Article – Theme section

Crisis reflexivity
The fragile regime of citizenship in Greece's compounded crises

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Abstract

The paper explores how the crisis imaginary shapes citizen identity in relation to the migrant noncitizen as well as the media's role in enhancing or containing the crisis. The communicative process of crisis reflexivity offers a conceptual tool to understand the consequences of limited or absent encounters with noncitizen Others for the citizens' construction of identity. Within the spatio-temporality of compounded crises in an Athenian neighbourhood, the study's multi-method approach combines 30 in-depth interviews with Greek citizens with offline and online participant observation. The empirical findings reveal that embodied encounters shape the perception of citizens as victims in light of structural inequalities and the existential uncertainty tied to media disinformation and fear. However, for those with progressive views, predominantly mediated encounters can open up an avenue for a politics of justice and generate feelings of cosmopolitanism towards citizens-in-the-making.

Introduction: Citizenship in crisis

The impact of the crisis-prone system of capitalism and the neoliberal framework is mostly felt in urban spaces. With Southern European countries struggling to meet the demands of divided political landscapes, austerity and economic stagnation have become serious challenges for urban populations. Hit hard by multiple crises since 2008 – including the financial crisis, increased migrant mobility in Europe, and most recently the pandemic – large metropolises have suffered significantly. Due to what Peck (2012) calls "austerity urbanism", these cities bear the brunt of welfare cuts (Matsaganis, 2011; Hall et al., 2013), being forced to address social issues with restricted budgets. Beyond the economic change, the city is a "space of encounter" (Valentine & Harris, 2016, p. 915) – a changing city that undergoes demographic transformation because of the arrival of migrant populations. Migration has been constituted in public discourse as a phenomenon that destabilises meanings of sovereignty, belonging, and identity – as yet another "crisis" that adds to existing inequalities, uncertainties, and anxieties.

When zooming into the reality of large urban areas where residents are highly dependent on institutional mechanisms, crisis encompasses several sub-crises that emerge from established economic mechanisms: (youth) unemployment, gentrification and the housing issue it entails, and increased demand for financial support and services and social support for disadvantaged groups. The convergence of these instabilities, coupled with rising poverty and insecurity, has transformed cities into sites of both conflict and solidarity. The city, now more than ever, constitutes a space where citizens have situated encounters with urban dwellers of different communities and cultures (Wilson, 2011; Amin, 2012; Neal et al., 2015).

In an attempt to explore how citizens and noncitizens live together in the spatio-temporality of compounded crises in the multicultural neighbourhood, I first synthesise ideas that address the issue of citizen identity through alterity by foregrounding the concepts of *crisis* and *reflexivity*. The materiality of migration and intercultural encounters coincides with the spatio-temporality of perceived and experienced crises – a context that positions migration as a topic at the core of citizens' anxieties and insecurities over other cultural and structural processes in the nation. Morley notes that conflict arises from identity formation and the attempt to exclude others who do not fit within culturally or ethnically purified enclaves (2004). For many, migration reframes the imaginary of crisis and of the nation – it becomes a condition and a discourse of identity that individuals reflect on when they speak of the citizen Self and the non-European/non-White Other. While crisis has been extensively discussed in relation to migration and the so-called "migration crisis", this is not the aim of the current paper. What has been insufficiently studied, rather, is the role of *crisis* for *citizenry*. By locating this interrogation in a crisis-ridden multicultural neighbourhood of Athens – Kypseli – I explore how meanings of migration for citizens are shaped in the context of urban throwntogetherness (Massey, 2005).

Inspired by Taylor's conception of the social imaginary as "those images, stories and legends" through which "people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others […] and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (2002, p. 106), and following Chouliaraki and Georgiou (2022), I deploy the notion of the "crisis imaginary". Referring to the symbolic space of Westernised narratives and representations through which individual citizens are invited to *imagine* what their encounters with migrants mean to their lives and identities, the crisis imaginary becomes a "distinction that makes certain things visible and invisible" in the temporal and socio-historical context that individuals experience on a daily basis (Roitman, 2013, p. 39). And, in the reality of the multicultural European city, the noncitizen is not only an imagined force, but also an embodied agent who lives close by. Building on this conception of the crisis imaginary, I draw also on Roitman's (2013) use of "crisis" that, besides its "narrative strategy", acknowledges its construction as an "experiential condition" with discursive, material, and affective manifestations. I thus aim to comprehend crisis through discourse and affective experience alike, in particular through exploring citizens' views and everyday life experiences, as they understand them as stimulated by or emerging from conditions of crisis. *How does the crisis imaginary shape the citizen Self in relation to the migrant non-citizen, and what is the media's role in enhancing or containing the crisis?* This is the main question that this paper aims to address.

Inspired by literature on reflexivity and crisis, I aim to foreground crisis as a context of citizen identity construction. I focus on how crisis comes to be construed as a *cultural process*. The second section of the paper focuses on these ideas in the context of Kypseli and in the analysis of material collected through online and offline participant observation as well as through in-depth interviews. I seek to understand three facets of reflexivity – disinformation, fear, and hope – by exploring citizens' views and everyday life experiences, as they understand them as stimulated by or emerging from conditions of crisis. The final section exemplifies the convergence of crisis and reflexivity in understanding the symbolic and enacted dimensions of citizenship in cities undergoing significant economic and demographic change.

Citizen identity through reflexivity

I turn to a processual theorisation of citizen identity, not as emerging internal to its own self-perception of similarity, but as constituted *from* the outside and *through* the Other (Isin, 2002). I thus explore citizens' identity in a dialogical framework, which is always defined through the encounter with the Other who, in the case of the multicultural city, is primarily embodied and represented as the migrant noncitizen. This theorisation of citizen identity is premised on three key ideas: A) that it is *practised* within everyday life and within a specific spatial context of a bounded nation but also of the city (Back & Sinha, 2018; Hall et al., 2016; Isin, 2002); B) it is *imagined* within the imagined community

of the nation – it can be enacted as claims where "new actors articulate claims for justice through new sites that involve multiple and overlapping scales of rights and obligations" (Isin, 2002, p. 370); and C) it is *relational*, through the constitutive outside(r) – always contextualised within urban systems and experiences of uneven distribution of knowledge and power.

I place the process of *reflexivity* at the core of citizen identity. According to key theorists of reflexive modernisation (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992), the concept of reflexivity describes how subjects construct their identities vis-à-vis constantly changing structural conditions and places individual rationality at the core of the modern Self. I take the concept of "convivial reflexivity" as a point of departure and build on my previous work (2021), in which I identified gaps in both the classic (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992) and critical (Archer, 2010, 2012; Adams, 2003, 2006; Farrugia, 2013) approaches to reflexivity. I explicate how "convivial reflexivity" works on different levels – macro and micro. Convivial reflexivity "offers a conceptual tool to make sense of the complex and contradictory intercultural interactions in the city of difference and their role in shaping practices and ideologies of citizenry and Otherness" (Koulaxi, 2021, pp. 225–226). I challenged Giddens' oversight by emphasising the importance of embodied knowledge (Bourdieu, 1990) in citizen identity formation at a micro level and utilising the concept of mediated reflexivity (Andrejevic, 2017, p. 557), which connects to the circulation of discourses and framing of Self–Other relationships.

Taking its starting point in reflexivity – as a property of humans that links cognitive processes with affective interactions (Seyfert, 2012) – my vocabulary is also grounded in people and their capacities for constructing meanings of the Self and the Other in the context of crisis. As recorded in "convivial reflexivity", reflexive Selves are constituted uniquely, but always both through discourse and affect alike (Koulaxi, 2021). In the same wavelength, the current paper argues that reflexives identities are constituted at the juncture of the macro processes of globalisation and intense mediated communication and micro-processes of everyday life (Giddens, 1991, 1992; Georgiou, 2019).

Similar to my earlier work (2021, 2022), the current paper understands reflexivity as emerging within the entanglement of the embodied and the mediated, but always within relations of history and power (Hall, 1996). I adopt the idea of *affective, embodied, and mediated reflexivity* to refer to the ways in which historical mediations of identity and power (Ahmed, 2000) are always already embedded in societal and individual systems of making sense of the encounter and the Self. This means that affective, embodied and mediated reflexivity is the result of historical processes of mediation in the sense that *both* everyday action *and* media representations are anchored in histories and relations of power that have shaped meanings of nationality, race, class, gender and so on.

Demystifying 'crisis' in citizen identity

There is substantial work surrounding the concept of crisis within the context of globalisation and migration, but this work often devolves into a false dichotomy of whether 'crisis' is socially constructed or real (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998; Mirowski, 2013). My intention is to resist framing 'crisis' either as an exceptional moment or a taken-for-granted condition, but rather to posit it as a concept whose definitions and meanings are unstable and constantly change in the context of the city. The emphasis placed on the idea of exceptionality leaves limited scope for exploring crisis in its discursive, material and affective manifestations in the context of everyday life. When crisis designates something more than 'a state of emergency' (Agamben, 2020), exploring the spatio-temporality of crisis is vital to uncover its localised experiences in everyday life. In what ways, then, does crisis relate to the everyday experience of reflexivity? In this paper, I seek to explore how crises are experienced as part of the continuous, lived experience in the multicultural locale. This includes the daily interactions, the material conditions, and the affective experiences of individuals that may not align with the notion of an 'emergency' but still constitute a significant and persistent sense of crisis.

Without favouring a political utopia where the concept of crisis has vanished and opposing the taken-for-granted narrative that crisis is intrinsic to the (capitalist) system and modernity, Roitman's (2013) study examines the practice of the concept of crisis. Its usefulness for this paper lies in the fact that she challenges the use of the notion of crisis as a narrative strategy and explores how it comes "to be construed as a protracted historical and experiential condition" (2013, p. 2). Most importantly, in the multicultural city, crisis is a way in which discourses and practices enter the encounter between citizens and noncitizens. On the same wavelength, Kaun (2016) makes an important contribution to a critical approach to the broad, vague concept of crises, viewing them as "*discursive* and *material* complex formations that are constantly under negotiation" (ibid, p. 21; emphasis added). It is this conceptualisation that I would like to take as my starting point for the study of citizen identity. The discussion of crisis is situated at the local level, where cities also adapt and change in response to crises.

I start my enquiry by conceiving crisis through discourse and affective experience, in particular by identifying citizens' perceptions and experiences as they understand them as driven or resulting from conditions of crisis. I locate my approach within what Kaun refers to as the discursive and material constitution of crisis, by exploring how citizens make sense of 'crisis' and what 'crisis' means for them in relation to the Self in the context of everyday life. When I employ the term crisis in this framework, I refer to, firstly, the lived experience of crisis (materiality) and, secondly, the imagining of crisis (discourse) that is culturally constituted and context-dependent: its changing nature is related to the temporal and socio-historical context in which it takes its meaning as a condition and as a narrative for understanding the Self and Others. Exploring crisis through the lens of media and communications is the missing link in understanding the construction of citizen

identity. Thinking of crisis in a productive way requires that crisis is not only a background concept, but one that in its discursive, material and affective manifestations generates new subjectivities and encapsulates every element of economic, political and social reality. I explore the 'crisis imaginary' (Taylor, 2002; Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2022) that becomes the symbolic space within which reflexivity (the practical negotiation of the imaginary that takes place through reflexivity) mobilises discourses and narratives present in the mediated encounter with the Other. I aim to bridge the gap between the lived experience of crisis and the cultural construction of its discourse.

The empirical discussion demonstrates how the crisis imaginary can be manifested through media disinformation regarding migration-related stories and becomes a public space for the views of citizens who perceive themselves as victims. As an extension to this, I show that anger and indignation are mobilised as affective forces to bestow legitimacy on claims of victimhood as expressed by Greek citizens (Chouliaraki, 2020). The last section of the empirical analysis examines how predominantly mediated encounters can open up an avenue for a politics of justice and generate feelings of cosmopolitanism towards citizens-in-the-making – that is how an 'alternative imaginary' (Zehfuss, 2020) becomes the means to diversify the city of Athens. The paper ends by bringing the concepts of reflexivity and crisis together to explain how identities are configured and reconfigured when certainties about the (citizen) Self have been destabilised because of the interaction of perceived and experienced crises.

Methodology

Informed by interdisciplinary approaches to ethnographic urban and media research (Pink & Morgan, 2013), this study is grounded in a four-month intense ethnographic exploration in Kypseli, a vibrant and diverse neighbourhood in Athens, Greece. Known for its rich tapestry of multiculturalism, Kypseli is a lively neighbourhood of approximately 50,000 residents, located in the 6th district of the Municipality of the 'global city' of Athens (Sassen, 2000). Greece has always been a mixture of different religious and ethnic groups, such as Muslims, Vlachs, Jews, Moraites, Rumelians, Turkish, Pomaks, Roma, Arvanites, Slavo-Macedonians, and refugees from Asia Minor – groups and communities that, in 1840, formed the modern Greek state in lands that for 400 years had been part of the Ottoman Empire. I located my study in Kypseli mainly for its diverse ethno-cultural constitution (Kandylis, Maloutas, & Sayas, 2012) as recent statistics refer to it as a neighbourhood whose migrant population constitutes 65% of the total (Daniilidis, 2018). The area's dynamic nature provided an ideal setting to examine the interplay between citizens and noncitizens in a modern urban context.

This research primarily utilised both online and offline ethnographic participant observation between April and July 2019. This approach enabled an in-depth understanding of the daily interactions and social dynamics within Kypseli. The methodology allowed

for the observation of real-life behaviours and interactions, offering insights into the lived experiences of the neighbourhood's residents. Following strategies from Pink's 'sensory ethnography' (2009) that accounts for bodily functions, I joined my participants in embodied activities (walking, shopping or eating) and in places with potential newcomer-citizen interaction, such as school gates, grocery stores, or simply in Fokionos Negri (the car-free street where many shops, restaurants and cafes are located) or in Kypseli Square. Walking around the area with participants was turned into a research opportunity (Pink, 2007, 2008). During the walks, we discussed while they were showing me Kypseli through their own eyes, as well as the local spots they usually visited and why, and places they avoided and why. Complementing the participant observation, 30 in-depth interviews were conducted. These interviews provided a space for residents to express their views on the multicultural environment and its impact on their lives and identities. The study focused on Greek citizens aged between 30 and 50 years, representing a cross-section of Kypseli's population in terms of education and class, encompassing both working-class and middle-class residents. An equal representation of men and women was ensured in the sample, reflecting the neighbourhood's gender balance. While I conducted in-depth interviews in homes, workplaces and around the city, I systematised my participant observations in the material and digital environments of the locale. Reading Jeffrey Lane's (2016) inspiring ethnographic study of networked streets in Harlem, I connected with as many of my research participants as possible on social media in an effort to "move online and offline with the same set of people" (2016, p. 54). Participants were asked if they would be happy for me to follow them online, except for two participants who were approached after I read their posts online. I used social media information from partici-pants who consented after reviewing a Microsoft Word document containing selected posts and comments, and I saved material from online observations to ask follow-up questions in subsequent meetings with participants I encountered frequently. My Greek nationality and personal contacts provided easy access to the neighbourhood, and my identity as a young female scholar made participants more willing to talk to me, as my age and gender positioned me as a non-threatening presence. Despite my familiarity with the Greek context and insiderness in domestic affairs that undoubtedly provided a level of trust, I was at the same time mindful of my then seven-year absence from the country that also made me an outsider (Ryan, 2015). Participants either viewed me as part of the brain drain (and thus one of those hit by Greece's economic crisis) or as a researcher from a prestigious university (and thus an outsider). Acknowledging the structural inequali-ties in Greek society, I approached the fieldwork with a stance of humility and empa-thy, particularly when discussing sensitive topics like the economic crisis's impacts on personal lives. The audio recordings from the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using NVivo 11, a software tool designed for qualitative data analysis. Adopting a grounded theory approach, the analysis was inductive, allowing themes and codes to emerge organically from the data. This methodological choice was instrumental in under-

standing the nuanced and complex narratives surrounding citizen and noncitizen interactions in Kypseli. The subsequent discussion in this study centres on the nature of citizens' embodied encounters with noncitizens within Kypseli. It delves into how these interactions are realised and negotiated in everyday life, and critically examines the adaptability and limits of the politics of difference in this multicultural urban setting.

Reflexivity of disinformation

For many of my participants, the mere presence of migrants in the Kypseli Square, on the streets and in public transport, mobilised discourses of the 'threatening' (to Greek citizens) Other. When I walked with Daphne, a female nail specialist in her early 30s, to do some grocery shopping close to her flat, we encountered a group of men of Middle Eastern appearance sitting on a bench in front of the playground. They were holding their mobile phones and chatting. During the conversation we had while sitting at the local café, I observed her affective reactions when she encountered the men: She closed her eyes, took a deep breath and shook her head with dissatisfaction. In common with two other participants, Markos and Anargyros, Daphne was annoyed by the apparent expense of migrants' and refugees' belongings. "Have you seen their mobile phones?" asked Daphne during our conversation. Even when participants did not directly refer to migrants' personal items, I could easily feel their dissatisfaction when accompanying them on daily activities. Anargyros and Daphne commented on the popular clothing brands and fashionable shoes that migrants wore when out on the streets; it was "unacceptable" for migrants to be "claiming benefits and seeking for a shelter when wearing such expensive clothes", they said in tones of outrage. Participants mentioned that, historically, social benefits have been considered to be "abused" by migrants – the so-called, in the literature, "welfare scroungers" (Golding, 1999; Larsen & Dejgaard, 2013) and those that the neoliberal order failed and those who were vulnerable. This section demonstrates that anti-migrant attitudes are central to disinformation, making noncitizens direct targets of attack and normalising racism as an integral part of everyday life in the digital and material streets of Kypseli.

Strong anti-migrant sentiments were usually expressed by participants who had little engagement with migrants on an interpersonal level and who tended to make intensive use of television and social media (Newman et al, 2019). Participants' anger was mobilised to legitimise anxieties that came from *below* – anxieties about refugees who receive the benefits and Greek citizens as the ones "who do not get anything" in return – and emerged as a result of disinformation circulated on mass and social media. Disinformation often spreads easily, particularly in high-anxiety environments (Calrson, Jakli, & Linos, 2018), and social media platforms amplify its reach. Far-right discourse in Greece has intensified anti-migrant speech and disinformation online, with social media playing a key role in spreading exclusionary anti-immigration messages and rooted stereotypes

(Humprecht et.al, 2020; Calderón & Veglis, 2023). This rise in extremist rhetoric and online disinformation has significantly contributed to political polarisation (Kalogeropoulos et. al, 2021) and negative attitudes towards immigrants, adding to the 'digital hate culture' (Ganesh, 2018). The antagonism between citizens and noncitizens also appeared in media practices of producing content on Facebook: "The flat of an unemployed Greek was taken because they couldn't afford to pay the electricity bill. In Kypseli, an NGO rents a flat for migrants and the lights/heating are on 24/7". My interlocutors complained about migrants who had settled in apartments offered by the NGOs that catered for the new arrivals' needs and paid their electricity and gas bills. It was common knowledge in the area that many blocks of flats did not operate their central heating, because tenants and property owners could not afford to pay their electricity and gas bills. The few who could afford it did not wish to pay for those who could not, and so there was no heating for anyone. According to findings, the temporal dimension here is stark: while migrant apartments managed by NGOs could maintain heating 24/7, local residents often could not afford to have the heating on all day, even in cold weather. This disparity in the ability to keep warm underscores the ongoing financial struggles of local residents and defines the temporality of their everyday life, highlighting a continuous state of economic hardship and insecurity (Knight & Steward, 2016).

Participants' affective responses intersected with disinformation and an Orientalist discourse familiar across Europe, which reaffirms that race still matters (Lentin, 2020) and vilifies 'welfare scroungers' who allegedly get stipends from the hard-working, tax-paying majority (Golding, 1999). Both online observations and interviews with participants generated narratives of apparently 'bottomless' funding for refugees. Such discussions often culminated in expressions of frustration about the rising cost of living, which was attributed to the financial accommodations made for migrants. A popular narrative that circulated on social media (mainly Facebook and X) was that migrants benefited from the Public Utility Services (known as ΥΚΩ in Greek) charge on the Public Power Corporation (PPC) bill that was intended for vulnerable groups of citizens. Responding to a participant's Facebook post, someone wrote: "You live on your own and have to pay the PPC bill for: families, unemployed and immigrants. Who is going to pay for me?" In the same vein, another angry post commented: "It was not enough that immigrants, illegal or not, received social benefits … Now, they will all have a 70% discount on the PPC bill. While for us the price of electricity is constantly increasing to cater for migrants at our expense and enable PPC to make ends meet". Lydia, a working-class mother, was the first participant to reproduce this narrative, which was widely circulated on social media platforms:

> … PPC has all these social tariffs included for migrants. When people do not have enough income to pay, it's okay. They can have some discount. But to pay for migrants, which are not included in any category, it is only a burden.

Participants Lydia and Markos, among other Greek citizens who have the 'lived experi-
ence of injustice' (Demertzis, 2006, p. 111), justified their unwelcoming attitudes towards
migrants and refugees by stating this belief, that the newcomers benefited from PPC's
Public Utility Services charge. When probing the source of such beliefs, participants fre-
quently referred to such information as 'common knowledge' or cited their engagement
with media stories despite their own embodied encounters with migrants on the material
street – an indication of a societal inclination towards accepting and propagating unveri-
fied information (Couldry, 2004; Fazio et al, 2015).

The second dimension of participants' anxieties that mediates crisis reflexivity was
built on the failure of governmental entities to support their citizens. This time, it was the
Greek state that 'failed to protect' its citizens. The grievances articulated by the par-
ticipants extend beyond mere economic concerns; they are emblematic of a perceived
betrayal by the state. There is a palpable sentiment that the government has failed to pro-
tect its citizens, opting instead to extend support to refugees and migrants. Temporality is
crucial in understanding citizens' anxieties and insecurities. The sense of state betrayal did
not arise overnight; it is the result of prolonged periods of economic hardship and inade-
quate governmental responses. Over time, these persistent feelings of neglect and aban-
donment coalesced into a broader narrative of distrust towards the state and resentment
towards migrants, who were perceived as receiving preferential treatment. This temporal
development illustrates how long-term crises can reshape perceptions of fairness even if
they are not related to the embodied encounters on the streets. The feeling of abandon-
ment aligns with the frameworks that suggest a 'new normal' in the aftermath of Greece's
economic crisis, where the costs of economic restructuring are disproportionately borne
by the poor and vulnerable, leading to heightened social tensions and a search for scape-
goats (Peck, Theodore, & Brenner, 2012). This perception fuels anger and indignation
among citizens who see migrants as draining resources and potentially compromising
their own well-being. The proximal Other becomes a proxy for risk and disappointment,
as well as a the perceived failure of the Greek welfare system and, consequently, to Greek
society as a whole.

It was evident from my research that *media disinformation* in migration-related news
constituted the symbolic environment of crisis reflexivity and provided a public space
for the views of citizens who perceive themselves as victims; the unwelcoming attitude
towards refugees was more a result of disinformation[1] and social media populist dis-
courses than of interpersonal, even ephemeral, interaction with migrants (Newman et
al, 2019). A subtle but pervasive trust in media narratives exists, viewed as part of being
well-informed, despite a broader distrust in democratic institutions (Bennett & Livings-
ton, 2018; Newman et al, 2019). This trust persists even when embodied experiences with
noncitizens contradict media reports[2]. My participants' insecurities were exacerbated
when they made references to media discourses about the Orientalisation of the Greek

welfare system, showing a dependence on stories in the media as a source of ontological security and to legitimise their views.

Reflexivity of fear and victimhood

While the previous section has demonstrated how disinformation effectively frames conceptions of the noncitizen's undeserving access to services, this section explores how media-related practices of victimhood produce crisis reflexivity; citizens, looking inwards, justify their lack of welcome towards migrants on the basis of their own fear and personal experiences of inequality rather than migrants' wrongdoing. What was distinctive in the particular socio-historic moment in Greece at the time of my fieldwork – less than a year after the end of the third bailout programme – was that the economic crisis had not only affected the already poor, "but [had] also threatened to impoverish the middle class" (Chouliaraki, 2020, p. 9; Bermeo & Bartlells, 2014). One common theme among the participants was the perception that their own well-being was in jeopardy. The economic downturn led to significant reductions in income across various professions. Teachers, airline hostesses, lawyers, and artists were all affected by severe salary cuts or reduced job opportunities. This economic insecurity, coupled with the fear of unemployment, contributed to citizens' feelings of vulnerability and victimhood. This section demonstrates that pre-existing crises and vulnerabilities in Greece's system had not only exacerbated citizens' feelings of deprivation but had also fuelled xenophobic sentiments, so that migrants were cast as scapegoats for the nation's struggles.

During my conversations with Greek citizens and observations of their media practices and digital interactions on Facebook, it was evident that 'self-pity' emerged organically – a self-pity condition that entangled with racism and xenophobia. Artemis, a young woman in her 30s, shared a meme on her Facebook timeline that aimed to encapsulate the feelings of her generation: "Tired, sleepy, stressed, underpaid, constantly disappointed. My generation." This meme garnered significant engagement and resonated with many of her peers who felt that their lives were marked by insecurity and disappointment. In a claim that prioritises the nation (assumed to be a bounded and stable community), another participant, Filippos, stated his belief that "Greeks were the real victims" and that Greece had to start solving its own problems before helping others. This was a common view amongst participants who had been financially hit by Greece's several crises. Grossberg (2018) claims that the system not only fosters and intensifies the boundaries between the rich and the poor, the privileged and the deprived, "but it also inflicts serious emotional harms on the latter, perpetuating their anxieties and affirming their self-perception as victims" (Chouliaraki, 2020, p. 10). Many Greeks, both young and old, have experienced this crisis in various ways, e.g. struggling to maintain their expected standards of living, secure employment, and access basic services (such as healthcare). In line with the view that depicts Greek citizens "as a deprived socio-economic class or subset of the population"

(Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2018, p. 5), even the knowledge of the co-presence of the Other inflicts feelings of insecurity and self-pity on citizens. The economic crisis seemed to be the overwhelming condition that determined not only the social, cultural and political life, but also citizens' interactions with their migrant co-habitants.

As the economic crisis continued, citizens started to view migrants and refugees as a threat to their already precarious well-being. This perception was reinforced by media narratives that depicted migrants as beneficiaries of the welfare system and resources that should have been allocated to Greek citizens. My informants all unanimously agreed with the view that, despite their alleged privileges as national subjects, the violence of urban life attached the precarity label to them and rendered them no less vulnerable than migrant noncitizens – a populist media discourse that not only emerges through citizens' media practices and news consumption about migrant benefits, but is also materially reflected in the existing structural inequalities and vulnerabilities in the city:

> **Michalis:** Given that we [i.e., Greeks] are already disadvantaged, priority should be given to us. I don't want this to sound racist … I don't mind if my neighbour is Greek or not. I just want to explain that citizens in any country should be generally privileged and not worse off. I can't believe that immigrants get their benefits, their papers, automatically and citizens of this country have to suffer.

> **Researcher:** This means that you do not feel privileged as a citizen, right?

> **Michalis:** I don't think that any Greek person feels privileged vis-à-vis migrants. I don't know if any of your other participants felt privileged … I would be surprised to know that any Greek person feels privileged. Sometimes, it's better not to be Greek. It's better to be a migrant.

Michalis' frustration has solidified into a narrative of resentment towards migrants, who are perceived as receiving benefits and documentation more quickly and easily. This perception of migrants being unfairly prioritised over Greek citizens highlights a temporal dimension where the immediacy of migrant support contrasts with the prolonged struggles of citizens, further fuelling feelings of injustice and victimhood. Filippos cited statistics about the number of refugees arriving in Greece and questioned whether Greeks were being treated as "punch bags" in their own country. Kimon mentioned that it was "provocative" and "inhumane" to force Greek citizens, who faced deep effects of growing inequalities and were already highly oppressed by the imposed austerity, to deal with the influx of migrant populations from 2015 onwards. My empirical evidence shows that citizens did not adopt a welcoming attitude towards newcomers, because they themselves felt unwanted, marginalised and excluded in the state of abandonment, perceiving that they were not given *priority* as formal citizens. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to claim that victimhood was only tied to xenophobia. Deprivation, alienation and anxiety were also difficult sentiments shared by many who struggled in a city torn

by a severe financial crisis. Sentiments of xenophobia, I argue, are entangled with those of victimhood, but they are not contained within them – i.e., not all self-perceived victims were xenophobes – especially as many participants were indeed struggling to meet basic needs or at least conditions of life with dignity.

The section has explored the enactment of crisis reflexivity through media practices of online interactions and the consumption of migration-related news that encouraged participants to justify their positionality as victims (Grossberg, 2018). I have shown that the affective antagonism between 'Us' and 'Them' that often drove citizens' reflexive accounts of a difficult life in the city was closely entangled with narratives in the media – the mediated encounters that they had with migrants, which were far more frequent than the embodied ones they had in the city's streets. Greek citizens conceived of themselves as victims due to existing inequalities, and in the citizens' imaginaries of crisis migrants were to blame for making things even worse. Ephemeral encounters on the urban street often reaffirmed the image of the victim citizen-Self vis-à-vis the privileged noncitizen, that conformed with national and racial hierarchies. The perception that migrants were given 'priority' in receiving benefits and support added a temporal dimension to this antagonism. The crisis imaginary was justified by informants' experience of everyday hurdles, but the perceived condition of victimhood was regularly legitimised and reaffirmed by the visual and textual narratives they so often encountered through their media practices, especially in their consumption of news. The slow burning crisis since 2008 has engendered a sustained anxiety about the future, fostering a pervasive sense of societal abandonment (Seabrooke & Tsingou, 2019).

Reflexivity of hope and cosmopolitanism

Despite the fact that everyday encounters in the city mobilised narratives of victimhood and self-pity that entangled with racism and xenophobia, the current section shows that justice is not fully absorbed by the struggles and anxieties of crisis. The nationalist and xenophobic positions that some participants adopted, as illustrated above, were more common among participants with nationalist positions more generally. In this section, I demonstrate that progressive ideological positions among other participants were constructed every day in physical encounters on streets and in citizens' media practices, opening up spaces for another facet of reflexivity – that of imagining a diverse, cosmopolitan and convivial city (Zehfuss, 2020).

For all who self-declared as left-leaning and whose media consumption practices relied on 'alternative' – as they characterised them – social media networks, migrants cosmopolitanised and enriched the city of Athens (Young, 1990). Those participants aimed to demonstrate their political and/or ideological alignment in an effort to position themselves in favour of migrant populations. Nefeli, a 48-year-old artist, claimed from the very beginning: "I lean towards a leftist political orientation … definitely not the Right. So,

when you ask me about co-existence with migrants, I just understand that you ask me about co-existence with human beings." Kimon, a 30-year-old actor, celebrated "his global identity" and the fact that "migrants and their families, that were transient in Athens, started to become citizens-in-the making". Ioanna, a young civil servant, emphasised that the only reason she lived in Kypseli was because of the area's "multicultural character"; she enjoyed "the co-existence with people from different cultural backgrounds". Valeria, a teacher in a multicultural school of Kypseli, said: "What I love about Kypseli is that it's colourful, multicultural, international … I don't know how to say it, but I love living in a neighbourhood with people from all over the world". These individuals emphasise their alignment with migrant populations as a way to express their political and ideological beliefs. They view coexistence with migrants as coexistence with fellow human beings. This perspective reflects a commitment to inclusivity and diversity within urban spaces.

Nefeli belonged in the same category of participants who not only dissociated herself from the unwelcoming positions that other locals identified with, but also made reflexive attempts to resist traditional media narratives of 'crisis' and 'emergency' regarding migration-related news. She has lived in Kypseli for 19 years and witnessed the neighbourhood's transformation from a conservative and conformist environment to one that is international and cosmopolitan. Nefeli celebrated Athens' multiculturalism but was critical of traditional media narratives that sensationalise migration-related news. In response to negative media representations, Nefeli and her friends created a private Facebook Messenger group titled "Kypseli is wonderful." In this group, they shared stories that highlighted the remarkable aspects of their neighbourhood, counteracting the negative narratives perpetuated by mainstream media. Some indicative examples shared on the group that Nefeli referred to during the conversation were the following: cooks from the Collective Kitchen El Chef [Συλλογική Κουζίνα El Chef], based at the Migrants Social Center, prepared meals for an anti-racist festival and a documentary at Trianon cinema in Kypseli about migrants who survived and created a new life in Athens. This private media practice serves as a form of 'domestic cosmopolitanism' (Nava, 2007), allowing these individuals to construct their own narrative of citizen identity that diverges from the hegemonic narratives vilifying migrants in Kypseli. Despite remaining within the confines of a private chat group, their initiative symbolically challenged prevailing perceptions of their migrant neighbours.

Nefeli asked me to accompany her to do some quick shopping at a local shop owned by a Pakistani man. As we entered, she greeted Adeel and his two young daughters. When Nefeli asked for cigarettes without mentioning the brand, Adeel already knew which pack to give her. He told her, "I am so tired. I usually leave my daughters at home. I've got no energy to run over there with them. You can imagine how tired I am". Nefeli was very understanding and said "Oh, yes, it's Ramadan time. Okay, I'll leave you be. Greetings to Azra." There was mutual understanding between Adeel and Nefeli. As she told me after we went out, having individuals from different religions was positive in the Greek context,

in which the church-state relationship was very strong. For her, mutual respect was the key to overcoming anything that separates people.

Those who self-declared as left-leaning view migrant populations as contributors to the cultural and social fabric of the city. They appreciate the heritage that migrants have brought to Athens, echoing the idea that cities around the world have flourished cultur-ally due to the arrival of diverse populations. This perspective stands in stark contrast to the negative portrayal of migrants in the media, with Valeria questioning why the media attempts to convince society otherwise. She argues that population mobility is a natural aspect of human history and should be celebrated rather than demonised. It was evident that for those participants the years of 'migration crisis' opened up avenues for the alternative imaginary (Zehfuss, 2020), according to which migrants are considered an opportunity rather than a burden (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2022). Nonetheless, set-ting prerequisites for mobility can be seen as a form of bordering, creating conditional acceptance and reinforcing the notion that freedom of movement is contingent upon an individual's ability to contribute or benefit the host community.

In a similar vein, when discussing the issue of living-together-in-difference, Kimon actively embodied this cosmopolitan identity (Hall, 2008) through his media practices. While I was looking for Facebook groups concerning Kypseli or neighbourhood-related posts, Kimon's post featured almost at the top of the search. His Facebook post criticised the divisions within Kypseli despite its multicultural population. Having now lived in the area for many years, he found it surprising that many Greeks even refused to co-occupy and/or even to share the same space with noncitizen migrants. "Despite multinational-ism and multiculturalism that characterises the Kypseli neighbourhood, inhabitants of the area are deeply divided", he wrote. His long post also referred to the racist and fascist tendencies that always addressed the poor and the weak, because the problems were essentially class-based and systemic/institutional.

Empirical evidence suggests that progressive political beliefs have increasingly acted as a counter to mainstream media narratives, fostering welcoming attitudes even among individuals with little to no direct urban encounters. For those participants, migration has been a constant throughout human history, connecting the 'here and now' with 'there and then'. The historical continuity of migration underscores that population movements are natural phenomena that have occurred since time immemorial. Recognising this continuity allows us to see beyond the exceptionalisation of migration as a crisis, viewing it instead as an integral part of human existence and societal development. I have also shown that social media has provided a space that supports and promotes the redefini-tion of citizens' identities, offering a cosmopolitan perspective that challenges the nation-alistic and xenophobic narratives prevalent in mainstream media. This resistance is seen as challenging nationalist and racist discourses, as it promotes anti-racist identities that confront structural inequalities in urban interactions. The imaginary of citizen-noncitizen interaction, especially facilitated through social media like Facebook, has encouraged

cosmopolitanism and hope, showing the transformative side of crisis reflexivity – how media practices among citizens in Athens have transformed the so-called 'migration crisis' into an opportunity for solidarity and connection. This demonstrates that media not only shapes identities within the political and cultural context of Athenian society but also highlights the constant clash of narratives about migration, national belonging, and citizen identities both in media and public discourse.

Crisis reflexivity: a communicative process in understanding citizen-identity

My attention focused on the everyday experience of migration in the city and on the urban neighbourhood that has been partly transformed and partly normalised as a socio-cultural space through human mobility. Following the discussion and analysis above, this section is dedicated to the implications of the relationship between crisis and reflexivity for the study of citizen identity in a crisis-ridden multicultural neighbourhood. Reflexive Selves differ, but are always constituted both through discourse and affect alike within the shared spatio-temporality of perceived and experienced crisis. The affective, embodied and mediated space of reflexivity leads me to the multifaceted notion of 'crisis reflexivity'. Crisis reflexivity is treated as a context of identity construction in a multicultural city – as a temporal and discursive framework of everyday life that reframes the imaginary of crisis and of the nation. In particular, crisis becomes a condition and a discourse that individuals reflect on when they speak about the Self and the Other. Crisis reflexivity is transforma-tive but mainly reproductive. It encapsulates moments of opportunity and transforma-tion, yet also encompasses loss, disenfranchisement and victimhood (Grossberg, 2018; Chouliaraki, 2020). Drawing on Beck's (1992) and Giddens's (1991, 1994) concepts of reflexive modernity, this paper has explored the vernacular dimension of crisis and reflex-ivity. It has paid close attention to the everyday hardships individuals face as a result of neoliberal agendas and economic downturns, emphasising the importance of considering both the macro- and micro-level dimensions of crisis (Peck & Tickell, 2002).

Crisis reflexivity points to the affective, symbolic and material conditions that shape citizens' identities, as these relate to the experience of urban life. By definition, affective, embodied and mediated reflexivity is a communicative process of citizen identity-making that is rooted in the context of everyday life and emerges at the juncture of embodied encounters with Others and the intense mediation of migration in the context of crisis. What this paper has also demonstrated is that ideological positions are fundamental to conceptions of the Self and the Other, especially when participants have no or limited direct contact with migrants. When the encounter is primarily mediated, migrants' voices are unheard and they have little say about who they are and why they are in the city. Instead, they are contained within ideological frames, which in most cases marginalise and denigrate them (through persistent xenophobic narratives circulated in the media)

and only occasionally recognise them (through alternative media and progressive politics). The communicative process of *crisis reflexivity* offers a conceptual tool to understand the consequences of limited or absent encounters with noncitizen Others for the citizens' construction of identity. Employing the concept of 'crisis imaginary' – referring to the symbolic space of Westernised narratives and migrant representations – the paper has shown how reflexivity challenges populist discourses that stem from the mediated encounter with the Other. Citizens' historicised and highly mediated concepts of the Self-Other binary dominated in cases where encounters were ephemeral and/or ideologies were polarised. Depending on participants' ideological and national position as well as on their level of vulnerability in Greece's system, crisis reflexivity manifested three facets: a) *reflexivity of disinformation* b) *reflexivity of fear and victimhood*, and c) *reflexivity of hope and cosmopolitanism*.

The research reveals two opposing ideas of citizenship among participants: one nation-centred and inward-looking, and the other centred on conviviality and cosmopolitanism, outward-looking. The nation-centred discourse stems from viewing migration as a threat to citizen identity and fostering unwelcoming attitudes and anti-migrant rhetoric. This perspective sees migrants as scapegoats for broader socio-economic issues and reflects a defensive stance towards preserving an assumed homogeneity. Conversely, the cosmopolitan discourse celebrates multiculturalism and migrants' cultural heritage, viewing migration as an opportunity to diversify the city. Participants with cosmopolitan views embraced migration as a natural phenomenon integral to Athens' history, resisting divisive politics. This outward-looking perspective aligns with values of inclusivity and global identity, opposing the inward-looking nationalism that frames migrants as threats. My findings underscore the fluidity and complexity of citizen identity, which evolves in response to socio-historical moments and in the context of intense mediated communication. The contradictory and conflicting discourses, as shaped through the complex intersectionalities of life in the multicultural city in crisis do not allow for generalising logics or rigid interpretations of identities bounded within stable positions that fully determine groups and individuals.

Notes

1   The ecology of Greek media and its political economy have significantly contributed to the spread of disinformation. According to the International Press Institute report (2023), the decline in media freedom, driven by the capture of private media by powerful families with vested interests, has led to mainstream media often demonising migrants and suppressing initiatives aimed at social justice. This has fostered a media landscape where disinformation thrives, despite the efforts of alternative media to promote more progressive viewpoints.

2   According to the Digital News Report 2023, "trust in Greece is now the lowest in [the] survey amid heated discussions about press freedom and a wiretapping scandal involving prominent politicians, businessmen, and journalists" (p. 24). Aligning with the report, Greece demonstrates the highest level

of selective avoidance, 57% (+6) of the population, when it comes to news consumption (people who mention they actively avoid the news sometimes or often). Similarly, in my work, participants manifested evident mistrust when speaking about the Greek media. I encountered many participants who constantly made references to the media to legitimise their views in a taken-for-granted way. I have noticed a contradictory condition in which, even if participants would not admit that they trust the media, they still use them as a primary system for gaining information and developing their perceptions about public life and political affairs.

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