IRREGULAR MIGRATION AND THE ‘SOUTHERN EUROPEAN MODEL’ OF MIGRATION

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Southern European countries, especially those which are EU members, share similar migration histories, being traditionally countries of emigration but now having to deal with large numbers of immigrants, many of whom arrive via irregular channels facilitated by smugglers, or enter by legitimate means as tourists and then overstay. This paper introduces a special issue of this journal on the theme of irregular migration. It starts by recounting the implications of the recent (October 2013) Lampedusa tragedy. The remainder of the paper is in three parts. We first explore the flexible concept of irregular migration, including questions of definition and migration policy—especially the policy of regularisation, which has been widespread in the four largest Southern EU states. Next, we describe what has been called the ‘Southern European Model of Migration’ and its constituent elements and theoretical foundations, a key part of which is the dynamic interrelationship between irregular migration and the informal economy. Finally, we introduce the six papers that follow, highlighting their key findings and significant research contributions.

Introduction

As we write these introductory words, the tragic events of the night of 3 October 2013—when a boat, massively overcrowded with migrants, caught fire and sank off the coast of Lampedusa—are still very fresh. An estimated 366 lives were lost, including those of many women and children; indeed, whole families perished. This disaster was merely the latest in a long list of maritime tragedies that have befallen migrants and refugees who have taken the ‘Mediterranean passage’ to try to get to Europe and a hoped-for sanctuary and better life. The International Organization for Migration estimates that at least 20,000 have died in these repetitive Mediterranean tragedies over the last twenty years. In a series of blog posts in the wake of the Lampedusa disaster, the Oxford-based migration scholar Hein de Haas argues that ‘smuggling is a reaction to border controls, not the cause of migration’.

As the EU and its constituent governments use military-style language and tactics to ‘combat illegal migration’ and ‘crack down on smuggling’, deploying sophisticated surveillance controls via the Frontex border agency, migrants and refugees are compelled to use increasingly circuitous routes. These have made their journeys more expensive, more dependent on chains of

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smugglers and more dangerous, including the risk of death. De Haas’ detailed map of the routes of irregular migration shows how they have shifted eastward as a result of the blanket surveillance of the Gibraltar Strait and the Canary Islands, leading to longer and more perilous crossings from Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. The map also shows the complexity and wide geographical coverage of travel routes towards the North African or Turkish shores, with migrant origins not only in North Africa but also in Sub-Saharan West and Central Africa, the Horn of Africa, Syria, Kurdistan, Afghanistan and further east.

Whilst much of this migration has been attracted by the ‘demand-pull’ factor of the need for cheap labour within certain sectors of the Southern European economies, especially agriculture, construction and personal services, a significant ‘push factor’ is the need to escape poverty and conflict. De Haas writes that it is distressing that the ‘so-called fight against illegal migration’ has blocked access to asylum for those fleeing conflict in many countries such as Algeria, Syria, Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia, thereby creating a major contravention of access to human rights.

The contradictions do not end there. A major irony emerged over the Italian government’s handling of the Lampedusa tragedy. At the very time that Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta announced that all those who died would receive Italian citizenship post mortem, the Italian public prosecutor initiated action against 114 rescued adults for the ‘crime’ of illegal migration, punishable by expulsion and a fine of up to 5,000 Euros. As Pablo Ordaz wrote in an article entitled ‘Only the dead can stay’ (El País, 5 October 2013), ‘The dead will remain. Unable to be identified, they have been awarded a coffin, a number and a piece of land in Sicilian cemeteries to rest, now with the European nationality for which they sacrificed their lives’.

We have used this desperately tragic example of a migration disaster as a symptomatic illustration of the contradictions of border control and the criminalisation of migration. But it would be a mistake to conclude that the bulk of immigration, even irregular immigration, into Southern Europe takes place through the mechanism of sea-borne—or, indeed, land-route—smuggling. Most irregular migrants living in Europe, and most of those who were irregular but now have ‘papers’, entered Europe legally and then simply overstayed their visas. They come from near and far: from Morocco and Albania, from Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, from South Asia, the Philippines and China, and from Latin America. They are present in different combinations in each of the four main Southern European countries (Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece): the greatest diversity of nationalities is in Italy, the lowest in Greece, where one nationality—Albanian—constitutes an absolute majority of the immigrant population.

The role of this introductory paper to the special issue is to provide a conceptual framework for the six more-empirically grounded papers which follow. We first explore the flexible and mobile concept of irregular migration, noting also—as hinted at above—the regrettable tendency to demonise and criminalise irregular migrants. Next we revisit the heuristic notion of the ‘Southern European model’ of migration and the role of irregularity in that model. Particularly in the post-2008 crisis years, we observe new forms and mechanisms of irregularity. Finally we introduce the six papers that comprise this special issue, highlighting their salient features and their individual and collective insights.

Irregular Migration

Irregular, illegal, undocumented, unauthorised, clandestine: all these are adjectives applied to the words ‘migration’ and ‘migrants’ to imply that something is ‘wrong’ and needs to be ‘controlled’ or ‘fixed’. We do not have space for a fully nuanced discussion of the sometimes-subtle differences between these terms; merely to note briefly the following. Despite its widespread use, ‘illegal’ carries a pejorative connotation and reveals an explicit criminalisation of the migrant’s situation of either entry or residence, whether or both. Yet the migrants’ legally justified ‘illegal’ status may be externally imposed and not of their own making; indeed, this status may overlook or contradict their de jure legal right, for instance, to receive humanitarian protection or apply for refugee status. ‘Undocumented’ implies that they have no documents, whereas actually they may have documents; instead, the legal system and the authorities of the country they are in may judge that the documents are false or incomplete. ‘Unauthorised’, like ‘illegal’, reflects the existence of an authorisation and control procedure which migrants have failed to conform to, whereas the condition of irregularity may have arisen through other means. ‘Clandestine’ refers more to the ‘hidden’ act of moving across frontiers and leads too easily into debates about people-smuggling. We see ‘irregular’ as a more ideologically neutral and all-embracing term, although its inclusivity results in a variety of meanings and inflexions which run the risk of it being regarded as a ‘chaotic concept’.

So let us try to create a ‘map of meaning’ for this still-problematic term. In doing so, we draw on the relatively few substantive studies of the phenomenon (Ambrosini 2013, Bogusz et al. 2004, Ghosh 1998, Jordan and Dívell 2002), the frequent discussions on irregular migration in the
Irregular Migration and the ‘Southern European Model’ of Migration


According to Boswell and Geddes (2011: 127), the first point to note about irregular migration is that it is an epiphenomenon; that is to say, it is irrevocably linked to the definition and assumption of regular or legal migration. Without regular migration, there would be no such thing as irregular migration. Ghosh (1998) sees irregular migration as the result of a mismatch between the numbers of people who want or are compelled to migrate and the opportunities available for legal migration. This argument interprets irregular migration as fundamentally economically driven—the need to escape poverty and to seek better life opportunities elsewhere—but there may be other motives, too, such as family reunion or the quest for asylum and protection (Ghosh 1998: 34–35, IOM 2008: 203). Another key point is that there is a mutually constitutive effect between the phenomenon itself and the way in which it is debated in the public, policy and scholarly arenas. This is an acute issue given the emotive nature of the topic (since ‘irregular’ elides into ‘illegal’), its complex nature regarding its scale, causes and effects, and a strong feeling that ‘something should be done’ via policy action and legal measures (Boswell and Geddes 2011: 125).

Irregular migration is a multi-faceted phenomenon which can refer to mode of entry into a country, residential status there, employment status and type of employment. Taking each of these elements in turn, four questions can be specified (Baldwin-Edwards and Kraler 2009):

- Was the migrant’s entry into the country regular or irregular?
- Is the migrant’s residence status regular or irregular?
- Is the migrant entitled to work? If not, and s/he is working, this constitutes irregularity.
- Is the nature of the employment and the work done regular or irregular (the latter refers to the avoidance of tax and insurance payments, rates below the minimum wage, etc.)?

Combining these four questions produces a matrix of up to thirteen possibilities, including, **inter alia**, regular entry (e.g. via a tourist visa) but irregular residence through overstay, and irregular work if there is no right to carry out work; irregular entry but regular residence status (following a ‘regularisation’ scheme); regular residence status but irregular work situation; and further combinations, some of which refer to the regular/irregular status of children born in the new country of residence. A situation of maximum irregularity would apply to a migrant who enters the country in an irregular fashion (e.g. by being smuggled in by land or sea), who has no residence status or right to work, and who works in the informal economy, earning wages ‘off the books’. The children of such a migrant are also likely to be classed as irregular (Boswell and Geddes 2011: 129–130).

The complexities of irregular migration do not end there. There are ‘spaces in-between’ strict legality and various dimensions of irregularity, especially in the employment field. National laws and regulations on migrants’ status and rights allow little space for variations in compliance—for instance the shades between semi-compliance and non-compliance (see Ahrens’ paper in this issue; also IOM 2008: 202–203). This situation has particular resonance in Southern Europe, where bureaucrats are often ineffective in translating rules into everyday reality (DeBono, this issue). The result is a high degree of discretionality which can involve both discrimination against migrants and rule-bending in their favour.

Further vexed questions arise over the degree of coercion vs voluntariness embodied in irregular migration. The key distinction here is between people-smuggling (assumed to be voluntary) and human trafficking (assumed to involve coercion and deceit). But this distinction, too, gets blurred: a smuggled migrant, who moves voluntarily, can get ‘coerced’ into a slave-like working situation, and trafficked persons can escape the clutches of their traffickers, either through their own agency or with the intervention of government or charitable bodies who ‘rescue’ them.

Finally, the issue of irregular entry as a means of accessing asylum further complicates the picture. Faced with the often-insurmountable obstacles to obtaining a visa and/or accessing asylum systems from countries of origin or third countries, migrants—as we saw in the opening case study—opt to undertake illicit and at times risky journeys. When it comes to the so-called irregular migration–asylum nexus, Southern European countries claim that they are put at a disadvantage by the Dublin system. Originally launched in 2002, the Dublin system has been retained and is today an integral part of the 2013 Common European Asylum System. The aim of the Dublin system is to determine which member state is responsible for examining an asylum application lodged by a third-country national on the territory of one of the member states of the EU, Norway and Iceland (European Commission 2007a). It was enacted to address two issues: a) ‘asylum shopping’—the perceived tendency exhibited by asylum seekers to choose a country wherein to submit their application and/or to submit applications in multiple member states; and b) asylum seeker ‘in orbit’ situations, whereby an individual would shuttle from one EU country to another, with no country being
willing to take responsibility for examining the claim (Gibney and Hansen 2005: 549).

According to the Dublin Regulation, asylum seekers are to lodge their asylum applications in the country of first arrival. Should they fail to do so, and if it can be shown that the individual has previously passed through the territory of another member state, the individual will be returned to the first country of entry. If applied meticulously, this could put a lot of pressure on Southern European member states through which a good number of asylum seekers enters the EU. In addition, member states near the EU’s external borders often have less capacity to handle asylum claims, and therefore cannot guarantee adequate reception conditions for refugees (ECRE 2008). 5

Five Southern European member states—Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain—which claim that the Dublin II Regulation placed a disproportionate burden on border EU countries have been working together to lobby for an effective burden-sharing mechanism for many years. One example of this is a 2011 joint communiqué, drafted following the events of the Arab Spring (Times of Malta 2011) and putting forward detailed proposals on how best to manage and prevent illegal migration and asylum and to protect refugees.

Estimating Irregular Migration

Global estimates suggest that between 10 and 15% of the world’s total of 214 million international migrants (defined as people living in a country which is different to their birth country) are in an irregular situation, most of them having entered the destination country legally but then overstayed (IOM 2010: 29). Whilst the ‘numbers game’ of irregular migrants is by definition highly imprecise, there is a general consensus that the number of irregular migrants in Europe and globally has grown in recent decades, perhaps at a rate faster than that of total international migration. Three reasons lie behind our justification for this last statement (cf. van der Leun and Ilies 2012: 306).

- Irregular migration is a response to, and is embedded within, polarising patterns of global inequality: this applies to the acceleration of all forms of labour mobility, but we observe an increasing tendency for aggressive capitalism and unscrupulous employers to opt for irregular migrant workers in order to impose low wages and poor working conditions and, hence, extract maximum profits.

- The globalisation of transport and communication incorporates once-remote countries into a global network of travel infrastructure and technology. Whilst this puts an ever-larger share of the world’s population, including those who are less well-off, in touch with the possibility of migration, raising their aspiration and desire to migrate, the legal possibilities for doing so have receded. Paradoxically, this forces desperate migrants to downgrade their transport means to dangerous and basic levels—walking vast distances across inhospitable mountain or desert terrain, crowding into delapidated trucks, risking their lives in flimsy boats and dinghies, and sometimes being dumped in the sea to swim for their lives—or drown.

- Restrictive immigration and asylum policies mean that there are few channels left for legal entry into Europe for third-country nationals, especially those coming from countries with high migration ‘push-pressure’ in Africa, Asia and Latin America. At base, restrictive migration policies are a large part of the reason why irregular migration takes place. Asylum regimes are especially unaccommodating in Southern Europe, whereas the region’s geographical position on the migration front-line of access from many source countries, combined with the impossibility of sealing all maritime borders and points of access, means that irregular flows are targeted at this flank of Europe.

On the other hand, the onset of the global economic crisis may have caused a reduction in the flows of irregular migrants due to the decline of labour-market demand for low-status migrant workers, especially those working in the crisis-ridden construction sector. Yet it has also been pointed out that, in countries such as Spain and Greece, hit hard by recession, irregular migrant stocks have increased. This has occurred not so much through new arrivals, but because workers who lose their jobs may also lapse into irregularity in terms of their right to stay on under conditions of unemployment (Koser 2010).

Methods for estimating the size of the stocks and flows of irregular migrants are various, but all are necessarily approximate and some may be wild guesswork (IOM 2008: 207–209, 2010: 31–33, Jandl 2004, Massey and Capoferro 2004, van der Leun and Ilies 2012: 312–315). The extrapolation of border apprehensions by applying a simple multiplier (for instance 1:2, meaning that, for every irregular migrant apprehended, two ‘get through’) is a direct but imprecise method of measuring flows. It is
Imperfections because the multiplier may be inaccurate and both the border crossings and the 'real' ratio may fluctuate widely from year to year and season to season (van der Leun and Ilies 2012: 313). A very different approach to measurement is via the census, which records stocks rather than flows. How country census records may enumerate irregular migrants as new flows/residents present on census day/night, but this population category is also at high risk of being excluded because of irregular migrants' likely lack of a stable residence. Moreover, censuses do not ask questions about legal status and usually take place only at ten-year intervals, thereby masking the volatility which often characterises irregular migration flows. Other official methods include government files on rejected asylum claims, or on refused work or residence permits, or data derived from police checks (e.g. on workplaces employing irregular migrants); however, these methods give only glimpses of the scale and distribution of the overall phenomenon of irregularity. A more direct source of post hoc enumeration is the series of regularisation programmes which have been the main 'policy instrument' for confronting the phenomenon of irregular migration in Southern Europe; we look at this in more detail below.

**Regularisation and Other Policy Options**

Faced with irregular migration, states have three main policy options: expulsion, toleration or regularisation (Boswell and Geddes 2011: 135–136).

The *expulsion* of irregular migrants is the most Draconian, time-consuming and expensive measure, but is consistent with the logic of border control and 'managed migration' or selective admission. Many governments hold to a policy rhetoric of expelling 'illegal immigrants'—often for political reasons to appeal to sections of their electorate—but rarely carry through such measures on a massive scale. Some international organisations take a hard line on irregular migration. These include the EU, with its 'Frontex' agency 'for the management of operational cooperation at the external borders of the member states' and the more pro-migration International Organization for Migration (IOM). Despite the IOM's commitment to the principle of 'orderly and humane migration' as something that 'benefits migrants and society', some of its statements reflect a more criminalising, repressive discourse on irregular migration. We read, for example, that: 'Fundamentally, irregular migration should be curbed because it undermines the rule of law... this report considers the curbing of irregular migration to be a priority' (IOM 2010: 30).

The second alternative, *tolerance*, arises out of the realisation that it is 'less expensive for a society to accept some irregular migrants than to erect and maintain elaborate border and immigration control regimes' (van der Leun and Ilies 2012: 322). As pointed out earlier, countries like Spain, Italy and Greece have long coastlines and many islands whose borders are impossible to monitor without full-scale electronic surveillance and a military-style operation. Moreover, some of the islands—the Canaries, Lampedusa, Mytilene, Kos, Simi—are close to major migration launching points in North Africa and Turkey, giving these islands a strategic stepping-stone function in a continually fluctuating geography of migrant access routes to Europe (King 2009, Simon 2006). But there is another, more cynical, element to the tolerance position: it represents a tacit acknowledgement that irregular migrants perform useful tasks in the labour market. This, in turn, generates two further negative effects: exploitation of the irregular-migrant workforce, and the risk of a kind of structural dependence of the economy on the labour contribution of irregular migrants.

The third policy option, *regularisation*, recognises the reality of irregular migration and attempts to adapt to it post factum. A regularisation scheme is usually promoted as a 'one-off' chance (yet one which often gets repeated) that grants irregular migrants an opportunity to acquire legal status. Access to legalisation is usually made conditional on certain things, such as a specified minimum period of already living in the country (to avoid a flood of last-minute arrivals), possession of a job, and no criminal record. Critics of the policy argue that regularisations fuel further irregular entry in anticipation of another scheme in the future. According to the REGINE study on regularisations in Europe, an estimated 4.6 million people had their status regularised between 1995 and 2008. The vast majority of these were in three countries—1.4 million in Italy, 1.3m in Spain and 1.1m in Greece (Baldwin-Edwards and Kraler 1999: 35). Indeed, regularisation has come to more or less define the Southern European model of migration policy over the past two or three decades since Spain and Italy initially, but latterly also Portugal and Greece, operationalised several such 'amnesty' schemes. Whether or not it is a true 'policy' remains open to argument.

Northern EU countries have been critical of the repeated resorting to regularisations by their 'southern' neighbours, seeing them as an ex post acknowledgement of earlier failures to 'control' immigration, and worrying that, once regularised, many immigrants will head north to other European countries where wages are higher and welfare systems more generous.

Table 1 presents the available data on the regularisations granted for the various schemes that have been implemented in Southern Europe, starting
in the 1980s in Italy and Spain, and in the following decade in Greece and Portugal. The figures relate to successful applications, not total applications; the ratio between the former and the latter varies greatly but is generally within the range 70–95%. Moreover, it should be appreciated that within the various scheme totals is a significant amount of repeat-counting of the same individuals: migrants who need to get re-regularised either because they have lapsed into irregularity between schemes, or because the system demands that they do so because the stay and/or work permit is time-limited.

Table 1. Regularisations in Southern European countries: numbers regularised (in thousands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>Portugal</th>
<th>Greece</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>578</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>350</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


What is notable about the table, apart from the obvious fact that the ‘one-off’ schemes have been constantly reprised, is the sheer scale of some of the regularisations. The 2002 regularisation in Italy and the 2005 one in Spain were the largest ever seen in Europe, whereas the scale of some of the Greek regularisations makes them, proportionally, even larger, given the size of the Greek population (11 million) as against the Italian (57m) and Spanish (42m).

Each country, indeed each regularisation in each country, has its own characteristics as regards the national-origin composition of the regularised populations, as well as complex differences in legal requirements for qualification and the type of status and length of permit awarded. Fearful of getting mired in too much detail (for fuller accounts see Baldwin-Edwards and Kraler 2009, Fakiolas 2003, Finotelli and Arango 2011), we highlight a few key points of each country’s experience, as follows.

Italy has had the longest regularisation experience of the Southern European countries: seven schemes since 1982, although the so-called ‘maxi-decree’ issuing of residence permits to irregular immigrants in 2006 is not considered by the Italian government to be a true regularisation. This one aside, Table 1 shows the escalating scale of regularisations up to the massive one of 2002, which legalised the position of 93% of the 702,000 applicants; those who could prove three months of pension contributions and continuous employment. This regularisation—‘the most generous in European history’ (Boswell and Geddes 2011: 137)—was part of the Bossi–Fini law on migration and was passed during the 2001–2006 premiership of Berlusconi. Yet these three names, Bossi, Fini and Berlusconi, are a roll-call of the three most iconically infamous right-wingers of recent Italian political history! The ‘Bossi–Fini’ represented a Janus-faced policy of, on the one hand, extending legal status to well over half a million irregular migrants whilst, at the same time, trying to restrict further immigration by introducing tougher rules on admission, entry and residence. This contradictory outcome resulted from the influence of more moderate voices in the governing coalition as well as the power of the employers’ federations and the Catholic Church. In particular, there was pressure for the regularisation of migrant women who were delivering key services to Italian families—the *coif* (domestic helpers and cleaners) and *badanti* (carers of elderly Italians) who, for decades now, have filled the wide gaps left by the Italian state welfare system (Ambrosini 2013). In most cases of regularisation in Italy, beneficiaries were issued with renewable two-year residence permits. However, the permits’ short duration, and the precariousness of most migrants’ employment situations, along with the discretionary power of the public officials who renew the permits and the long and cumbersome renewal procedures, have meant that regularised migrants frequently experienced ‘return to irregularity’ (Finotelli and Arango 2011: 500). Finally, of the 1.4 million foreigners regularised by the five schemes implemented between 1986 and 2002, the main groups were Moroccans (12.6% of all regularised migrants), Romanians (11.7%), Albanians (8.2%) and Ukrainians (7.1%).

Spain’s six regularisations have run more or less in parallel to the Italian experience, and indeed there is some evidence of a ‘policy transfer’ effect from Italy to Spain (Finotelli and Arango 2011: 509). Like Italy, Spain’s formal adoption of a restrictive approach to the entry and residence of foreigners from outside the EU proved inadequate, compared to the reality of both the needs of the Spanish labour market, and the scale of irregular immigration that eventuated. A mismatch between labour-market demand and the state regulation of migration occurred, such that irregular immigration became embedded as a structural component of the Spanish migration scene (Arango 2000). For all regularisations, a general requirement was that applicants had to prove that they had been living in Spain prior to a certain date before the regularisation deadline, and that they had no
criminal record. A history of employment in Spain was desirable but not always essential. In general, regularised migrants’ permits were valid for one year, thus requiring frequent renewal. Although this can be a tedious and frustrating experience, the evidence suggests that most migrants have been able to do this (Finotelli and Arango 2011: 504). On the other hand, as in other Southern European countries, possession of a regular ‘permit to stay’ does not mean that the migrants are not working irregularly; in fact many work in the informal economy. Of the 1m foreigners regularised by the last three programmes (2000, 2001, 2005), the main groups were from Ecuador (19.5%), Morocco (14.4%), Romania (12.5%) and Colombia (9.9%).

The Greek case represents probably the most extreme of the Southern European irregular migration scenarios, and the most problematic instance of regularisation implementation. Administration of the regularisations has been chaotic and data are patchy on the characteristics of those who applied and got regularised (Baldwin-Edwards 2009, Fakiolas 2003). By 1997 there were estimated to be 650,000–700,000 irregular immigrants in Greece—nearly 7% of the total population of the country. A kind of double regularisation was pushed through, after long debate, in 1997–1998: 372,000 applied for the ‘white card’ (provisional six-month permit), of whom 65% were Albanians, and 219,000 ‘green cards’ (for temporary residence) were issued in 1998, according to the Greek Interior Ministry. Another large and poorly administered regularisation took place in 2001, on which few data are available beyond the totals regularised (with no breakdown by national origin). More-recent regularisations have been smaller-scale because of bureaucratic hurdles and the high fees that have to be paid by applicants, most of whom are poor. These patchy statistics apart, what is also revealing about the Greek case is that it exemplifies a confused and contradictory mix of all three of the policy-option reactions to irregular migration mentioned earlier: mass expulsions (an annual average of 200,000 Albanians were carted back to the border during the 1990s and early 2000s: Fakiolas 2003); the tolerance of mass-scale irregular migration because of porous national borders, bureaucratic inertia and a tacit acknowledgement that such workers were vital to the Greek economy (Fakiolas 2000); and large-scale but inefficiently organised regularisation.

The final country to be considered, Portugal, has more similarities to the Spanish and Italian cases, but at a lower level of regularisation activity. Portugal’s experience of immigration is heavily influenced by the country’s history of colonialism, with major inflows coming from the so-called PALOP (Portuguese-speaking African countries)—Cape Verde, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau and São Tomé e Príncipe—as well as Brazil. More recently, PALOP migrants have been superseded by migrants from Eastern Europe—especially from Ukraine, Romania and Moldova—who have been prominent in recent regularisations. Thus, PALOP migrants made up 72% of those regularised under the 1992 scheme, and 61% for the 1996 one but, for the much larger 2001 regularisation, the leading nationalities were Ukrainians, 35%, and Brazilians, 20% (Cangiano and Strozza 2008: 159–160). Portugal shares with Spain what Malheiros (2012) calls an ‘Iberian model’ of ‘low-regulation migration’ which was (until the recent crisis) well-suited to the needs of a particular variant of neoliberal economy based on tourism, construction, personal services, familism, informality and traditionalism. Moreover, in these two countries immigration has been less of a political issue or a target for negative public reaction, in contrast to the more vehement anti-immigration (and often blatantly racist) rhetoric witnessed in Italy and, especially, Greece in recent years.

The Southern European Model of Migration

Mention above of the Iberian (actually pan-Southern European) model of ‘low-regulation migration’ linked to a specific socio-economic formation moves us on to a discussion of what has come to be called the ‘Southern European model’ of migration. This model was introduced and elaborated by King and various co-authors (King 2000, King, Fielding and Black 1997, King and Konjhodzic 1996, King and Rybaczuk 1993); it has been further discussed by other authors (Peixoto et al. 2012, Ribas-Mateos 2004), including criticisms of its heuristic value (Baldwin-Edwards 2012). It applies mainly to Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece; also to Cyprus but less so to the other Southern EU states of Malta, Slovenia and Croatia (King and Thomson 2008).

The model first maps out a historical trajectory from mass emigration to mass immigration, the ‘migration turnaround’ being located in the 1970s and early 1980s (varying by country) when the return migration of Southern Europeans also provided an important contribution to the switch from net emigration to net immigration. Southern European emigration had evolved in two main historical epochs—the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when most of the emigration was overseas, mainly to North and South America, and the early postwar decades, roughly 1950 to 1973, when the main emigration destinations were in North-West Europe, principally France, Germany, Switzerland, the Benelux countries and the UK. Return migration was the predominant flow in the second half of the 1970s and into the 1980s, with individuals’ decisions to return based on a complex amalgam
of recession-induced industrial lay-offs in the host countries, family circumstances, and the wish to set up small businesses or pursue other employment options in their home countries.

Thus we see at this time a progressive dilution of the contrast between emigration regions and immigration regions within Europe. By the late 1980s, earlier in North Italian cities like Milan and Turin, the attainment of 'European' standards of prosperity and economic modernisation, amongst other factors, had turned Southern Europe into a major global destination for immigrant flows from various parts of the world. In particular, the Mediterranean became, and remains today, a 'Rio Grande' between the northern flank of relatively wealthy countries, and a southern shore of high population pressure, unemployment and poverty (King 2000, Montanari and Cortese 1993). By the late 2000s, the main Southern EU countries hosted 13.5 million immigrants, 11.5m of them in Spain and Italy (see Table 2). Particularly dramatic was the fast growth of the immigrant population in Spain during the 2000s: from a 'stock' of 1.5 million in 2000 to 6.9m at the end of the decade, or from 4% to more than 15% of the overall population. It is true that there has been some diminution in the inflows of migrants in these past five 'crisis' years, especially in Spain and Greece, the two countries the most severely afflicted by negative economic trends, but this is balanced by the rapid growth in the foreign-origin population due to births in situ to immigrant parents.

Table 2. Southern European countries: demography and immigration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population (m.)</th>
<th>Immigrants (m.)</th>
<th>As % of popn</th>
<th>Top eight source countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Romania, Romania, Angola, Albania, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>Romania, Morocco, Ecuador, Mozambique, Romania, Bulgaria, Brazil, Georgia, Greece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>UK, France, Mozambique, Romania, Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>Angola, Mozambique, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>Albania, Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Portugal, Portugal, Portugal</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estimates of irregular migrants ('000): low</th>
<th>high</th>
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<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>1,000</td>
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<td>1,000</td>
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<table>
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<th>Mean estimate as % total population</th>
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<td>1.0</td>
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Economics, the Labour Market and the Comoditisation of Welfare

Aside from the geopolitical and security setting of border controls and shifting routes of access, it is important to emphasise the overarching economic structures framing migration into Southern Europe. As Mingione (1995) has cogently argued, Southern Europe exemplifies a specific 'late-developer' variant of European capitalism which is very different from the North-West European model based historically on a 'heavy' industrial revolution and Fordist modes of mass production. Characteristic of the latecomer capitalist model is a sectoral economic transition which 'misses out' (except in a few places—Bilbao, Barcelona, Turin, Milan, Genoa) the industrial phase of economic history and progresses directly from a mostly agricultural economy to one based on rapid urbanisation, construction and service-sector growth. This modernisation pathway combines economic growth (at least until 2008) with fragmented socio-economic structures, a dualistic labour market and, above all, a dynamic informal sector of irregular work practices and widespread tax evasion. Following Castells and Portes (1989), we can define the informal economy as the sum of income-earning activities which are unregulated by the legal codes and institutions of society in a legal and social environment where such activities should be regulated. Informal activities are distinguished from criminal ones (like, in many countries, drugs, prostitution and child labour) in that they encompass goods and services that are legal, but whose production and marketing are unregulated—for instance, making garments in illegal sweatshops or unlicensed street-vending.

Portes (1995: 30) goes on to point out the close correlation between the informal economy and immigration, but it is equally important to emphasise that the informal economy did not suddenly appear with the arrival of immigrants in Southern Europe in the 1980s (King and Konjhodzic 1996: 43). The informal sector was the traditional solution to the problems of poverty and 'formal' unemployment in Southern Europe, where social welfare support is very weak. Indeed, precisely because of its embedded prior existence, the informal economy has proved extremely attractive (if often the only option) to irregular migrants arriving in Southern Europe since the 1980s. Hence there is a symbiotic relationship between the two phenomena—informal economic activities and irregular migration—and not a causal one, in either direction (i.e. the informal sector does not 'cause' irregular migration, nor does irregular migration 'create' the informal economy).

In terms of employment practices, the informal-sector labour market is characterised by evasion of taxes and social insurance payments, avoidance of trade unions, precarious work (casual, seasonal, part-time, without contracts
Irregular Migration and the ‘Southern European Model’ of Migration

Having analysed what we see as the key theoretical foundations of the Southern European model of immigration, we now turn to the main descriptive features of the model. In setting these out as a series of key points below, we draw some contrasts with the previous era of labour migration in Europe, which took Southern Europeans as emigrants to North-West Europe during the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s.

The first feature is the multiplicity of migrant nationalities and types. The Fordist era of guestworker migrations in Europe saw mainly poorly educated rural-origin migrants recruited to work in heavy industrial plants and factories and on building sites. They were a more-or-less homogeneous mass of labour sourced from the Southern European countries, plus Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. Since the 1980s, Southern European countries have hosted migrants coming from all parts of the developing world, with large inflows from Eastern Europe since 1990. Italy and Spain best exemplify this ‘super-diverse’ heterogeneity of migrant origins (cf. Vertovec 2007); the exception is Greece, where nearly two-thirds of the immigrant population are made up by one nationality—Albanians (see Table 2). One other feature stands out from Table 2: all the Southern European countries (including Cyprus and Malta as well) host significant numbers of Northern Europeans, especially Britons and Germans, who have settled, many upon retirement, in attractive coastal, island and inland scenic areas (see King, Warnes and Williams 2000, O’Reilly 2000).

Second, immigration into Southern Europe is characterised by a high degree of spontaneity and unpredictability. This is related both to the lack of a proper management system for regulating inflows from various non-EU countries, and to the increasing frequency of migration-inducing events and conflicts in various parts of the world, such as the Horn of Africa, the Arab Spring countries, and the current awful conflict in Syria. Migrants have also shown themselves to be highly mobile, both within their host countries (e.g. from the South to the North of Italy—see Daly 2001, Schuster 2005), and from one destination country to another, either within Southern Europe (e.g. Albanians moving from Greece to Italy) or northwards from other European countries (e.g. Nigerians in Spain onward-migrating to Germany or the UK; see Ahrens, this issue).
Thirdly, migration into Southern Europe is marked by gender specificity and asymmetry, a characteristic which is linked to the specialisation of certain national-origin groups in gender-specific labour niches such as care-work, construction or ambulatory vending on streets and beaches. A further correlation is observable here between religion and gender: most national-origin groups coming from Muslim societies have a male majority (Morocco, Senegal, Egypt, Bangladesh etc.), whilst those originating from Catholic countries (the Philippines, Cape Verde, Latin America) are female-majority.

Another important characteristic of Southern European countries, both those which are now EU members and those which are not, including 'southern-shore' states like Morocco, Tunisia and Libya (as well as Turkey), is the phenomenon of transit migration. Southern European countries like Spain and Italy have long functioned as 'passage spaces' for North African labour migrants in Northern Europe travelling to and from their home countries overland. In more recent years, as we have seen, this transit function gave way to Southern Europe becoming a 'terminus' for North African labour migrants, especially Moroccans, who are amongst the largest migrant communities in both Spain and Italy. But the transit function continues not only for North African migrants resident in Northern Europe but increasingly also for migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere who find it expedient to arrive in Southern Europe, stay for a while (perhaps awaiting a regularisation opportunity), and leave open the option (which may have been their ambition from the outset) of moving north to achieve a more settled and prosperous life in a country like Germany, Sweden or the UK. Here, again, we note a contrast between today's mobile or 'liquid' migrants (cf. Engbersen 2012), moving into, within, through and beyond Southern European countries, and those labour migrants of the past who went to just one country, either staying there for good or return-migrating after a certain number of years.

The final aspect of the Southern European model takes us back to the core argument of this paper: the fact that irregular migration is constitutive of the Southern European migration regime, and that new forms of irregularity and semi-legality are emerging as a consequence both of the economic crisis and of the hardening of migration limitation and control policies. Table 2 shows that estimates of irregular migration vary widely. This is inevitable, not only because of the inherent difficulty of enumerating an 'unknown' population, but also because the number goes up and down according to the timing of regularisations. A large-scale regularisation can do much to remove irregularity; but the effect may only be temporary, and by no means will all irregular migrants be able to benefit. As for the influence of the economic crisis on the number and status of irregular migrants, different hypotheses can be suggested. There may be downward pressure on the numbers of irregular migrants due to unemployment and consequent return or onward migration, and fewer migrants may be attracted into the country. On the other hand, the scale of irregularity may increase if a permit to stay cannot be renewed without the migrant having a job. In this scenario, lack of renewal means an increase in the number of irregular migrants.

The Papers

Six papers follow. Most are based on ethnographic research undertaken in various research sites within Southern Europe, but one is based on the quantitative analysis of a large Italian survey dataset. Together and individually, the papers offer rich insights into the construction, experience and policy aspects of the phenomenon of irregular migration, both in the region and more broadly.

In the first paper, Elena Ambrosetti, Eralba Cela and Tineke Fokkema investigate the relationship between irregularity and transnationalism for a large sample of immigrants in Italy derived from the 'Integrometro' Survey. The complexity and detail of their analysis make it difficult to summarise succinctly. The key dependent variable, transnational behaviour, is measured along four dimensions: sending remittances, return-migration intentions, feelings of belonging to country of origin, and interest in country of origin. Further statistical analysis of the respondents' scores on these individual transnationalism dimensions enables the authors to synthesise a single transnational score for each respondent migrant. The main independent variable, legal status, is captured by categorising respondents into a fourfold spectrum ranging from undocumented, through short- and long-term residence permits to dual nationality (plus a fifth category—'other status'). However, two other independent variables also refine the analysis and findings: duration of residence and integration into Italian society. The latter variable is divided into two composite measures, one representing economic integration, the other socio-cultural integration. Finally, a number of control variables were incorporated into the statistical analysis—age at arrival in Italy, gender, ethnicity of spouse/partner (if relevant), location of any children (Italy or abroad), religion, and country of origin (grouped by world region).

Behind this battery of variables and indices, the authors posit two oppositional hypotheses: that having an irregular or insecure legal/residential status may either hinder or encourage transnationalism. These alternative
hypotheses are based respectively on a resource-dependent and on a linear theoretical framing. The resource-dependent model assumes that socio-economic resources are required in order to sustain transnational practices; hence a lack of papers, which implies marginal job opportunities, low incomes and an inability to come and go on visits to the home country, constrains migrants’ abilities to ‘be transnational’. The linear line of reasoning assumes practically the opposite: namely that those who have acquired a secure legal status in the host society (in this case holding a long-term residence permit or dual nationality) will be more likely to be well-integrated and less likely to preserve strong transnational practices than those with an irregular or insecure status.

The results prove to be both fascinating and, to some extent, counter-intuitive. At a purely descriptive statistical level, transnational engagement turns out to be strongest amongst undocumented and insecure migrants (those with only short-term stay permits). Dual citizens are the least transnational, and long-term residence card-holders occupy an intermediate position. However, several other independent and control variables intervene to complicate, but also to clarify the reasoning behind, the overall findings. Chief amongst these are integration and duration of stay, which mediate the link between legal status and transnationalism. Whilst irregular migrants are clearly at a disadvantage in their integration, in both economic and socio-cultural terms, and hence are more likely to still be oriented to their home countries, for legally secure and long-term residents we observe opposite effects for economic vis-à-vis socio-cultural integration. Economic integration (stable employment, decent income etc.) predisposes migrants to be transnational, and especially to send remittances, thus supporting the ‘resource-dependency’ model. On the other hand, socio-cultural integration, which correlates with length of time in Italy, marriage to an Italian, having children resident in Italy, speaking good Italian, sympathy for the Italian lifestyle etc., leads to detachment from the country of origin and hence to less transnationalism, according to the ‘linear’ model. Finally, part of the difference in the transnationalism outcome is explained by migrants’ socio-demographic characteristics. Irregular migrants, compared to the other status groups, are much more likely to be single, male, Muslim and from Sub-Saharan Africa.

In the next paper, by Daniela Giudici, we stay in Italy but, this time, examine from an ethnographic perspective the complex interplay between migrant irregularity and asylum-seeking. The asylum seeker represents a ‘boundary’ category, occupying a limbo space between an undocumented condition and a documented one, but always with the public suspicion of being an ‘illegal immigrant’. The irregular migrant fares, if anything, even worse. Damned by the media’s repeated recycling of images of ‘boat people’ trying to enter the country by stealth, he/she becomes, in popular perception, an ‘illegal alien’ who, in practice, occupies a ‘space of non-existence’. This can be rectified by regularisation but, at times of crisis, it is all too easy to fall back into irregularity.

Giudici shows how bureaucratic labels such as ‘irregular migrant’, ‘asylum seeker’ and ‘humanitarian protection’ are inter-subjective social constructions. The multiple shifts that migrants make, or are forced to make, between different ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ conditions are shaped by the interactions between generally restrictive and stigmatising Italian immigration laws and policies, local bureaucratic processes and individuals’ experiences. The author argues that, in Italy, asylum seekers are constructed as flexible non-citizens floating between transient juridical statuses and kept at the margins of society. She also demonstrates, with reference to some specific case-studies, how asylum seekers are able, or try, to perform, transform or subvert the (il)legal and moral categories assigned to them. On a broader front, the Italian case illustrates the paradoxes of irregular migration: the absence of effective legal channels for migrants’ entry; the fact that irregular migration has always been the main way in which immigrants have inserted themselves into Italian society and contributed their vital labour to the economy; and the repeated use of regularisations as a ‘crisis-management’ tool to compensate for the dysfunctional mechanisms that have characterised Italian migration policy for the past 30 years (cf. Finotelli and Arango 2011: 509).

After two papers on Italy, the next two are on Spain, based on ethnographic field research in turn in the Basque Country, and in Andalusia and Madrid. Ingrid Ramsoy looks at Senegalese migrants in Bilbao and a small neighbouring town, tracing their Africa-to-Europe migration projects as a form of ‘global connection’ (cf. Tsing 2005) and looking especially at how their lives and livelihoods are threatened at a time of economic crisis. She examines how both structural and socio-cultural elements interact in shaping Senegalese migrants’ desire to stay on in Spain, even under conditions of irregularity. Structural elements include global inequality, the economics of structural adjustment, Spanish legislation restricting migrants’ rights whilst allowing their continued presence in Spain, and hegemonic European and Spanish colonial-style discourses towards migrants. By socio-cultural factors the author means those cultural tropes, translated into norms and behaviours, which are intrinsic to the Senegalese way of life, especially in migration. These include masculinist traditions of providing for the family and of aspiring for a ‘better life’, and the tradition of teranga, or solidarity and hospitality, articulated through gendered social and kinship networks. Despite
the profound disillusionment over the global encounter between Senegalese culture, teranga and religion on the one hand, and ‘Western’ culture, racism and economic meltdown on the other, the migrant does all in his power to stay on: his family needs him and he cannot provide anything for them if he goes home. To return empty-handed is a personally shameful admission of failure. Rams0y thus shows how the Senegalese migrant, caught in a trap between his own and his family’s needs and expectations on one side, and the realities of increasing precariousness due to the Spanish crisis and an actual or looming irregular status on the other, mobilises a ‘discourse of need’ akin to that of the ‘deserving refugee’ in order to counter the colonial discourse of ‘othering’ African economic migrants in Spain.

Some of the issues raised by Rams0y resonate with the succeeding paper by Jill Ahrens which looks more explicitly at the relationship between the Spanish version of the ‘eurocrisis’ and Nigerian migrants’ irregularity in Madrid and southern Spain. Ahrens rightly points out that, whereas the process of irregular migrants gaining legal residence through regularisation is relatively well documented, the opposite process—of regularised migrants falling back into irregularity—is under-researched. This paper contributes new insights into ‘status mobility’ (especially ‘becoming irregular’) and ‘semi-legality’, phenomena which result from a Spanish legislative framework for migration which was created at a time of rapid economic growth and which does not function at times of economic recession. Functionality is further hampered by an overstretched immigration bureaucracy. The Spanish experience of mass immigration concentrated in a rather short span of time (immigrant stock numbers grew from 1.5 million in 2000 to 6.5m in 2008) makes it ‘exceptional in Europe’ (Arango 2013). Construction was the leading sector of the Spanish economic boom, but there was also strong expansion of employment for migrants in the tourism and hospitality, agriculture and domestic-service sectors. The sudden economic crisis, driven by the collapse in the building sector and by unemployment rates which rose to 24% for the total population and 36% for immigrants, had immediate and profound effects on the well-being and legal status of migrants. According to Ahrens, unprecedented numbers of migrants in Spain are unable to regularise their migration status or are about to lose their previously acquired residence permits. Migrant categories are emerging which do not fit the conventional ‘legal’ vs ‘irregular’ migrant definitions and are more adequately described as ‘semi-legal’ (Kubal 2012).

Based on in-depth interviews with 40 Nigerian migrants in Malaga and Madrid, as well as other conversations and ethnographic observations, Ahrens suggests that four ‘semi-legal’ migrant categories have emerged in Spain:

- migrants who lose their jobs and who thus become irregular through an inability to renew their residence permit;
- migrants who use their short-term residence permits to move as ‘tourists’ but actually to look for work in other Schengen countries;
- migrants with long-term residence permits who move to another Schengen country which, however, is reluctant to issue them with work permits; and
- migrant children who are, for various reasons, ‘irregular’ in Spain, often because they are ‘left behind’ by parents who move out of Spain to look for work.

Out of this typology of semi-legality also emerges a number of interactions between irregularity and/or semi-legality and im/mobility. For some migrants, economic deterioration in their conditions in Spain provokes a move to seek work elsewhere, or to reunite, albeit temporarily, with family members living elsewhere in Europe. For others, the result is the opposite: irregularity means that outward mobility is blocked, since the migrant would have difficulty re-entering Spain. Another effect is that ‘legal’ migrants whose livelihood was (partly) based on visiting other European countries and trading goods with Nigerians elsewhere in Europe or for export to Nigeria (second-hand cars, for instance), find that their ability to engage in this kind of international trading is reduced by financial and bureaucratic obstacles, so they do not travel so much.

The paper by Ioanna Tsoni uses the first-hand account of Michel, a 28-year-old Guinean migrant, as a heuristic device to open up a series of debates about border-crossing, mobility, irregularity, racism and urban space in the everyday context of Athens. This unusual, but completely justifiable, opening to an academic paper reproduces lightly edited extracts from the hand-written ‘migration journal’ of a migrant who learnt English ‘on the road’. The account is direct, matter-of-fact, yet extraordinarily powerful. It tells of the trials and tribulations of the newly arrived irregular migrant in an unknown city where, it transpires, he is spumed both by Greeks and by fellow-Guineans. Eventually he finds help and solace in the company of other migrants, mainly black Africans. For a while he ekes out a bare living by going to soup-kitchens, squatting in empty buildings and trying to sell recycled items retrieved from rubbish bins. After a spell washing cars, he now works part-time in a restaurant, which represents an improvement on his previous scavenging on the very margins of the Athenian economy and society. He concludes his moving account with the following words: ‘I pray to be successful so I can one day go back to help the development of
my country. I am black, and I am proud. I have Jesus in my heart, Martin Luther King in my mind and Malcolm X in my arms. We hope and pray that things will become better some day'.

Tsoni carried out 18 months of multi-sited and mobile ethnography amongst African migrants in Athens and elsewhere, observing, recording and mapping ‘migrant border narratives’. In her words, ‘These are testimonies of mobility and fixity: stories of how undocumented migrants got here [to Athens] and why; what types of borders and boundaries, visible and invisible, and of what scales, had to be crossed; and how these border-crossings were felt, signified and performed’. Whilst the migrant-scripted narrative is a privileged testimony—privileged above all by the insight that researchers get from reading and learning from such authentic material—the technique of mobile ethnography is also particularly appropriate for researching migrants, especially those whose pathways are uncertain and subject to blockage, diversion and sudden change. Mobile methods facilitate the elucidation of sensory, emotional, affective and kinesthetic experiences; they make it possible, according to Tsoni, to weave together thick descriptions of migrants’ conditions of irregularity and their experiences of material and symbolic border-crossings at a variety of nested scales from the international border to the urban neighbourhood and the micro-spaces of working and living quarters.

Starting with Michel’s story, and linking it with the Greek (non-)policy on migration, with everyday racism and the challenges of migrant life in crisis-ridden Athens, Tsoni aspires to write a critical phenomenology of migrant ‘irregularity’. The result is a scenario where undocumented migrants, especially those with black skins, are remorselessly stigmatised as villains and scroungers who need to be deported in order to preserve the monolithic, mono-cultural character of Greek society. What Triandafyllidou and Veikou (2002) have termed the hierarchy of Greekness places Greeks from Greece at the core of the hierarchy, with concentric circles of ever-more ‘non-Greek’ groups extending outwards: first diaspora Greeks, then other Balkan and European peoples, and an outer ring of ‘Third World’ migrants from Africa and Asia. Tsoni identifies the triptych ‘black–Muslim–man’ as the personification of the ultimate ‘other’ who should remain hidden, rejected and out of the public gaze. The irony is that, in the immigrant social geography of Athens, such migrants, like Michel (who is actually a Christian), find themselves placed at the visible heart of the securitised metropolis and in the epicentre of a racialised political discourse. But there is one final irony. Alongside the familiar subaltern categories inhabiting the marginal spaces of the inner city—drug and alcohol addicts, the homeless, Roma, ‘visibly different’ irregular migrants like Michel – is a new category, labelled by Kaika (2012) the nouveau poor, who are the social casualties of Greece’s spectacular financial mess and who now find themselves jostling with the ‘others’, the ‘regular irregulars’, in the queues for free food and clothing.

The final paper, by Daniela DeBono, takes us to Malta, where she spotlights the plight of irregular migrants in this small-island EU state which sees itself, at least according to the voices of some politicians and social commentators, as well as large sections of the general population, as under seige from boat-borne irregular migrants and asylum seekers. Based on interviews with irregular migrants and policy-makers, as well as on other forms of ethnographic field research, the author shows how a democratic system like the Maltese one can, in practice, work against the maintenance of migrants’ human rights and end up by disempowering them. DeBono focuses on two aspects: first the vertical tension between elected politicians and the electorate and, second, the operation of bureaucratic institutions, the personnel of which may be unconvinced of the legitimacy or the necessity of helping irregular migrants with the services to which they are entitled.

Regarding the first point, ministry officials told DeBono that they are practically held to ransom by the electorate, and gave examples of ministerial plans in the field of irregular migration being scrapped due to public outcry or the opposition of a particular group of people—for example, opposition to the creation of a migrants’ residential centre by those living in the vicinity. The extremely high voter turnout in Malta, considered one of the virtues of the Maltese democratic system, thus emerges as counter-productive for the respect of the human rights of irregular migrants. On the second point, interviewees—especially pro-migrant NGO workers—frequently complained about the lethargy of public-service bureaucrats dealing with migrants’ issues and human rights. Foot-dragging and responsibility-shunning resulted either from ‘orders’ from politicians or from their own anti-immigration views. The conclusion is depressing. Disempowered both by the political system and by social reactions like racism, irregular immigrants are denied a platform to voice their own contribution to debates about irregular migration and their treatment by Maltese society.

Acknowledgements

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conference took place in Malmö, Sweden, 26–27 August 2013, organised by the Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare (MIM) and the Department of Global Political Studies of Malmö University. Each paper was pre-circulated and critically commented on at the workshop by two nominated discussants, and subsequently reviewed by the guest-editors of the special issue, supported by other referees as necessary. We thank Ioanna Tsoni for help in setting up the workshop and Jenny Money for final copy-editing.

Notes

1. See Hein de Haas: ‘Smuggling is a reaction to border controls, not the cause of migration’, 5 October 2013; also ‘Lampedusa: only the dead can stay’, 8 October 2013. Available at http://heindehaas.blogspot.co.uk/2013/10/smuggling-is-reaction-to-border.html (accessed 12 December 2013).
2. Interestingly, Castles and Miller (2009), in what many regard as the standard textbook on global migration, prefer the term ‘illegal’ to ‘irregular’ migration; and in the index the entry ‘irregular migration’ is diverted to ‘see illegal migration’.
4. For a presentation of this discussion see, in particular, the introductory and concluding chapters of van den Anker and van Liempt (2012). For two excellent ethnographic studies of how West African migrants struggle to survive on the margins of Southern Italian society, drifting in and out of legality and existing mostly in multiple realms of irregularity, see Cole and Booth (2007) and Lucht (2012).
5. In a reflection note on the evaluation of the Dublin system, the European Parliament points out that, in practice, out of all the asylum applications that were filed, only a small proportion of around 12% (European Commission 2007b: 18) gave rise to transfer requests (Maiani and Verstad 2009: 2). This does not eliminate the problem, as the potential threat of returnees still remains.
6. This is not to overlook the use of regularisation schemes by other European countries, notably Belgium, France and the UK, as well as the USA. Some are unhappy with the term ‘amnesty’ as it implies absolution for a prior criminal state or event (Sciortino 2012).
7. In Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus, the other three ‘Southern EU countries, which all joined in 2004, there have been no regularisations.
8. According to Zincone (2006), the Italian experience of regularisation demonstrates, firstly, the relative continuity of immigration policies regardless of changes in the political complexion of the governing coalition and, secondly, the discrepancy between a public opinion generally hostile to ‘illegal immigration’ and governmental action on mass regularisations.

9. This migration tipping-point from net emigration to net immigration occurred first in Italy in 1972, in Spain and Greece in 1975, and in Portugal in 1981, according to these countries’ respective national statistics on inflows and outflows of migrants (King et al. 1997: 3).
10. For comprehensive overviews of the geography of Southern European emigration during these postwar decades see King (1993, 1998) and Salt and Clout (1976).
11. These figures are in constant fluctuation, mostly upwards, due to the volatility of the flows and the evolving systems of enumeration. For instance, the latest data on immigrants in Italy produce two estimates for 31 December 2012: those who are de jure resident, 4.4 million, and those who are ‘present’ in Italy, 5.2 million. The top five immigrant nationalities (under the latter estimate) are Romanians (1 million), Moroccans (513,000), Albanians (498,000), Chinese (305,000) and Ukrainians (225,000). For details see UNAR (2013: 18, 20).
12. Also known as the black economy, underground economy or ‘submerged economy’ (in Italian, economia sommersa).
13. Although the current recession is changing this situation, with local workers willing to downgrade their employment status aspirations and pick up some kinds of work which they would have rejected before.
15. As Papadopoulou (2004: 4) and Sørensen (2006: 5) point out, transit migration is a phenomenon that cuts across various categories of migrants, including both regular and irregular migrants as well as readmitted migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Transit migration constitutes a continuum in the migration experience, somewhere between mobility, migration and settlement. As such, transit migration is not a specific type or category of migrant/migration; rather it is a contingent state and an ongoing process.
16. Inspired by the writings of Zygmunt Bauman on ‘liquid modernity’ and other aspects of ‘liquid life’ (Bauman 1999, 2005), Engbersen’s concept of liquid migration stresses the flexible and individualised migration trajectories of today’s migrants, no longer as constrained as they were in the past by the stable structures of the nation-state, family attachment, labouring class and residential neighbourhood (Engbersen 2012: 98–100).
17. Similar findings were brought out more explicitly in another recent paper by the same team of authors, referring this time only to East European migrants in Italy (Cela et al. 2013).
18. According to Arango (2013), Spain accounted for one-third of the total increase in the EU 25 net migration of 15 million over this period, and was second only to the United States in the volume of migrants taken in during these years.
References


