On European money in Greece: Anthropological and political perspectives

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2012/2013 A.G. Leventis Fellow in Contemporary Greek Studies at South East European Studies at Oxford (SEESOX)

European Studies Centre, St Antony’s College, University of Oxford

Abstract

This paper addresses the material and symbolic implications of the European Union’s funding policies in Greece, especially since the first Community Support Framework in 1988. Departing from my ethnographic experience among local political elites in the region of Evros (North-eastern Greece), I propose to view the circulation of these funds as a process that not only reinforced representations of dependence in a wider nexus of inter-state relations, but also engendered particular moral readings of social reality and politics. In conclusion, I suggest that the ideas of beneficial dependence and gifts, which underlay the trajectory of these funds, can further help us in examining the moral terms in which European Integration was symbolically constructed in various settings.
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Introduction

In the autumn of 2009, Greece entered a prolonged period of economic instability and social upheaval due to the exacerbation of the Greek state’s budget deficit and debts, and the ensuing economic and political reforms undertaken by successive Greek governments. These neoliberal reforms were enacted in close cooperation with the European Union, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, and destabilized social and political consensus within Greece. They led, on the one hand, to class restructuring, social protests, and grassroots mobilization, and, on the other, to the emergence of new political configurations. At the same time, the outbreak of the “Greek crisis” in 2009 has been closely connected with wider debates on Greece’s relations with the European Union (EU). The European framework is central to the understanding and management of the crisis by governing political parties and most opposition forces. This centrality of the EU is not only a recent condition imposed by the urgency of the crisis or the current reliance of the Greek state on European loans; it also reflects the historical course through which European Integration had become intertwined with the ideas of progress, modernization, and, most importantly, material prosperity in Greece over the course of the last three decades. Since 1981, when Greece became a member of the then-European Communities, the European framework was gradually conceptualized by the dominant political class as a supranational institutional context that improved Greek society’s overall living standards. The material aspect of EU membership, through funding policies such as the Community Support Frameworks (CSFs), was one of the defining ways in which this relationship was experienced by the Greek political class and mediated towards the national audience.

In this sense, this paper aims to posit these flows of materiality as not solely a technical or economic (in the strict sense) feature of Greece-EU relations, but also as a process with symbolic and, especially, moral implications among social agents who act in the context of the Greek state. Departing from an anthropological standpoint, I will attempt to illustrate the symbolic processing of EU funds through the case of local political elites in the border region of Evros in North-eastern

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2 An equally important feature of the Greek membership in the European Communities was the geopolitical security and stability that this institutional framework seemed to provide, especially in the context of Greek-Turkish relations.

3 In using the term symbolic, I am referring not only to explicitly articulated ideas and worldviews, but also to semi-conscious assumptions concerning the natural order of things and naturalized hierarchies of power, in line with Pierre Bourdieu’s multivalent use of this term in the case of ‘symbolic domination’ and ‘symbolic capital’ (Bourdieu 1977, 1991, 2000). In this sense, the emic terms ‘morality’ and ‘moral’ largely fall within the category of the symbolic, since they reflect a particular experience of social relations along codes of conduct and depoliticized dichotomies such as ‘good’/’bad’, ‘right’/’wrong’, etc. (for a dynamic and flexible approach on morality, see Fassin 2012, and also Heintz 2009). The extent to which native concepts of morality transcend socially situated contexts and become wider frameworks of political struggle and/or consensus is one of the underlying questions of this paper.
Greece. This Greek region shares borders with Turkey and Bulgaria, and local politics have been largely conditioned by the central state – in reference to its foreign policy, but also its funding and developmental policies. Given this local sensitivity to the changing orientations of the Greek state, this case study can help us address the course of Greek national politics as well, and, therefore, reflect on the symbolic construction of the EU in a multileveled perspective.

The first part of the paper builds on the ethnographic research that I conducted among political elites in Evros. I propose to view EU funds as having restructured the practices, interests, and imagination of local politicians and their economic advisors – the latter being often referred to as ‘technocrats’. Such localized experiences were not detached from the broader framework of Greek politics, but instead were closely intertwined with the course of national politics over this period of time. Secondly, the conceptualization and enactment of these funds as redistributive policies entailed the reproduction of the relationship between Greece and the EU in the paternalist terms of “donors” and “recipients”. In the second part of the paper, I will point out how these funds led to a pervasive idiom of dependence among these networks of politicians and technocrats, but also engendered specific readings of social reality and politics in moral terms, given the particular construction of these funds as aid and tokens of European solidarity.

The third and last part of this working paper proposes new research directions in the study of the project of European Integration. Anthropological and historical accounts of the ways in which European solidarity was constructed and enacted are of great importance, since they can contribute to an understanding of the social embedment of economic and political projects. Further research may include “local” settings, such as in the case of my fieldwork in Evros, but also calls for an extension of this critical enquiry to more “central” settings of policy-making, such as political and technocratic elites in Athens, or EU officials in Brussels. The concept of moral economy seems pertinent to the study of norms, obligations, and emotions (Fassin 2009), which communicate with economic interests and economic realism in these settings. In fact, experiences of putatively disinterested action may prove to be of particular importance for understanding the structuration of these moral economies, but also the increasing moralization of modern-day politics.
Local experiences of European money

My ethnographic work has dealt with new forms of political governance and public discourse in Evros from the late 1980s to the late 2000s (Gkintidis 2011, 2012, 2013). The research took place from November 2005 to August 2009 and involved interviews, archival research pertaining to the course of institutions and policies, as well as observation in specific instances of public deliberation. My fieldwork focused particularly on political elites and addressed the changes and the continuities in the action and worldview of these social agents. Given that these social agents were either elected political representatives or part of the local and national administration, my ethnography provided a locally-grounded perspective on the course of the Greek state in the aftermath of the Cold War and the increasing inclusion of Greece within the institutional framework of the EU (Featherstone 1998, 2006, Kazakos 2001, Sakellaropoulos and Sotiris 2004, Mavroudeas 2013). My research brought out the increasing prevalence of ‘Europe’ and ‘Europeanization’ in the action of these social agents, as a particular ‘strategy of self-representation’ and a ‘device of power’ (Borneman and Fowler 1997: 489).

In fact, I came to understand that studying the policies of the Greek state also meant elaborating on the centrality of the idea of ‘Europe’ among its local bearers, since those gradually stood as local ‘mediators’ of the policies of the European Union (Green 2008: 260).

Evros is a border region, a nome, situated in the most northeastern part of Greece, sharing borders with Turkey and Bulgaria. Its population of approximately 140,000 inhabitants is predominantly Christian and Greek-speaking, while, at the same time, the nome of Evros is part of the wider multiethnic region of Greek Thrace, where a significant population of Muslims lives, most of whom define themselves as ethnic Turks. In this sense, geographic proximity to Turkey and, to a lesser extent, the presence of a minority deemed as “nationally ambiguous”, led to the conditioning of a wide range of local practices, strategies, and discourses along the practical reality of the Greek state (Gkintidis 2011, 2012, 2013, Tsibiridou 1995, 2013, Chtouris 1999). This centrality of the Greek state was constantly emphasized through the language of Greek nationalism, with which local inhabitants of Evros and their political representatives grew to be quite accustomed. Since the deterioration of Greek-Turkish relations over Cyprus and the Aegean Sea in the 1970s, anti-Turkish rhetoric became the main framework through which politicians, businessmen, or the clergy negotiated their relations with the national Greek state. A recurrent demand was the ‘economic fortification’ of the region (« οικονομική θωράκιση», literally the building of an economic armour).
Given its positioning as a region of particular national interest, Evros received substantial amounts of public funding – national and later European – from the Greek state, while the periphery of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace was a privileged locus for state-backed developmental incentives for private investments (Petrakos and Psycharlis 2004). In the long term, these policies didn’t deliver sustainable development in Evros; nevertheless, they reinforced – in their implementation and failure – the ideas of scarcity and dependence on external funding, either from the state, or, later on, the EU funds.

It is in this context that EU developmental funds were locally mediated by politicians and technocrats. Following Greece’s accession to the European Communities in 1981, the European orientation was interpreted in two ways. First, it was seen as a condition of geopolitical stability vis-à-vis Turkey. Second, since the mid-1980s, it was increasingly conceptualized through its regional developmental policies as a crucial source of funding, on which Greece (and Evros) were largely dependent. The first instance of these policies were the 1985 Integrated Mediterranean Programs (IMPs), which were relatively limited in their scope and budget, but nonetheless pointed to the consolidation of the community’s cohesion policies and Structural Funds in the years to come – most notably in the form of the Community Support Frameworks since 1988. These cohesion policies consisted of developmental aid towards the least developed or ‘lagging regions’, meaning regions with a per capita GDP less than or close to the 75% of the Community’s average (Hooghe and Keating 1994: 377, also Mitsos 2001). Greece, which fell within this category as a whole, received a proportionally large share of this money, during the implementation of the 1st and 2nd Community Support Frameworks (1988-1993, 1994-1999). Moreover, from the early 1990s, European funding...
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came to engulf Greek funding policies, thus defining the developmental and economic priorities of
the Greek state itself.9

In the case of Evros, the growing importance of European funds led to the realignment of
perceptions of material redistribution and subsequent political demands. The Greek state was called
to prioritize the channelling of European funds to the region in order to compensate for its isolation
and long-term underdevelopment, as well as for its crucial location on the border with Turkey. These
demands were expressed by not only local politicians, but also intellectuals from outside the region,
including members of the Academy of Athens who conducted a much publicized study of Thrace’s
economic problems and stated that the needed funds for the economic and strategic stabilisation of
the region were to be found in the EU funding framework (Academy of Athens 1994: 155-159).
Therefore, next to demands for more national funds, one could start noticing demands for more EU
funds. Those two sources of funding came gradually to stand for the same thing. This implied an
interesting reconceptualization of local politics, in reference to old and new perceptions of external
dependence. For instance, a parliamentary representative of Evros declared in the Greek parliament
in 1993 that the wider region of Thrace was entitled to these European funds since, among other
reasons, it ‘had only received a few thousand dollars from the Marshall plan’ (Kipouros 1994: 177).

This process of readjustment involved an overall refashioning of the action and expectations
of politicians and their advisors. Recurrent narratives of dependence reflected their experience of
relying on and competing for the allocation of this external funding. As one of my key informants, an
economist with a leading position in local economic planning, put it, the 1990s had signalled a quasi-
obsession with European funds and the EU itself, a ‘Eurolust’ («ευρωλαγνεία») that relocated any
perspective for development in the implementation of European programs. The use of the term
‘lust’ pointed to the fact that these external funds had come to constitute a stake, not only in the
relation of local politicians and technocrats with the Greek state or other Greek regions, but also
within their own local political arenas. Moreover, the implementation of this funding required new
technical, legal, and practical knowledge among politicians and their planning units. The
decentralization and the new forms of Greek local government institutions in the early 1990s also
responded to the requirements of the European Union’s funding policies. In addition to this
administrative reorganization of Greek local government, a series of semi-public developmental
companies were created in the early 1990s throughout Greece and Evros (also see Paraskevopoulos
2001). These developmental companies were most often affiliated with local municipalities. They

9 In order for EU funds to be granted for the implementation of specific projects, the Greek state had to contribute a part of the funds
required for each project. While its participation was proportionally low (usually 25%), in terms of its own budgetary capacities it meant
that its public funding program had to be committed solely to the implementation of these projects. On the centrality of European
funding policies in the Greek budget, see Andrikopoulou 1994, also Plaskovitis 1994, Featherstone 1998, Georgantas and Psychariss 2000,
Petrakos and Psychariss 2004, Chytopoulou-Pappa 2007, Streeck 2013. For a recent overview of the Greek economy, see the collective
responded to the new legal requirements for the implementation of various EU programs, which were not necessarily limited to the state-administered main bulk of EU funds. Obtaining new programs was seen as a further accumulation of EU funding by those politicians who eventually succeeded. Procuring EU funds became a comparative advantage in the reproduction of one’s political capital, given that these programs accordingly entailed sums of money, e.g. leading to the hiring of temporary personnel, such as unemployed university graduates, and the allocation of projects and resources.

In Evros, specific networks of pioneer politicians and technocratic cadres grasped these new opportunities early on, e.g. through the creation of the first developmental company in the early 1990s. They largely fit into what Cris Shore has termed ‘agents of European consciousness’, whose action promotes acceptance of the European idea (Shore 2000: 26). Some of them succeeded in becoming recognised as holders of a specific set of skills, connections, and perspicacity. One of these pioneers referred to this nebulous set of skills as ‘Euroknowledge’ (ευρωγνωσία), the knowledge of how to accede to the funding opportunities provided by the EU. As he put it, this informational capital rendered him valuable and respected to his counterparts – even those from opposing parties. Moreover, the constituencies of such informed and skilled politicians were perceived to benefit from their action, in contrast to other parts of Evros whose elected representatives had failed to obtain similar funding. In the course of the years, these practices and knowledge were generalized among political and technocratic personnel in Evros. In fact, the gradual intertwinement of local and national politics with the European framework made political action in itself an ‘agent of European consciousness’.

For many of my interlocutors, whose daily routine consisted of seeking funds, implementing programs, and writing up projects, the EU stood largely as a metonymy for money. Politicians and technocrats were the first ones to disseminate such practices and new perceptions of materiality to national and local audiences, and they were probably the most consistent believers in the overwhelming

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10 To a great extent these developmental companies stood as ostensible markers of the propagation of the (EU-funded) ‘program’ as the par excellence vector of development, both “social” and “individual”. On this orientation of the Greek state as a ‘state of programs’, see Panayotopoulos 2008.

11 This was not only a local specificity, but in many ways was relevant to similar processes in other regions of Greece and Europe (Abélès 1994, Baisnée and Pasquier 2007, Green 2008).

12 Southern parts of Evros initially proved more successful in this process, whereas the northerners seemed unable to match the southerners’ performances. For instance, a competition had taken place during the introduction of the first EU LEADER initiative in the early 1990s. A joint developmental company of southern municipalities of Evros finally ‘got it’, while the northerners, divided into two different companies, ‘lost’. Similarly, some years later, in 1999, a leading politician from southern Evros publicly spoke sarcastically about the inadequacy of his northern colleagues to submit proposals for European funding. In reply, a politician from northern Evros stated in an offended tone that this was an insult (Proti 29 September1999: 4, 5). In any case, the local enactment of Europeanization as a ‘strategy of self-representation’ and a ‘device of power’ (Borneman and Fowler 1997: 489) demanded from local politicians to provide ostentatious displays of such techniques and knowledge. This would be typically confirmed through articles in the local press, where new projects and their promising budgets were advertised next to the politician or institution that had succeeded in acquiring them.
dependence of Greece on the EU. Accounts of an overarching material dominance of the EU pervaded my informants’ worldview. As a manager of an EU project put it jokingly in late 2005,

thousands of people eat bread [τρώνε ψωμί] from this whole thing, thousands of people [...] If they were to stop sometime, meaning if they pressed a small button and stopped community funds, say tomorrow, the whole Greek public sector and system would collapse tomorrow, guaranteed [...] I am telling you, everyone. If, let’s say, starting tomorrow, everything was to be cut, half of Greece, and even more, would go unemployed. Everything would stop, nothing would move.

Such bleak accounts revealed how the EU and specifically European funds had come to occupy and consume a large part of these social agents’ time, efforts, and hopes.\(^\text{13}\)

The intimate and commonly shared precept of ‘getting EU money’ seemed to resurface in instances of public deliberation, such as in municipal council meetings, nationalist conferences, or cultural association meetings, thus reinforcing representations of an obstinate search of all Greeks for as much EU money as possible. This practice was modelled along similar practices of the central Greek state, as suggested by a local mayor during a municipal council meeting in 2006: ‘this is the duty of a municipal authority, to maximize its funding possibilities... This is [also] how the Greek state works’. \(^\text{14}\) And indeed, this local mayor was right to the extent that the absorption of EU funds had come to take a central place in the partisan debate among the two then-dominant Greek parties PASOK and Nea Dimokratia and, subsequently, within the rationale of the Greek state itself (also Sakellaropoulos and Sotiris 2004, Mavroudeas 2013).

The centrality of these external flows of money, as well as the perceived renovation of the region’s infrastructure, services, and quality of life, led to recurrent representations of a beneficial dependence of Greece on the EU.\(^\text{15}\) For instance, the same informant that had criticized the obsession (‘lust’) of national and local politicians over European funding acknowledged at the same time that, thanks to these funds and infrastructures, they had ‘everything’, in contrast to the past when they didn’t ‘even have water to drink’.\(^\text{16}\) This representation was in fact a strong and culturally specific allegory, using water as the source of life and social reproduction, and relating it to the transformative power of the EU. Far from being solely a scholastic account of political processes, it matched the emotionally invested experience of overall social progress.

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\(^\text{13}\) This was especially the case for temporary employees in EU funded programs. Non-permanent employees, even managerial personnel, were aware that their jobs depended on the existence of EU funds.

\(^\text{14}\) Interestingly, the gradual adjustment of the Greek state to policies of neoliberal regulation from the late 1990s, as well as the growing perception of an autonomous global free market which could not be politically bridled – e.g. such as in the case of Greek capital relocating activities to neighbouring cheap labor markets – accordingly increased perceptions of material scarcity.

\(^\text{15}\) For a clear depiction of the ideas of an externally funded prosperity and European ‘donors’, see Lauth Bacas 2004. On the memory of European ‘generosity’, see Maraveyas 2012.

\(^\text{16}\) Highly publicized EU-funded projects, such as the Egnatia motorway or the new University Hospital of Alexandroupolis (Davis 2012), stood as ostentatious markers of this renovation of the region.
I should point out that Eurocentric and evolutionary classifications preceded Greece’s membership in the European Communities. The national state, its public sphere, but also standards of social excellence, had been historically structured in accordance to a defined set of Eurocentric ideals and relevant geopolitical realities (Herzfeld 1995, 1998, 2005, Bakalaki 2006). The professional, educational, and aesthetic trajectories of social agents in the Greek political and intellectual field (Panayotopoulos 2001) constantly re-actualized ‘Europe’ as a form of symbolic capital with economic, cultural, and political value. In the case of Evros, the familiarization with the idea of the European Union through such institutional and material encounters points to a similar localized, European experience. The experience of having ‘eaten bread’ and ‘drank water’ thanks to the EU reinforced already established Eurocentric hierarchies. For my informants, social and personal change became conceptually and experientially intertwined with the process of European Integration itself. Progress resulted from the dialectics of Greek-EU relations. It is in this sense that propositions to view the accession and membership of Greece into the European Communities in 1981 as the main social force in contemporary Greece are accurate. They are accurate to the extent that this axiomatic truth was constitutive of the action and worldview of dominant political networks – a socially positioned worldview that nevertheless defined the articulation of partisan politics to a large extent.
The idiom of dependence and European gifts

Through this brief overview of the local political field in Evros, one is able to grasp the changing practices, interests, and imagination of local politicians and technocrats in a context of multileveled institutional hierarchies. The project of European Integration proved to be a dynamic hegemonic framework within which the field of political action was restructured. This meant the intertwining of old and new normative precepts, practices, and discourses, as well as an increased sense of the asymmetrical interdependencies upon which their localized social power relied. EU funds were central in this process of experiencing and conceptualizing the EU. They constituted a crucial condition in the reframing of the ‘politically thinkable’ (Bourdieu in Bayart 2006: 302) along the lines of the EU framework. In fact, the growing sense of dependence on external materiality was not limited to the political field. Rather, it exceeded the strict confines of formal politics in the sense that the relationship of various social agents with the Greek state itself was mediated through ‘European programs’. This became particularly clear to me while studying the changes and continuities in the action of local cultural associations in Evros. In contrast to the past, when funding by the state and local government was the main material resource for these middle-class associations, starting from the mid-1990s, ‘European programs’ or ‘European money’, as mediated by the state and its local personnel, became the main practical and conceptual framework within which they had to reposition their action and expectations (Gkintidis 2012).

Accordingly, this affected their preoccupation with these funds.

During a public event of ‘patriotic interest’, the 7th World Thracian Congress of 2006, which gathered a wide range of local officials and various cultural associations, I was approached by an elderly gentleman who had been informed of my interest in local cultural practices. He was a retired police officer and a member of a cultural association. While we were seated in the last rows of the hall where the conference was taking place, he started enthusiastically explaining to me his historical and cultural interests. He was particularly concerned about a collection of rare books and archival material that was in the possession of his cultural association and for which he was trying to find a way to build a small library building. As we were conversing, the official speakers on the podium were frequently making references to the then-forthcoming new period of EU funding, what was then called the ‘4th CSF’. My new acquaintance seized upon this and – without having any knowledge of my interest in the policies of the EU, at least from what I understood – stopped his description and spontaneously turned to me, speaking in an almost complicit and intimate way: ‘You see? Everyone is talking about this, they...’

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17 One of the most striking changes was the adoption of the new discourse of ‘Greek-Turkish friendship’ since the late 1990s (Gkintidis 2012, 2013, Tsibrindou 2013), as well as the refashioning of nationalist representations in the individualized terms of neoliberal accountability and free-market exchange.

18 This entailed changes in the action of these rather conservative associations, which were called by national and local officials to reproduce standardized discourses of ‘entrepreneurship’ and ‘civil society’, as well as to publicly align themselves with the politics of EU-backed cross-border cooperation.
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are waiting for this, let’s see who gets [money], however, they are all waiting for this [...] we are waiting for this as well to get money. They all take money from there’.

This example was not unique, but rather depicted an overall process of social diffusion of the notion of ‘EU program’ as a practical reality and a ‘mobilizing metaphor’ (Shore and Wright 1997: 20) for the project of European Integration. Accounts of extroversion and dependence were not limited in the confines of the political class, but this discursive genre was to a great extent generalized. This was also seen in the case of anti-elitist discourses. The preoccupation with European money was accentuated in accusations of greed and even corruption that were directed towards the mediators of EU funds (Gkintidis 2012, 2013; on ‘eating money’ in Epirus see Green 2008; on narratives of wealth and corruption in Portugal see Draklé 2005).

In this sense, the introduction of EU funds framed the imagination of a varied range of social agents, in regards to their perception of the state, the EU, and the construction of their own action. The increasing importance of EU funds in multiple settings – from infrastructures and politics to cultural institutions, education, temporary employment programs, or social policy – tended to relocate native readings of social reality within the conceptual and practical framework of an external materiality.

In fact, these funds were central to the articulation of an overall idiom of dependence, which pervaded intimate accounts of Greek politics, the Greek state, and its relation to the EU.

This idiom of dependence has to be seen in regards to the wider historical context of the Greek state’s asymmetrical relations with powerful foreign states since its creation. These conditions (and their collective memory) have entailed acute native geopolitical readings. The national political imagination has indeed been largely influenced by this widely acknowledged past of ‘crypto-colonialism’ (Herzfeld 2005). Nonetheless, the symbolic construction of the relationship between Greece and the EU seems to have implied a qualitatively different reading of such patterns of dependence. I argue that European funding since the late 1980s and the particular forms in which it

19 In Evros, this process was especially reflected in the case of self-defined patriot militants who objected to the elite endorsement of Greek-Turkish rapprochement. In fact, European programs and especially the INTERREG cross-border initiative were largely deemed as problematic money, since they supposedly aimed at softening people’s patriotic sensibilities. As a member of local cultural associations put it, cross-border collaborations were ‘incited from somewhere, [the people implementing them] have to adopt the opinions from where the programs come’. This ambivalence surrounding the acceptance of EU money was publicly brought to the fore by local critiques from outside the established field of power. Their anti-elitist criticism targeted the materiality of politics, official nationalism, and the dependence of Greece on foreign sources of wealth. According to them, local technocrats and politicians were greedy and profit-oriented, while the constant search for money on their behalf was nationally perilous. And EU programs (mostly, but not only, cross-border programs) stood as the primary corrosive catalyst for such dependence. On a national level, this was probably best expressed in the term «ευρωλιγούρηδες» (literally, eurohungry) – used to denote those constantly hungry for Europe and euros, and therefore eager to betray the nation’s ideals. The term was conceptualized by philosopher Kostas Zouraris but became popularized after its adoption and use by the then-Archbishop and leader of the Greek Church Christodoulos, in his debates with the Greek state and modernizing elites. In any case, such public debates instituted the materiality of the EU largely as a moral issue.

20 One of the most poignant markers of this reality was the omnipresence of the EU flag and symbols on the site of each EU-funded project. The persistence of the European Commission for the EU flag to be present wherever EU money had been given has been pointed out by Cris Shore in his ethnographic work on the Commission (Shore 1993), while it was also pointed out to me during my fieldwork in Evros. These EU flags stood as a symbol of the pervasiveness of EU funds, a particular but familiar embodiment of the European Union’s institutional symbolic capital.
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was enacted tended towards the vernacularization of an imagery of beneficial dependence of Greek society on a personified European Union. While the idea of western ‘benefactors’ (Herzfeld 1995: 219) had always been present in the trajectory of the Greek state and politics, former patterns of external materiality had also been largely paired with acute counter-narratives of subjugation, such as in the case of the US-run Marshall Plan in post-WWII Greece or, more generally, in the case of loans obtained by the Greek state since its creation. EU funding policies differed to the extent that their construction in the terms of a beneficial relationship became shared by the majority of Greek political forces. I should point out that the explicit term of gift was relatively absent from their discourse over this period. Nevertheless, terms such as ‘free money’ or ‘solidarity’ framed these representations of beneficial dependence, while at the same time entailing an acute sense of moral ambivalence – especially in discourses on the unsuccessful implementation or squandering of this given money throughout Greece.

Marcel Mauss’ *Essay on the Gift* (2004 [1950]) has been seminal in establishing a wide and fruitful debate on the forms of disinterested giving and their moral and political functions. Contrary to the model of one-dimensional utilitarianism, societies offer examples of seemingly disinterested circulation of material goods that bear various social logics. The anthropological study of gifts and the status of the donor and recipient is pertinent to the case of Greece as well (e.g. Campbell 1964, Papataxiarchis 1999, Alexakis 2006, Hirschon 1998, 2008, 2012, Placas 2008). More generally, the question of the gift is political (Schrift 1997, Bourdieu 1997), since it transforms relations of structural inequality into (asymmetrical) moral relations. In the very end, the question is raised as to whether any gift can be true to its supposedly disinterested conception.

In any case, the ambiguity of this practice is usually revealed where the gift cannot be returned, such as it is typically in political gifts or inter-state developmental aid. Both the moral superiority of the donor and the indebtedness of the recipient are reproduced in an enduring configuration of material and symbolic asymmetry. This political function has been brought to light by critical perspectives on international developmental aid, both from the field of anthropology and international relations.

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The interpretation of EU funds in the terms of a harmful ‘gift’ was openly expressed in the discourse of the Communist Left, most notably by the Communist Party of Greece (KKE). This party followed consistently an anti-EU stance. It was repeatedly pointed out in its discourse that the EU was not giving anything for free, while Greek society would be indebted in the future due to its adherence to EU developmental guidelines and its participation in the common market – as indeed happened. In the case of European funds, the Communist Party enacted a discourse that, among other things, aimed at demystifying the beneficial aspect of these funds and the concepts of ‘gift’ and ‘free money’. E.g. ‘The CSFs are presented by the European Union and its supporters as a “gift” of the European Union towards its economically weaker member-countries. In its essence, this is the return of a very small part of the profits made by the more powerful countries at the expense of the weaker, through trade exchanges as well. Therefore, for example, in the case of Greece, for each euro from the CSF our country pays 3 euros for importing products from Germany, France and other “big” counterparts’ (Rizospastis 5 December 2010, http://www.rizospastis.gr/story.do?id=5984192; also Central Committee of KKE 1994, Ideological Committee of the Central Committee of KKE 1993, Rizospastis 18 September 1997, http://www2.rizospastis.gr/story.do?id=3698357, Rizospastis 24 June 2001 http://www.rizospastis.gr/story.do?id=846182, Rizospastis 28 March 2007 http://www1.rizospastis.gr/story.do?id=3980898).

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A wider overview of the anthropological literature on this question would exceed the limits of this working paper.
I suggest that we can posit the study of EU funds in this wider context. It appears that to a great extent the Greek political class came to experience EU structural funds as a form of external help that didn’t entail any apparent obligation of material reciprocation. More likely, the other end of this relation seemed to implicate a return in terms of a political endorsement of the idea of European Integration, as well as a political, administrative, and economic regulation of Greek society, for its own sake. At the same time, the reception of EU funds as tokens of European solidarity seemed to increase Greece’s dependent position within a global hierarchy of value (Herzfeld 2005). This representation fueled a sense of uneasiness among my informants, especially given their awareness of the recurrent and unflattering image of Greek elites as serving foreign interests at the expense of their co-nationals. Such ambivalence or criticism pointed to the relocation of political action in the terms of a (national) moral scholasticism. In this sense, the economic crisis of 2009 re-actualized the reality of unequal relations between European economies, but also brought to the fore the particular ways in which political relations had largely been reconfigured in moral terms.

More generally, the political function of gifts raises the issue of the historical construction of modern (bourgeois) politics as a game of contractual exchange, especially when taking into account that since the eighteenth century ‘giving has been regarded as the epitome of the political act’ (Karagiannis 2004: 107).

The representation of Greek political elites, especially PASOK governments in the 1980s, having wholeheartedly adhered to the project of European Integration as a response to the flow of EU funds is a similarly widespread collective memory. Notwithstanding the actual qualitative features of this significant political shift, these representations nevertheless reproduce overall hierarchies of worth.
Towards new research directions: EU money and moral politics in Europe

The outbreak of the economic crisis in 2009 led to the redefinition of the position of the Greek state towards its EU counterparts. Since then, the notion of European solidarity has been brought to its limits and seems nowadays to bear different readings across Europe. The previous pattern of beneficial dependence has given place to unfavourable conditions. Moreover, next to debates on the political management of the “Greek debt crisis”, one notices discourses of an overall balance of worth among member-states. These discourses involve readings and experiences of an economic (in the strict sense) balance, but also of a moral balance between Greece (which is often presented as a spoiled child) and its powerful EU counterparts (also Herzfeld 2011, Shore 2012, Fourcade 2013, Streeck 2013, Pesmazoglou 2013). The memory of EU funds and European paternalism holds a central place in the construction of this overall balance. The familial metaphors of parental austerity and filial respect or revolt which underlie many facets of the politics of the crisis, as Konstantinos Kalantzis has pointed out (2012), reflect to a great extent the terms in which Greek dependence and prosperity had been structured in the recent past. Furthermore, current political debates in Greece largely reproduce a one-dimensional nationalized reading, where causes and proposed solutions – from most right wing and left wing perspectives – generally refer to the relationship between “Greece” and “Europe”.

Greek governing political parties have enacted policies of austerity, in close collaboration with the EU, as a response to the outbreak of the economic crisis. This seems to be the adequate response according to technocrats as well, e.g. my old informants in Evros but also their more powerful and media-savvy colleagues in Athens. According to them, the endorsement of the project of European Integration in times of crisis has become synonymous with the implementation of policies of structural adjustment programmes. While these policies are consistent with the neoliberal orientation of the dominant political class over the last 20 years (Sakellaropoulos and Sotiris 2004), they nevertheless entailed significant political losses and social upheaval. This persistence of established elites in implementing these reforms calls for further research. I believe it is of great importance to illuminate the context in which various networks of power construct their (controversial) action in contemporary Greece. Such an endeavour has to take into account affinities with wider class and business interests, economic orthodoxy, but also the centrality of the EU in these social agents’ worldview and action. In retrospect, EU funds in Greece over the last decades could be read as a crucial material resource for the reproduction of the dominant political class, as Wolfgang Streeck has astutely pointed out (2013), and, at the same time, as a symbolic resource through which these social agents came to experience and meaningfully construct their action and position. If we are to approach EU funds as a tangible and meaningful vector of European solidarity, we can similarly proceed to view Greek elites as not only

25 Wolfgang Streeck also notes the continuity between EU funding and cheap loans obtained by the Greek state after its inclusion in the EMU as another form of beneficial relation of Greek elites with the EU framework (Streeck 2013).
having mediated EU money, but as also having endorsed the role of mediators (or entrepreneurs) of the values, hierarchies, and obligations of this solidarity. Certainties of this kind are currently reflected in public discourses by politicians and technocrats as to the accountability and obligations of Greeks, but also as to the past of Greece-EU relations.  

In this sense, further research could examine these representations of beneficial dependence among the Greek dominant political class through the study of its socially situated moral economy – meaning the ‘production, the repartition, the circulation and the use of moral sentiments, of emotions and values, of norms and obligations’ (Fassin 2009: 1257). Moralist discourses about the overall indebtedness of Greeks may reflect hasty strategies of political reproduction in a changing political landscape. At the same time, they reveal a historically formed constellation of obligations, sensibilities, and embodied hierarchies among the Greek political class, which seems to be grounded in the way these social agents came to experience and mediate the idea and the economic aspects of European Integration. The politicization of ‘shame’ and ‘guilt’ in times of crisis (Stavrakakis 2013) echoes to a large extent these particular memories and sensibilities. Both ideas of ‘gifts’ and ‘debts’ seem to frame the discourse of obligation and accountability being currently presented to Greek citizens by the Greek government, as well as by EU officials. In fact, a further question is the extent to which the circulation of these funds on a European level entailed the consolidation of a wider moral economy of European Integration, among a broad and diverse range of local, national, and EU officials. Regional cohesion policies and the emergence of community solidarity have indeed been posited as a hallmark for the reinvigoration and moral consolidation of the project of European Integration since the mid-1980s (Ludlow 1991: 100). The outbreak of the “Greek

26 A prominent member of the PASOK party, Michalis Chrysochoidis, stated in 2012 that ‘all these years the EU was distributing wealth and now that it’s distributing burdens it is not easy’ (Iefimerida 25 July 2012 http://www.iefimerida.gr/printpdf/60725). I had the chance to record similar representations and experiences in recent discussions with Greek technocrats, in Evros, Athens, and Thessaloniki.

27 The use of the term ‘moral economy’ can be traced back most notably to E.P. Thompson’s work on the history of the moral economy of the English crowds (Thompson 1971). More recently, this concept has been re-introduced in a dynamic but differentiated way (Daston 1995, Fassin 2009, Edelman 2012). Didier Fassin has suggested its use in various ethnographic settings, in the study of both dominant and dominated groups, while reminding us of the political implications in the (re)production of such moral economies (Fassin 2009). A moral economy may refer to specific social worlds (e.g. the field of political action in Greece), but also to wider societal contexts (Fassin 2009: 1266).

28 The “paternalist” politics of the gift and the “cynical” politics of debt seem to have functioned in a complementary way in the field of inter-state relations, at least in the conjuncture of neoliberalism and capitalist restructuration since the 1970s. Tomohisa Hattori has shown that both the rise of national debts among the countries of the developing world and the increasing practice of international aid tend to the reproduction of relations of global inequality, thus reminding us of Pierre Bourdieu’s point on the complementarity of debts and gifts (Hattori 2001).

29 David Allen has noted that ‘it is not easy to explain these “side-payments” in rational economic terms’ (Allen 2000: 263). A significant contribution of the Structural Funds was that ‘solidarity between the richer and poorer parts of the Community was affirmed as a “value” in the political process’ (Laffan and Shackleton 1996: 81) and that they in turn helped to legitimize the European project’s political survival. Early on, Piers Ludlow had already pointed out ‘the achievement of the Delors package in February 1988, which in psychological terms at any rate was probably the real turning point for Community morale’ (Ludlow 1991: 113, also Allen 1996: 231). For Marc Abélès, the process of distributing funds stood as indicative of the way that the EU and the Commission were gradually structured as actors with a specific vision, above inter-state bargains or national interests (Abélès in Shore and Abélès 2004: 11). These policies were largely conceived and implemented under the presidency of Jacques Delors in the European Commission from 1985 to 1994. A convinced heir of French social Catholicism and Durkheimian sociological thought, Delors infused EU policies with the concepts of ‘social inclusion’ and ‘solidarity’ as a complement to the creation of the common market (Grant 1994, Delors 1995, Levitas 1996, Cohen 2000, Robbins 2011). His conviction that beyond the simple economic processes and monetarist policies, one has to feel, think, and believe in moral terms about his action were often inscribed in the metaphors of family or neighborliness. In fact, Jacques Delors ‘thought greater transfers from richer members to poorer ones would promote a family spirit within the EC’ (Grant 1994: 78). In his own words: ‘you don’t fall in love with a common market; you need something else’ (Delors in Laffan 1996: 95).
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“crisis” highlighted the important place that these EU funds had held in the construction of the idea of European Integration across Europe, and the way in which this collective memory fuels hopes for a more “compassionate” turn in European and Greek politics.

The emergence of a moral economy of European Integration along with the circulation of these particular funds allows for a wider questioning of the way Greek and European politics were shaped throughout the last three decades. The ideas of the gift and beneficial dependence seem to have reproduced and, in fact, reinforced particular relations of symbolic domination between national elites and within national societies. At the same time, I suggest that we can view the construction of this moral economy of European Integration as a dynamic and expansive process which reflects not only socially situated constellations of moral sentiments – among Greek technocrats, politicians, or Western European officials – but more generally the emergence of moral discourses (and introspection) on gifts, solidarity, and obligation as a commonly shared framework of political action and imagination since the 1980s. Therefore, I propose we ask ourselves whether the shift of Greek attitudes towards the EU, largely in response to this disarming European money, did not signal a simple pro-EU turn, but also an overall paradigm shift, from structural readings of global and domestic politics to accounts focusing on the obligations of each party, reinstituting politics as a contractual relation of reciprocity between morally linked “actors”. In this sense, the emergence of the gift and beneficial dependence as a pervasive idea underlying public discussions and fuelling introspection possibly addresses a wider process, through which structural inequality and political struggles are refashioned into a politics of obligation, moral asymmetry, and (unattainable) reciprocity.

The idea of a gradual moralization of politics (Fassin 2012: 10) may in fact help us understand the discursive field in which current reactions to the crisis take place – either those pointing to the moral laxness and indebtedness of Greeks, or those defending their moral integrity. Therefore, the study of modern gifts and their implications is not to be limited in the issue of the symbolic construction of the European Union; equally importantly, the pervasive ideas of gifts and obligations can be interpreted as indicative and constitutive of the increasing relocation of social struggles and politics on the (horizontal) grounds of a morality of contractual relations.

Speaking of the ‘making of the indebted man’ as a constitutive feature of capitalism in its advanced neoliberal form, Maurizio Lazzarato stresses the overall ethico-political reformation of subjectivities and societies in the terms of obligation and indebtedness. A part of this process includes social rights being gradually reframed as assistance and help (2011). Didier Fassin has raised a similar point as to the marginalization of struggles and demands for social equality in favour of a horizontal politics of morality – in accordance to the overall ‘humanitarian’ turn in global politics following the end of the trente glorieuses (2011: 13).

In locating the public emergence of moral sentiments in the field of global and domestic politics in the 19th century and building on Gary Bass’s work, Freedom’s Battle, Didier Fassin mentions the military intervention of foreign powers in favour of the Greek national movement in the 1820s as one of the first instances in the long term formation of ‘humanitarian government’ (2011: 4, 265). This point allows us to consider how current political action in Greece – where the collective memory of such “instituting acts” is widespread – builds on and reinforces a particular precedent of moral politics (and geopolitics) in the trajectory of the Greek state (also Herzfeld 1995, 1998, 2005).
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Dimitrios Gkintidis studied Balkan, Slavic, and Oriental Studies at the University of Macedonia in Thessaloniki (BA) and Sociology at the University of Strasbourg II Marc Bloch (MA). He received his PhD from the Department of Balkan, Slavic, and Oriental Studies of the University of Macedonia in 2011, with a specialization in Social Anthropology. His thesis focused on the local public sphere of the Greek border region of Evros and the changing perceptions of politics, economy, and culture in the context of national and EU policies. He was 2012/2013 A.G. Leventis Fellow in Contemporary Greek Studies at SEESOX, ESC, St Antony’s College, University of Oxford, while he is currently Mary Seeger O’Boyle Postdoctoral Fellow at the Seeger Center for Hellenic Studies, Princeton University. His research focuses on the symbolic construction of “European Integration” among technocratic networks in Greece.

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