Facets of migrant labour contribution in Greek agriculture: Precarity, mobilities and social integration

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Introduction

• Since the early 1990s, migrant labour has gradually become a structural factor of rural development; supporting/ expanding the agricultural production.

• Given the demographic, social and economic constraints in many rural areas, migrants have provided a necessary labour force for the survival of rural and farming households as well as the competitiveness of family-owned businesses.

• This ‘multifunctional’ labour force has been internally differentiated not only in terms of the labour tasks that various ethnic/migrant groups perform, but also, through their different social mobility and integration pathways.
Introduction

• Despite the constant changes, migration policy has been instrumental in the development and maintenance of such exploitative labour regimes founded upon the creation of regular, semi-regular and irregular migrant labour force tiers.

• The recent economic recession has in many ways altered the integration and social mobility trajectories of migrants in Greece.

• Migrants were among the hardest hit victims of the unprecedented crisis. Migrant unemployment and poverty significantly increased surpassing that of the indigenous population, but more importantly, migrant lives slid into precariousness.
Mobility, precarity and migrant agency

- Migrant presence and labour in rural areas of Europe has been an issue of discussion since the 1990s.

- Especially southern European countries (Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal) became “new immigration countries” (Castles and Miller 2003), as a ‘semi-periphery’ of western and northern countries, within an integrating EEC/ EU.

- This semi-periphery, due to its geographical location (as a border of Europe) and its sectoral characteristics (existence on significant farming activity, tourism, constructions, etc.), was destined to receive masses of irregular migrants, who would be ready to accept low paid and unskilled jobs.
Mobility, precarity and migrant agency

• A plethora of economic and social theories were combined to offer persuasive arguments in the emerging domain of migration studies.

• Therefore a number of theories, such as the ‘segmented labour market’, ‘social networks’, ‘new economics of migration’, ‘institutional theories’, etc. contributed to the theorization of how migrants ended up in various locations in more developed and not-so-developed regions of Europe.

• More particularly, rural areas were also described as “new immigrant destinations” (NID) illustrating their ‘attractiveness’ to migrant labour – due to their limited demographic dynamism, developmental potential, numerous employment opportunities for semi- and un-skilled labour and so on.
Mobility, precarity and migrant agency

- In the literature up until the burst of the economic crisis of 2008, the forces of economic globalization were seen as contributing to European integration.

- Moreover, it is important to mention that despite the existing casualization and flexibility of migrant labour in rural areas of southern Europe – also due to the increased size of informal economy – there were some opportunities for migrants’ social integration leading to their upward social mobility.

- Since the crisis, which lead to the collapse of full time employment labour precarity emerged as a ‘normal’ condition for migrant labour in rural areas and more particularly in agriculture.
Mobility, precarity and migrant agency

• There is a significant discussion on labour precarity and the various precarious statuses of migrants in agriculture (Goldring et al. 2009; Rogaly 2009; Kasimis & Papadopoulos 2013; Kasimis, Papadopoulos, Zografakis 2015).

• Standing’s contribution to the discussion over precarity and the ‘precariat’ (Standing 2011; 2014a; 2014b; 2015) is a useful starting point (Shukaitis 2013; Paret 2016); despite the severe criticism that it received (Breman 2013; Munck 2013).

• Recent work on precarity reconnects the domains of work, labour and migrant agency (Lier 2007; Pereira 2014; Paret and Gleeson 2016; Schierup and Jorgensen 2016).
Mobility, precarity and migrant agency

• In the last decade or so, it was realised by labour geographers that more emphasis should be given to the labour agency and more particularly to migrant agency (Lier 2007; Castree 2008; Waite 2009; Tufts and Savage 2009; Rogaly 2009).

• For geographers in particular, scale, place, community and spatial strategies are very useful concepts for organizing the discussion over labour and agency (cf Lier 2007).

• Three strategies of migrants seem relevant here: (a) resilience, (b) reworking, and (c) resistance (Coe & Jordhus-Lier 2010). But their strategies need to lead to collective actions and not to remain place-based struggles. The mechanism(s) of how these migrant struggles arise in certain agricultural areas need more attention.
The current socioeconomic situation in Greece

- The recent focus on the large migrant and refugee flows to the country and their treatment by the state has overshadowed the discussion on the country’s socio-economic situation.

- A recent OECD (2016) report estimates that Greece is facing a deep and prolonged depression:
  - Lost 26% from its real GDP in the period 2008-2014.
  - Unemployment rate is at 25% in 2015, with a peak at 27% in 2013.
  - The recession has pushed many people into poverty, while income inequality has increased.
  - Tax and benefit reforms have materially improved the budget position, but the burden of adjustment has been uneven and public debt is still considered very high.
Figure 1. Unemployment rate and real GDP in Greece, 2001-2015

Agriculture and migrant labour

- Family farming remains a defensive practice for numerous rural households in their struggle for coping within a constantly changing global setting (Kasimis and Papadopoulos 1997).

- Family farming is not just the outcome of an incomplete agricultural modernization process, but rather a systemic characteristic of households, communities and local economies in Greece (Efstratoglou et al. 2004)

- Agriculture has been historically important for Greece, currently accounting for 13.8% of employment (476.4 thousands) (ELSTAT, 2015).

- The agricultural sector, in general, is characterized by low productivity, which is due to the large number of family members employed in their farm holding and their limited working days on the farm.
Figure 2. Evolution of regular farm labour in working days and Annual Work Units (AWUs), 1991-2013

Source: ELSTAT, Farm Structure Surveys and Agricultural Censuses, 1991-2013 & Eurostat Database.
Agriculture and migrant labour

• The majority of the farms (76%) have a size of less than 5 hectares and only 29% of farm labour force is employed full-time in agriculture; the rest are underemployed in agriculture.

• Moreover, it is important to mention that the number of family members has been declining over the years and therefore the total farm labour is decreasing. Despite the diminishing numbers, each person employed on the farm works on average over one third (0.38) of the equivalent of full-time employment.

• Another point is that the size of non-family labour increased since 1991 and remained at a high level up until the economic crisis.

• Unemployment in rural areas has remained at a lower level (decreased by 5%) compared to urban areas.
Table 1. Evolution of family farm labour, regular and seasonal non-family labour, 1991-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of farms</th>
<th>Employed family labour</th>
<th>Farms with regular non-family labour</th>
<th>Regular non-family farm labour</th>
<th>Farms who employ seasonal non-family farm labour</th>
<th>Working days of seasonal non-family farm labour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>817.059</td>
<td>1.434.504</td>
<td>7.247</td>
<td>10.465</td>
<td>293.650</td>
<td>17.295.225</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ELSTAT, Farm Structure Surveys and Agricultural Censuses, 1991-2013
Figure 3. Contribution of non-family labour in farming (calculated in full-time equivalents and as share of total labour on the farms), 1991-2013

Source: ELSTAT, Farm Structure Surveys and Agricultural Censuses, 1991-2013
Agriculture and migrant labour

- Despite the collapse of salaried employment, agricultural employment has remained important due to its autonomous features. However, agricultural employment does not guarantee full-time employment for the majority of the employees.

- Agriculture provides jobs as the majority of farmers are self-employed. In recent years, the number of self-employed farmers has remained stable, while the number of supporting and non-paid family members (mostly women) has been declining.

- Migrant farm labourers should be considered as a new social group in rural areas that until today has a long presence in rural areas and, consequently, it challenges the existing rural social structure.
Figure 4. Evolution of employment and agricultural employment in times of crisis, 2001-2015

Figure 5. Evolution of farming population by employment category, 2001-2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Greeks</th>
<th>Albanians</th>
<th>Other Immigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 (I)</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 (IV)</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Calculations based on primary LFS data, Hellenic Statistical Authority.
Map 1. Proportion of migrants in total population, 2011

The mobility of migrant labour in rural Greece

- Much of migration literature has approached migrants as a labour force which is moving according to economic rationalities and therefore their employment is shaped solely by structural forces.

- In our opinion, migrant labour cannot be just considered as a labour force which fulfills its role according to the structural logic of segmented labour markets and the stratified host society.

- Migrant labour has its own agency (e.g. social networks, becoming trustworthy). It takes up opportunities and becomes a semi-autonomous vector (i.e. by building up strategies) in local economies and societies in host countries (Castles 2004; Parks 2005; Bauder 2006).

- Migrants’ actions allow them to move further, to move up and/or to move down; this capacity of migrants to be mobile was contested since the economic crisis.
Migrant labour struggles: The ‘Manolada case’

- Migrant labour is a new social actor in rural areas who is increasingly involved in local society since many migrants have been rural residents for many years already (Kasimis and Papadopoulos 2005; Papadopoulos 2009; Papadopoulos and Fratsea 2013).

- The presence of migrant labour is more prevalent in the coastal, island and more agriculturally developed rural areas. It is also in these areas that they are more heavily exploited because of farmers’ pressure to maintain low costs for their produce.

- The case of Manolada community, which is the most important location for strawberry production in Greece, is exemplary of how migrants are controlled and overexploited (Papadopoulos and Fratsea 2016).
Migrant labour struggles: The ‘Manolada case’

- Manolada has been a ‘hot spot’ of intensive agricultural production, of utilising high technology and employing large numbers of migrant labourers.

- There seems to be an ‘emerging proletariat’ of mostly irregular migrant labour, who work under difficult conditions and have organized mobilizations three times until today.

- Similar migrant mobilizations have been organised in other agricultural areas (Skala Lakonias, Achaia, etc.), but attracted lower attention compared to Manolada, where farmer interests are considered more important (due to the export orientation of strawberry production).

- The community of Manolada has been affected by these mobilizations, while it has also been at the centre of public attention since then.
Map 2. The location of Manolada community in the Peloponnese
Migrant labour struggles: The ‘Manolada case’

• Labour control is achieved by keeping wages down due to the ethnic stratification of migrant labour in agricultural production.

• The specificity of Manolada case of strawberry production - compared to the Californian case (based on migrant tenant farmers from Mexico) and the Spanish case (based on women ‘circular’ migrant labour from Morocco) – has to do with maintaining migrant labour hierarchy in agricultural production.

• The work of Asian migrants (Banglandeshi) is increasingly precaritised and casualised as a result of their low position in the local migrant labour market. Their working conditions are persistently kept at a minimum while their remuneration is not always secured.
Migrant labour struggles: The ‘Manolada case’

- The casualised and precaritised labour of Asian migrants has been a constant issue of clashes between migrants (many of them undocumented) and farmers (especially those with larger farms) during the last decade.

- The basis for the (contesting) claims of Asian migrants before the crisis (2007/8) were on wage increase, while in the middle of the crisis (2013) the claims were transformed into (defending but angry) demonstrations on maintaining their standard of living and demanding their payment.

- The economic crisis far from creating a precarious situation for migrants, it has further intensified their precarious position by exerting high pressure on their wages and by justifying employers’ actions to eliminate migrant demands for a minimum standard of living.
Migrant labour struggles: The ‘Manolada case’

• Migrant struggles/ mobilizations, in both periods, against certain employers were supported by left-wing political parties (KKE, ANTARSYA), despite that Asian migrants were in their majority undocumented and their situation did not improve following the demonstrations.

• The case of Manolada can be seen as a ‘laboratory’ of migrant labour relations where there is an agricultural production system based on migrant labour control so that it increases its profitability and competitiveness within a globalised production system.

• The ‘Manolada model’ of migrant labour control has led to increased migrant mobilizations due to the fact of migrants’ mounting labour precarity and precariousness. This ‘transformative’ effect is caused by the changing employment and living conditions in rural ‘hot spots’ of globalization; given their poor linkages with the indigenous population.
Concluding remarks

• Rural areas have been transformed into localised areas of contentious development. May be this was the case also before the crisis, but today this feeling is more prevalent – as the economic depression intensifies.

• It is under question whether the above mentioned migrant struggles/mobilizations may be transformed into a social movement on migrant rights over employment and living standards.

• The context of economic crisis and austerity has played a significant role for reinvigorating migrant struggles/mobilizations and momentarily (April – May 2013) gaining certain support by political parties and the general public.

• Although ‘Manolada’ became a generic name for places of exploitation and precariousness, the public support of migrant claims against exploitation and precarity did not last long.
Concluding remarks

• To the question whether migrant struggles/mobilizations challenge the neoliberal agenda by undermining the basic rationale of the capitalist mode of production (Gritzas and Kavoulakos 2015; Gialis and Herod 2014) or whether they represent only a ‘healthy’ reaction of civil society agents towards the evils of economic crisis (Huliaras et al. 2015) there is not a straightforward answer.

• The consolidation of a migrant movement is still far from being achieved in the case of rural Greece; despite the claims that migrant protest challenges the dominant discourse (Karyotis and Skleparis 2016).

• Within a sociopolitical context which encourages migrant victimisation and public skepticism over migrants’ contribution to the economy, migrant labourers are either busy with gaining the means for their survival or they move out of the country aiming at avoiding the austerity and escaping from a country which does not offer them any real living prospects.
Thank you for your attention!!!