests that the nationalist discursive elements of these communities tap into various cultural resources, which are utilised by the political actors who strive for electoral gains.

Moreover, in the same analytical framework, there is an underscoring of two groups of *others* (immigrants and elites) that offers a more nuanced understanding of the resources of exclusiveness. The first group of others, namely the cosmopolitan elites who suffuse the EU apparatus, is perceived as the personification of the global market forces which jeopardise "the nation". Multiple and scaled collective responses are generated on the local, regional or national level mobilizing symbols, rituals, routines and practical knowledge. An insightful contribution here is the updated Polanyian notion of "double movement"

between the “forces of ‘pure’, expanding competition and the various attempts to delimit the reach of commodification”, leading to a resurgence of “moral economies” (Karner 2008: 169). In particular, the moral economy argument discussed by Karner in his analysis on Austrian nationalism (2008: 171) focuses on “a taken-for-granted ‘right to survive’ serving as a standard of legitimacy (applied to the performance by political elites) and outweighing economic considerations of profit maximization”.

In the context of the Greek attributions of responsibility for the economic crisis and its unprecedented social implications, the menacing figure of the supranational elite was personified in Troika, the tripartite creditors’ control body consisting of representatives of the EU, the IMF and the ECB. As discussed below, the everyday practices in the Greek steel company Hellenic Halyvourgia (HH) and the Perama shipyards (West Piraeus) demonstrate such perceptions while certain features of “moral economies” take place. Nevertheless, the mobilizing potential of neo-nationalism could not be realized without the attribution of blame towards the second group of “them”, that is the immigrants and to a lesser extent other cultural minorities.

Despite its novel features, neo-nationalism also shares certain elements of continuity with more traditional nationalist ideologies and discourses. According to Gingrich’s account on neo-nationalism, there are two basic elements shared by both versions of nationalism. First, they are both intrinsically linked to the capitalist market economy and related forms of statehood. Second and equally important, both of them aggressively construct and mobilize for, an emotionalized “us” (Gingrich 2006: 198). The former element is closely related to the social/moral orders that prevail among collectivities while one (or more) identity (or identities) is (are) in the making. The latter element of continuity reminds us of the importance of addressing the emotional structures that enhance or constrain the permeability of neo-nationalism.

As already mentioned, neo-nationalism does not occur in a void. Apart from the social conditions that enhance its permeability, there is also another challenge that needs to be addressed: its competitive and hardly symbiotic relationship with class identity. Once again, the stigmatizing of working-class communities as amplifiers of racist and anti-immigrant discourses should be reconsidered in the light of arguments stated in the reviving theoretical debate on class and nation.

In his introduction to the collectively authored volume titled *Class, Nation and Identity: The Anthropology of Political Movements*, the editor, Jeff Pratt, has convincingly argued as to the contrasts and similarities between class and nation:

“The nationalist movements attempt to unify a group of people they consider to be related through descent [...]. Their discourses stress homes and homelands and their identity narratives are strongly historical, established through continuity between the present and the past. Class movements create horizontal solidarity in order to achieve a transformation of the existing state or to abolish it. Their discourses stress relations established at work and in the workplace and their identity narratives have a strong future orientation [...] The similarities derive from the fact that in each case we encounter people living through periods of rapid change and dislocation who forge an identity and an interpretation of history which makes their own values and experiences central in a narrative of how society should be and forge a political strategy to make that happen.” (Pratt 2009: 17)

In a similar vein, our exploration of neo-nationalist discourses in working class contexts points to the fact that these two cultural, experiential and political modes of identities are inextricably tied, though in contradictory ways.

Collective Identities, Emotions, Moral Orders and the Interplay Between Nation and Class

Following both Stuart Hall's conceptualization of identities as "*not the so-called return to roots but a coming to terms with our 'routes'*" (Hall 1996: 4) and a social movement theorization of collective identity as a process (as opposed to an essence) which is heavily conditioned by the contingent ability to distinguish a (collective) self from the "*other*" and to be recognized by those "*others*" (Melucci 1995: 47), the collective identities under scrutiny are approached as:

- 1) constituted within representation drawing on the resources of history, language and culture in an ongoing process of negotiation and reconstruction. Therefore, we employ Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a method for studying "*symbolic practices*" (spoken language) in their wider contexts (Chouliaraki, Fairclough 1999: 16, Weiss, Wodak 2003). Units of analysis are themes and concepts such as injustice, glorification of the past, victimization, class struggle, foreign occupation and subordination;
- 2) constrained by different structures of power and social actors. Identities also exhibit agency in their uses of the discourses that seek to define them and in their negotiations of the practices that involve them (Karner 2007);
- 3) consolidated in emotional structures. There is a growing literature in political psychology linking mass politics, collective identities and emotions, arguing that contrary to the conventional wisdom, emotions should not be understood as competitors of reason. Feeling serves as the basis for a second route of judging and acting, well suited for some critical "*moments*" of democratic politics where common cause and commitment have to be sustained (Marcus 2012). The affective side of political judgments is as valuable to the understanding of public opinion formation as its cognitive components (Capelos, Exadaktylos 2016).

These three integral parts of the collective identities examined here, apart from widening the research scope towards the unreflective bases of identity ("*the unthought known*") they also reveal competing *social/moral orders* (Karner 2008), which constitute a more embedded level of identity politics. Bloch and Parry (1989) argue that economic systems combine two economic spheres: a 'short-term transactional order' of competition and a 'long-term social/moral order', which is articulated through discourses of the household, the community, the nation and their reproduction. Building on the latter concept, Karner (2008: 174) has suggested that Austrian identity discourses in the 21st century "*insist on a larger, collective order whose reproduction [...] is considered as a moral task that transcends individual self-interest*". Due to their inherent ideological contestation, identity politics: "*unfold in a diverse discursive field involving competing notions of social/moral order*" (Karner 2008: 174).

The notion of social/moral order is of paramount importance in the context of the Greek crisis and its contested economic terrain shaped by successive clashes and reconfigurations between the financial market forces (aligned with the so-called memoranda politics), the state and the various social groups and interests. The interpretation of the economic crisis as a problem of national sovereignty was incorporated in the political communication strategies of almost all Greek parties, while for the government the implications on an external enemy were a means of escaping political costs. The unpopular austerity policies that were implemented in this context were thus presented as a foreign imposition (attributed to the impersonal global market forces, IMF or the German-led European Union), and the Greek government could appear as an uninvolved actor obliged to conform to the terms of the loan agreements.

Despite the above consensus, it should not be assumed that the public discourse was uniformly shaped has been manifested through an anti-market, anti-liberal or moreover through an anti-capitalist ideological reaction. In line with Karner's argument, contemporary economics – unlike its more localized historical predecessors – are not subordinated to a singular moral order; *“instead, local responses to transnational market forces reveal discursive struggles between several such orders”* (Karner 2008: 178).

At least a significant – if not the most significant – part of the political and ideological collective responses to the Greek crisis, could be adequately linked with distinctive socio-cultural building blocks (*sorts of habitus*)³ pertaining to the three basic levels of identity politics: emotional structure, interpretative repertoires and social/moral orders. Although the social order is construed externally and signifies a locus beyond the internal dynamics of the national or class self-images, it remains an interacting element of the collective identity.

As suggested by the following analysis of the interview material collected from the West Piraeus workers and unemployed case, *the first socio-cultural building block* compiles fear, anger, victimization and a sort of social protectionism and exists as a resource of the neo-nationalist politics of nostalgia. *A different socio-cultural block* consisting of hope, pride, distrust, class-bounded politics of solidarity, emancipatory and inclusive discursive practices has been identified in the case of the strikers of the HH steel industry. Although the latter block seems residual compared with the former, it should not be overlooked as far as it concerns its dynamics. Another aspect that should be acknowledged is the hybrid character of these building blocks, as none of them exists in a void.

Although each of the following case studies highlights different aspects of the deep six-year crisis in Greece, they share one major assumption: the biggest part of the empirical material derives from interviews conducted with people who perceive themselves as directly impacted by the Greek crisis and who therefore eagerly offer their own narratives of the crisis. Most identify themselves as members of a collectivity (strikers' community, ship-building community, trade union community); as such, their discourse is constructed from competing interpretative repertoires, emotions and values. In the next section, we briefly discuss the socio-political context of each case, focussing on the analysis of the material on the basis of the previous developments.

³ National identity can be regarded as a sort of habitus, that is to say as a complex of common ideas, concepts or perception schemes, (a) of related emotional attitudes intersubjectively shared within a specific group of persons; (b) as well as of similar behavioural dispositions; (c) all of which are internalized through “national” socialization. (De Cillia, Reisigl, RuthWodak, 1999).

Unfolding Neo-nationalism in the Context of De-industrialization: ‘The Hidden Injury of Class’ in the Perama Ship-building Zone and HH Steel Company.

The sixteen semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the precariously positioned workers of the Perama shipyards and the unemployed from West Piraeus were conducted between 2013 and 2015, while the fourteen interviews with strikers of the Greek steel company HH were conducted between 2011 and 2012. Both target-groups were experiencing trauma associated with their extremely turbulent socio-economic environments on both local and national levels.

The workers of West Piraeus – a metropolitan area comprising the municipalities of Keratsini-Drapetsona, Nikaia-Rentis, Perama and Korydallos – have experienced the current economic hardship in a much harsher, at times devastating way, as the crisis aggravated the gradual de-industrialization, to which the wider Piraeus region had been subjected. The notion of *liminality*, applied by Spyridakis (2013), perfectly describes the contingencies that these people have to deal with every day. In particular, the period of 2010–2013, was recorded as the worst period in terms of economic activity in the ship-building industry of this area. According to a recent study, employment in Piraeus’ shipbuilding and ship repair industry has been reduced from 10,400 employees in 2008 to 5,437 in 2013 (Tsimplakis 2016).

The second group of interviewees – the steelworkers of the HH company – was also confronting gloomy pauperisation prospects and liminality at the time of the field research (2011–2012), mainly due to the loss of income and the culminated insecurity. The employer’s plans for dismissals, deep wage cuts and work-time flexibilisation were perceived as unfair treatment and thus the “felt injustice” was maximized. The strike in HH lasted almost nine months, while the two waves of interviews were conducted in months 2 and 6.

The intersubjective realm of the HH case differs from that of West Piraeus in terms of temporal and spatial setting, considering that at the time of the survey, the HH workers had not yet been defeated. The social space of the occupied factory with its numerous national and transnational events of solidarity, organised and supported by its militant communist leadership, was forging a class-bounded identity, competing with other forms of identities, such as the national one. It was only a couple of months after the second wave of interviewing that the strike ended up with mass dismissals (about 4 in 5 workers were fired), diminished wages, employer hostility and deregulation.

Furthermore, the collective identities of both groups underwent socio-cultural shifts associated with the challenging of the existing social and moral order though in different ways. In the case of West Piraeus, this shift was accompanied by a resurgence of exclusivist politics at the local level. In the case of HH, the challenging of the market rules took on an inclusive, redistributive and emancipatory character, although implicit neo-nationalist tendencies also transpired at the moment of the strikers’ defeat. The resulting interview material from both cases has been analysed focusing on *themes* that tap into the *interpretation* of the ongoing crisis, the *emotional responses* to the subjects’ hardships and the reconstructed *social/moral order* entailing values and attitudes towards the power relations within the workplace or the community under scrutiny.

Starting with the interpretations and focusing on *interpretative repertoires* (Wetherell, Potter 1988) emerging from both groups, we observe that there are some common patterns of attribution of blame. The nation and the steelworkers’ community are the victims, while the foreign powers and their subordinates, namely the Greek government, are

the victimizers. For instance, striker no. 4, a 55-year-old industrial plumber and ex-member of the union board, argues, *“If they are the deceivers and they took the money, I do not owe a thing. It’s not my fault, my colleagues’ fault nor Greece’s fault to speak more generally”*.

The same person attributes the blame for the economic and social situation in Greece as follows: *“Those who create the discomfort are unfortunately abroad. Our politicians here are not Greeks, because if they were, things would be different. Unfortunately, they are all renegades”*. The class discourse is of course dominant among the strikers and impacts on the blame-attributing mechanisms: *“If only we could elect a working-class leadership in Parliament and not those thieves, who have left their wages intact”* says striker no. 5, a 34-year-old worker who defines himself as supporter of non-mainstream political parties.

There is also a noticeable mechanical interpretation which, even if it is not conflated with exclusivist discursive patterns, has certain implications for the negotiation of national identity: *“the game is compromised; they want degrading countries, cheap labour, while other countries take advantage by receiving interests; they want us to return 50 years backwards.”*

In the same vein, the 42-year-old worker S.T. from West Piraeus, who portrays himself as a left-wing activist, nonetheless adopts a narrative about the losers and winners of the crisis, which retains a discursive opposition between the rulers and the ruled, but at the same time denotes an opposition between the “Europeans” and the “Greeks”. Thus, the opposition between workers and capital is discursively mapped onto different nation-states: *“For example, France builds a perfume factory. Who is going to work here? When Europe is united and I’m obliged to take [workers] from every country, who’s going to work? I, the French, keep the money. I can’t let a Greek become the manager.”* According to such a narrative, nations like Greece signify the subordinated classes whose destiny is to be exploited. Despite his progressive tone, S.T. hardly escapes from the mechanical, deterministic and ultimately fatalist community of discourse of a deeply injured working class.

Moreover, within a nationalist discourse a respective instrumentalism, articulates the emotionalized and essentialist “us” which is demarcated by national and not class connotations. Striker no. 8, a 50-year-old machine operator, stresses emphatically: *“There is a plot [against the Greeks]. Greece has such a civilization, Greece has emanated such things; they still try to find how we built monuments, temples 2,500 years ago, when they were still uncivilised. I can see that Greece has energy resources and I don’t know under which agreements the exploitation of such resources has come to a halt.”*

However, taking into account the total of strikers’ narrations, neo-nationalist interpretative repertoires seem less explicit and definitely not hegemonic, compared with the Piraeus case of a working-class community. At this point, the study of the emotional structure of Piraeus and HH workers contributes further to the analysis of the discursive practices employed. As already implied, the study of mass political behaviour and identity research should not ignore that emotions have numerous and diverse effects on political action.

Indignation, anger, distrust against the employer, the government, and to a lesser extent the EU or other transnational entities, pride for being on the forefront of the Greek social protest movement and hope for strike victory constitute the dominant emotions among the interviewed strikers. *“There will be blood”*, declares striker no. 4, *“if the employer and the government do not step back”*. Striker no. 9, a 47-year-old worker, argues that he has been working as a steelworker at HH for twenty years *“and the only things we received are injuries, pressure, oppression and death. And this is gratitude, they say.*

And they won't stop here. If we don't react, there will be more victims". As stated by striker no. 14, a 43-year-old engineer, *"on the one hand, the anti-labour laws implemented by Greek governments and dictated by the creditors trap you, but on the other hand they urge you to react, to go out and shout [...] What are we supposed to do? Say thanks and kneel down? No, it doesn't work this way".*

Distrust emanates from many accounts as well. The political attitude of striker no. 9 is intertwined with his feeling of distrust: *"The last time I voted, I cast the ballot for a marginal party. I was led by indignation. I trust no one."* The affection of distrust and particularly the diminished levels of political and institutional trust are visible in many accounts: *"[I trust] No one. Not even my shadow. This is how the worker should be",* claims striker no. 13, a young worker with only for 4 years' experience with HH. If the steelworkers' anger lacked an expectation of change it could lead to despair and apathy (Frijda 2004: 164). However, along with anger and distrust, positive emotions such as pride, enthusiasm and hope also took their place, boosting the dynamics of mobilization at the micro-level. In particular, hope and enthusiasm are positive emotions that promote the use of habitual decision-making and stimulate engagement and action (Capelos 2011). Striker no. 2, a 28-year-old worker and one of the first who got fired, mentions with original pride: *"We won't be the slaves of the 21st century. We are steelworkers and will die like steelworkers."*

Although anger is an emotion that applies to many of the respondents from West Piraeus too, a recurrent feeling of fear is also expressed explicitly, while positive emotions are almost totally absent. On the opposite side, fear and anger couple with guilt. Focussing on fear, G.T., a 50-year-old, long-term unemployed worker who abandoned job-hunting in ship repair ten years ago, is afraid of the decay of Piraeus industry: *"All is dead now. You're afraid to go out in the night. And we are speaking about Keratsini."*

G.A., who expects to earn money only by looking for a short-term shipping job abroad, says: *"I'm in a panic state, so to speak... If I can't ship out, my mind starts playing games."* In the same vein, V.B., a 55-year-old construction worker, at the end of the interview suggested with more than a hint of desperation that if the bank came to confiscate his house, he would be waiting for them armed...

Hopes and expectations have given way to recurrent pessimism, expressed in assessments such as: *"Greece can't change anyway, now; we're going down";* or, *"I see tomorrow gloom and doom";* or, *"Some hope? – No, don't say crazy things..."* As Frijda (2004: 166) has noted: *"anger that finds no meaningful outlet may lead to harming oneself. Revenge, almost by definition commands only ineffective actions"*. Perceived inefficacy, regarding both the working-class community of West Piraeus and the institutions responsible for repairing social suffering (welfare-state institutions, trade unions, local state) coupled with anger directed both inwards (*"we demanded too much"*) and outwards (*"they have stolen our enjoyment"*), both bottom-up (accusation of immigrants, left parties, unions) and top-down (accusation of foreign powers, transnational elites and their subordinate Greek political system), created an explosive mixture of emotions. The comforting functions of neo-nationalism found their way to realisation, and the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn consolidated its electoral and organisational gains in the previously "red fortresses" of West Piraeus.

This may explain why in contrast with the HH strikers, the Piraeus workers tend to be more vulnerable to the glorification of the past, something inherent in neo-nationalist discourses. According to G.T.'s recollections: *"In Keratsini and Drapetsona (West Piraeus), people were employed in the Zone and in construction... I remember shops full of people*

in Keratsini.” In accord with the interpretative repertoires of many of his colleagues, G.T.’s interpretations of the crisis largely ascribe responsibility to workers as a whole, to the unions, which by striking discouraged investors at a time of relative prosperity: *“I remember in 1989, a weekly salary was 250,000 [drachmas], from 6 AM to 6 PM. Overtime. Nice living.”* His anti-union and self-critical attitude is outlined unequivocally a little later in the interview: *“Strike... What’s this thing? ... Now go on strike in the Zone; it is a graveyard. These things consumed us... Strike... We had it coming.”*

Along with a narrative of guilt about previous consumption patterns that according to T.A. were rather exuberant, self-criticism is recurrent in terms of the mistakes made by the Zone workers individually or collectively – errors, he argues, that have to do with disregard for the community, apathy and absence from union struggles. *“Thanks to the union, we gained much. But on the other hand, it is at fault, because we were going to strikes at the slightest opportunity. But we are at fault too, because we were not participating. I’ve never taken part in a demonstration. We can’t say it was only the union’s fault.”*

The attitude of the interviewed West Piraeus workers towards mass consumption is characterised by ambiguity rather than uniformity, and this is also the case for the steelworkers of HH. In the context of economic prosperity, consumption provides *“symbolic trophies”* to also be displayed to the (upper) middle class, thereby providing the working class with a sense of dignity (Bithymitris: 2016a). In the midst of economic hardship though, this has given way to self-blame: encouraged by the elites, former images of dignity have been reconstructed as ‘proof’ of individual and collective guilt for the crisis (Lialiouti, Bithymitris 2016).

A mode of coping with this ambiguity is the homogenising discourse of neo-nationalism and its embedded social protectionism. The extreme right in West Piraeus (and elsewhere) capitalised on this “healing” component of nationalism, demonstrating two basic discursive patterns: first, the glorification of the Zone’s past; and, second, the stereotyping of the political enemies.

As argued elsewhere, Golden Dawn articulates a strongly anti-elitist nationalism, promising to include the internal “outsiders” of West Piraeus within the solace provided by the nation (Bithymitris 2016a). Espousing political rhetoric typical of the European extreme right, including a xenophobic stance and populist opposition to the “corrupt” political establishment, Golden Dawn gained an unexpected share of the vote particularly among the working class and the lower middle class (Davou, Demertzis 2013: 113). Workers and the unemployed are thereby encouraged to develop and express anti-elitist or anti-systemic opposition without being isolated from the national community, with the latter being portrayed as a resort of certainty, continuity and safety.

Regarding the interpretative repertoires employed by the workers of West Piraeus, the shifts from a class-bounded to a nation-bounded discourse is more explicit than in the steelworkers’ case. The delegitimisation of the local syndicate of metalworkers reconfigures the attribution of blame, from capital (ship owners and their contractors) to organised labour: *“I don’t care what the ship owner does from the moment he brings in the ship and he meets his obligations; I must meet my obligations. [...] I told them during a strike, what you do is not right because you strike against the client, it impacts upon the client and everyone is gone from the zone”,* said the metalworker G.A. The collective assessment of unionism is apparently contrasted with the HH case. Most of the strikers’ accounts, even from those who were ideologically opposite to the unions’ leadership, accepted and appraised their leader as *“fighter who doesn’t give up”, “dignified”* and *“persistent”*.

There is also another dimension concerning the different moral orders between the two cases. The strike at HH is a case of challenging the capitalist market norms and customs via the function of a moral economy within the occupied industry for the period of nine strike months. According to the daily reporting of strike events, a total of 481 social and political organisations from Greece and abroad, mostly trade unions, expressed their solidarity with the HH union by sending money, foods, utilities or letters of support (Bithymitris 2016b). Likewise, an inclusive mechanism of distribution was created, keeping with a spirit of democratic accountancy and commitment.

To sum up, the analysis of the material collected leads to quite different assessments of the socio-cultural building blocks construed by interpretative repertoires, emotional structures and moral orders. *The building block* in the case of West Piraeus compiled fear, anger, hopelessness, victimization and social protectionism, and it has been further instrumentalised by the agents of the neo-nationalist politics of nostalgia. *The building block* in the case of HH strike compiled anger, hope, pride, class-oriented discourses, solidarity politics and a far less implicit victimization as a pattern of negotiating national self-image. Additionally, both structures were characterised by hybridity: labour radicalism is also present at West Piraeus, though it is somehow withering away in the period under scrutiny; nationalist elements are visible within the strikers' community in the HH case, however marginal at the time of my survey.

Concluding Remarks

Although nationalism in current Greek public discourse has been systematically explored with regard to supply-side politics (Dinas et al. 2013; Ellinas 2013), a closer look at the socio-cultural background of public attitudes, beliefs and discursive practices is still missing, particularly as far as it concerns working-class politics. The present paper attempted to reconstruct the discourse of the selected *liminal workers*, by examining three different levels of identity: (a) the representation level, where "*certain tropes or figures of speech*" signal the presence of a repertoire (Wetherell, Potter 1988: 168-183; Wetherell, 1998), (b) the emotional level, and (c) the level of wider and more abstract spectrums of social knowledge, such as the social and moral orders, embedded within individuals' and social groups' value systems.

The concept of neo-nationalism is drawn mainly from the social anthropology study of Gingrich, who outlined three aspects of this phenomenon: the essentialised "us", the superior otherness ("them 1"), and the inferior otherness ("them 2"). The analysis of the empirical material analysed here gives credit to the aforementioned conceptualization at least as far as it concerns underground socio-cultural processes of collective identity formation.

In particular, the discourse analysis of the interview material collected from labourers of West Piraeus disclosed a socio-cultural and emotional building block that comprises fear, anger and victimization discursive patterns, while many of the accounts aligned with the moral order of social protectionism. Neo-nationalist features also emerged. The analysis of the material collected from interviews conducted with strikers of the Greek steel company HH during their strike indicated a second socio-cultural building block, which consisted of hope, anger, class-based discursive practices and a moral order of embedded solidarity. Victimization discursive patterns, although only implicit at least in comparison to the Piraeus case, were also present.

Though tentative, the assumptions made here suggest that the emergence of neo-nationalism and its ambivalent intersection with class could not be adequately stressed without the exploration of the social, cultural and emotional raw material stemming from the working-class narrations and yet in liminal contexts. The analysis of discourses of loss such as those examined in the Piraeus case showed that their instrumentalisation by agents of pure-and-simple nationalism is conditioned upon the ebbs and flows of other cultural and emotional building blocks, such as the one explored in the case of HH strikers. Alongside that, one could reflect on other less far-reaching moments of recent Greek labour radicalism (Zamponi, Vogiatzoglou 2015: 6), which also challenge the argument of the alleged workers' predisposition in favour of nationalism and extreme right politics. Although the issue of hegemony lies beyond the scope of this paper, it would be useful to elaborate further on the implications of labour's growing liminality in tandem with the political and ideological decline of labour's militancy, both nationally and globally. Otherwise, the misleading labelling of the modern worker's spoken and unspoken desire for safety and certainty, as a nationalist symptom, remains unchallenged.

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