In what grounds does the presence of immigrants correlate with the citizens’ insecurity about their country’s future? Or how does the citizens’ ‘sense of insecurity’ becomes the grounds for making decisions as to who is to be dispossessed? The present article tackles the issue of how in times of emergency people engage to political projects that entail the exclusion of others. Specifically, it asks how the implementation of austerity measures in Greece in the time of its debt crisis – measures supposedly necessary for the country’s return to a much anticipated financial stability – works with exclusion politics in order to ask the afflicted citizens to engage further to the vision of success that austerity implies. By way of reversing this question, I suggest that the affective formations of loss and failure – that largely follow the implementation of austerity reforms – become the space that the politics of exclusion are built upon and justify; in so far at least that such politics correspond to the lost sense of power and order. What I propose is we view this affective space of indifference towards the excluded other not as a by-product of austerity but as an affirmative public.
demand towards the state to take the responsibility of exclusion; namely, to reinvent itself through the ethics of the strong and, for that, I propose we view indifference as the only way the neoliberal project can be applied.

1. READING NEOLIBERALISM AS AN ECONOMY OF RELATIONS

Since 2010 and the Greek government’s official declaration of the “state of emergency”, Greece was excluded from credit markets, and the country’s economy was taken under the supervision of the European Commission, European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund – the (in)famous Troika – for its financial support on the conditions that it would follow a strict reform program to reduce the deficit. The program was evidently limited to welfare cuts, which is, as I argue, the first and the most political affordable action of any neoliberal reform program. It is not by any means the Greek case alone that affirms such a claim. The dismantling of the welfare state by means of decreasing health costs and cutting wages and pensions has been the par excellence political way, in the postwar western world, to overcome financial crises. Indeed, the case of Great Britain in the years of Margaret Thatcher’s government is the most emblematic one in how the social welfare was related to state fund’s misuse and corruption. Social theorist Stewart Hall (1988) is revealing in his reading of that attribution of the crisis to the welfare state as well as the restrain of the (much needed) entrepreneurial investments to the labor union’s politics. In a similar fashion, in the United States, at the time of the welfare cuts of the 1990s, the images of the young black male ‘gangsta’ and the ‘welfare queen’ were portrayed as grave threat to the financial recovery. Cultural critic Henry Giroux (2009) informs us that what was demanded was again the deregulation of the welfare state, downsizing of services and regressive taxation. As he
says (ibid.: 305) the undermining of the weak became the state’s vehicle to justify the necessity of reforms.

In the academic literature of neoliberalism, there is great focus on the social and economic changes as consequence of “state crafting” in the neoliberal fashion, as social theorist Loïc Wacquant (2012) would say. In critical and Marxist approaches, specifically, the deregulation of state control, privatization of public property and withdrawal of welfare provision are seen as the main policies that the most powerful institutions and agents push for, for the own interests. Additionally, the more (post) structuralist readings, highlight the complexity of financial and political strategies, and the importance of discursive and somatic technologies (See Ong, 2007). Namely, neoliberalism is seen as a logic that becomes intelligible as an experience of self since it refers, from the start, to techniques of self-formation, self-care and self-governance (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013). Nevertheless, Wacquant (2009) explores a shift in our historical present in which the thriving of neoliberalism is followed by the ascendance of a penal state. He views the tightening of the punitive system as a political response not to rising criminality but to the defuse sense of social insecurity caused by labor deregulation and welfare cuts. And, most importantly, he believes that this becomes possible only through a philosophy of moral behaviorism that embeds values such as ‘zero tolerance’, ‘the worth of work’ and the ‘rule of the strong’. There is, certainly, a question about the subject’s responsibility towards such changes that the dominant readings cannot correspond to. A question that accounts for the sense of the collective responsibility and accountability for the distressed present. And it is a question that since it entails the exclusion of an-Other, it requires an understanding of responsibility that extends beyond the scope of intention; or an understanding of intention that is freed from the responsibility of exclusion (see Butler, 2005).
2. THE FACE THAT MATTERS (NOT)

For a subject to find it *reasonable* for the state to undermining worker’s benefits, unemployed insurance funds and budgets for people with disabilities, drug-addicts, homeless, immigrants or refugees in times of crisis, means that it incorporates an image of the ‘weak’ that corresponds with the belief that the state should care for its resources. The recognition of the weak as a threat to state’s resources complements the desire of a strong, robust and healthy state. Indeed, by undermining the weak, the state follows the fantasy of power and order, and becomes a locus for investment and projection of utopian and liberating elements: protection, fulfillment, affinity. And since the state, through the reforms, acts as if it is endangered by people-in-need, their prevalence (which comes as an emotional investment in their presence and visibility) is implied as a possible *origin* of crisis. Thus, the impression of the weak as resource consumers fosters the imagination of a self with rights and acknowledges the image of a state with the right to disregard. Insofar as there is a recognition that both the rights of self and the abilities of the state to regulate resources are in crisis. For the subject to lose its privileges because of austerity measures means it is receptive to the fantasy of people-in-need as resource consumers, inasmuch as the subject attaches this loss to the image of success that the neoliberal reforms channel.

Wacquant is very accurate to highlight the morality of survival and aesthetics of the strong as the underlying echoes of the austerity measures implementation. For what the example of the welfare cuts indicates as to what *should* be important, what is really worth safeguarding and to where Greeks, in particular, *should* place their effort and sacrifice is the reorganization of the state on a model which acquires its value via the current neo-liberal language and its embedded ethics: individualism, self-interest, expansion, possession, competitiveness, management. Because once such quali-
ties are apparent on a face, introducing its self-presence, presented in its physiognomy, then they grant it with the promise of the one that not only will survive crisis but will, also, pull everyone out of it. The ‘commonsensical’ call for austerity, in times of crisis, is grounded on and further intensifies the deep seated relation between the caricature of the corrupted wasteful state and the fantasy of the competitive hardworking subject. On account of this magical relation between the face and the state, whatever kind of exclusion takes place becomes ‘symptomatic’ of indifference toward the subjects who do not or cannot engage with this impression of success. Likewise, it is on the same basis that any action against the ‘strengthening’ of the state is stigmatized as hostile and unpatriotic. In the neo-liberal ethos of crisis, the competitive hardworking subject has to be protected and supported.

3. THE AFFECTIVE LOGIC OF AUSTERITY

In Greece, over the course of four different governments, eight austerity packages were implemented that demanded up to 50% cuts in salaries and minimum wages, the termination of all holiday wage bonuses, cuts in overtime salaries, cuts in pensions up to 30%, the firing of 200,000 public sector employees, combined with elastic laws regulating lay-offs and overtime pay in the private sector. The Troika also demanded tax hikes (up to 30% on luxury goods, 24% on consumer goods, 15% on petrol and up to 30% on income taxes), health and defense spending cuts, privatizations of a vast number of state properties and goods, and the deregulation of education, tourism, real estate, health and energy markets. Within these five past years of austerity measures, the Greek society came also to learn that debt crisis was the inevitable aftermath of the centralist state control of economy and management of markets: a structural form that is personified in the corruption, negligence and sloth of the bureaucratic state. In addition,
the austerity rhetoric demonstrated the inefficiency of the political system to change the structural mentality of the state as responsible for the inability to handle the deficit. In a sentence, austerity reforms could not but be permanently linked to the causes of the debt crisis and the causes themselves intertwine with the condemnation of the most recent political and financial past of Greece.

It would not be unreasonable to suggest that it is the pressure of the awareness of a guilty past that made it possible for the governments to push for the importation of all sets of extreme reforms. Furthermore, I suggest we consider that the placing of Greece in a ‘state of emergency’, for the last five years, as a way to a better future produced the collective feeling that the whole population wanted ‘things to change’, despite the fact that the Troika created, through the debt crisis, the austerity measures as a one-way out of the guilty past. Indeed, what we are witnessing is a process where neoliberalism becomes intelligible as an ethical sensibility and experience through the common sense of shared responsibility and the phantom of a personal and collective advancement; a condition that serves as a safe ground for all the austerity measures and social exclusions to take place. Once we view that the debt crisis in Greece has been acknowledged through an ensemble of political gestures of accusation of the past and the state, we may comprehend the acceptance of all austerity measures by Greek society in the last five years: Measures impossible for previous governments to take were implemented in only a few years time, following the official announcement of crisis.

With the constant and repetitive implementation of austerity measures and the continual degradation of the Greeks’ living standards, and within an incrimination rhetoric about the past, and promises about seeing the “light at the end of the tunnel” as well as future successes, comes an affect of shared responsibility that nourishes a collective feeling of loss. A nourishment which is more like a skill people are invited to learn in order to make
manageable the truth of crisis and to engage themselves with the efforts needed to make intelligible the possibility of a success story. In feminist studies, the issue of loss features prominently in the discussions of the dispossession and marginalization of bodies through gendered and sexual normativity. Certainly, in the most critical approaches, loss refers not only to the impositions of the patriarchal establishment but also to the metaphysical condition in which having drives the moral economies of self-belonging and personhood. The conversation between Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou on dispossession, in particular, highlights the metaphysics of presence as a performative production of selfhood via the sense of belonging – having in the western world is required for a proper sense of being (2013: 13). It is no wonder that Athanasiou (2012) views the financial dispossession due to the debt crisis as a process of intensification in which the affective values of having – and especially losing – are re-acquired as new dexterities. To perform a sense of self by losing through accusation and the ghost of success means, among others, to revalue the affect of having and through that to re-appropriate ways of possession and protection. It is in that sense that indifference to others constitutes the space to understand the current political theatre of crisis-management wherein the apparatus of security plays a prominent role and the affect of loss matters most.

4. TAKING ON THE RESPONSIBILITY OF EXCLUSION

To understand Neoliberalism, a word that constantly appears to be a ghost oscillating between an ‘external threat’ and an ‘internal inscription’, we ought to examine not just how Troika or other agents and institutions enforces the deregulation of the welfare, among others, neither how citizens accept the dispossession of their assets due to desiring-images of future success and personal fulfillment, but how they come to accept the dispossession and
punishment of the weak or any people-in-need and of anyone who does not conform to the image of the state’s success. Because, loss might be seen as a paradoxical everyday internalization of a coercive dispossession of assets within the justification rhetoric that becomes simultaneously an everyday practice in the skills of having, gaining and winning, yet responsibility toward the other is not a skill. Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1987) asks us to consider responsibility as an aporetic reflex we exercise due to our immanent receptivity to the presence of others. In his long study on ethics he argues that responsibility is a constant existential aporia we face when facing another. If one would not accept being accountable for the actions of others and the dispossessed demand an explanation for their afflictions, it is because responsibility is an issue of moral economy – to whom I feel responsible and how to compensate (see Butler, 2005: 145-146).

Morality in the strong sense lies in the accountability for one’s actions towards the Other within a habitual, so to say, code of conduct. Likewise, ethics comes as the way to incorporate the responsibility towards the people we never face; to incorporate a responsibility that extends beyond the scope of intention into the existential play of personhood. Political theorist Hannah Arendt (1991) has also reflected on the state’s capacity to embody the subjective concerns in times of emergency. She believes that when the populace experiences loss, they become conscious of their right to be protected and, for that reason, subject to the regime’s ability to produce a narrative for all. Both Levinas (1990) and Arendt try to understand the establishment of the Nazi regime through the ethics of relating. They claim that once there is a certainty of an actual social dimension, people await the resolving of their aporias from the outside. In that sense, the pending issue of accountability for austerity becomes the space wherein the state assumes its imaginative release through exclusion. Accordingly, the reactionary reflexes of the state materialize as long as there is belief in
the success story. This is the magic of the state as anthropologist Michael Taussig would suggest (1992). The state evokes power by narrating (and, thus, providing) what it lacks: strength (both as fantasy and politics).

Hence, indifference becomes an ethically acceptable affective attention to the weak not just because their public image acquires negative worth due to the dominant specter of the strong that acquires affective surplus value in conditions of deprivation, accusation and ideals of success; neither because there is a supposed understanding about the collective sacrifices needed on the basis of a rational thinking that will favor the ‘strong’ productive forces of the country. It is by performing loss with a coercive optimism at heart and by stifling rationalism that individualism and possession – not as psychoanalytical categories but as socio-existential ways to participate in the public – become an active response in times of crisis: In times of deprivation and within the ethics of the strong, indifference becomes an affect with surplus value because it acts as a substitution to the affect of having. Certainly, to ask how the sense of protection is produced by the state through a politics of hate and exclusion is to over-emphasize the monovocality of a total acceptance of the reforms – wherein indifference becomes an ‘uncomplicated’ emotional response – which is never the case. Yet, Greece in the period of its debt crisis offers many examples of such politics of hate and exclusion, which are concealed within the need for protection and the desire for success.

5. BEING DIDPOSSESSED IN GREECE IN THE YEARS OF THE DEBT CRISIS

There is no better way to picture the institutionalization of exclusion as a release from debt crisis’ responsibility, than to look at the expansive growth of the ultra-nationalist party of Golden Dawn. Since the 1990s and the founding of the party, it was situated at
the margins of the electoral acceptability. Yet, with the implementation of austerity reforms, the party’s voice started to have an appeal; and with the elections of 2012, it gained almost seven percent of the parliamentary seats. One of Golden Dawn’s main pronouncements, which garnered wide publicity for the party, was the reclaiming of public space for Greeks in areas with a high migrant residency. Indeed, within the first months of their parliamentary service, groups of Golden Dawn’s members started to invade Greek street markets to drive off immigrants’ illegal stands. They were asking the immigrants shopkeepers, in front of the attendant TV cameras, the authorization papers to their shops and to those who couldn’t prove their legal status, they were tipping over stands and chasing them away. The importance of this incident, which is one among many other hate acts against leftists, gays and progressive public personas, is not just limited to the growth of a supposedly marginal group. To the contrary, it indicates the many facets that the affective formation of indifference manifests in the public sphere. It embeds in the everyday life a specific affective attention to cope with the present misfortunes as rational and reasonable: All charges against the members of Golden Dawn, in the above incident, for unlawful violence, wanton damage, illegal usurpation of authority and violation of the racial discrimination act, were dropped.

Similar with the above is another ‘scandalous’ event occurred in 2013 in the small agricultural town of Manolada in the Peloponnese, where a group of some 200 immigrants demanded their outstanding wages for more than six months for working at the strawberry plantations of the region. On being denied their wages the group wrangled with the Greek foremen, who took up rifles and started shooting at them. In the end, 35 people ended in hospital, seven of them in critical condition. News of this incident came as a shock in the Greek public sphere. The majority party in the ruling coalition government, New Democracy, rushed to
denounce this incident of blatant worker exploitation and hate crime. Despite the shock caused by media coverage of the hospitalized immigrants, which conveyed an image of modern slavery in deeply indebted Greece, Manolada had been known for several years for both immigrant torture and inhumane working conditions. State officials, local authorities and news media, however, had usually downplayed analogous incidents as isolated cases or symptoms of the ‘ills’ that ought to be reformed: the uncontrolled immigration and the inadequacy of the outdated insurance system. Indeed, in both the cases, violence and dispossession were acknowledged in the public sphere as *unlawful ways to claim what is yet rightfully just* in a modern developed state: Again, all charges against the protagonists for trafficking and for causing dangerous bodily harm, were dismissed.

However, the two most alarming incidents of this ritualistic weaving of the phenotype of the Greek victim (of circumstances) who deserves/ demands protection were not triggered by marginalized groups. To the contrary, they were initiated by the state. The first was the enforced regulation on the transmission of infectious diseases and especially HIV, among ‘high-risk groups’ of sex workers, queers, homeless and drug users by the transitional government of the banker Lucas Papadimos, which led to the humiliation of dozens HIV positives. By applying this regulation, the state created a public image of the ‘undocumented illegal sex worker infected with HIV who has unprotected sex’, which was nonetheless an effective theatrical persona for resonating the reactionary reflexes of *paterfamilias* (see Arendt 1991: 279) in order to assist the election campaign of the parties that later supported the austerity reforms. Not until their trial, a year later, when all of the accused were found innocent, did it become known (though not widely reported) that almost all of them proved to be drug users of Greek origin. Given that thousands of ‘lawful Greek family men’ had paid extra, according to the
testimonies of the accused, in order to have unprotected sexual intercourse with them and that most of them found innocent of charges of causing grievous bodily harm, we witness, again, the magic of the state, which victimizes for to fabricate the physiognomy of a victim capable to pose as the bearer of a convincing performance of the provision of protection.

For this performance, the police operation Xenios Zeus initiated in the summer of 2012 after Antonis Samaras, leader of the New Democracy party, became the new prime minister of Greece, proved to be emblematic. This harshest and most ruthless manhunt was equivalent to a military-like raid and led to the arrest of more than 80,000 foreigners in one year’s time and to the imprisonment of 4,000 undocumented migrants in so called ‘special reception centers.’ Even the name, Xenios Zeus, which literally means ‘the hospitable Zeus’, metonymically evokes the imagination of (and the desire for) having the authority to determine the terms of hospitality. Certainly, such a policy of exclusion strengthens the fantasy of the national identity, in the name of which the state claims the role of the one who can legitimately exercise power and violence. The physiognomy of the one affected by crisis who deserves protection is dramatized as cult of the community via the tattered face of the ‘HIV positive junkie’ and the ‘greasy immigrant prisoner’. Indeed, the ghost of an aesthetic uniformity is re-presented through the fantasy of exclusionary politics and the image of camps, which, in turn, suggest the competence of the state to protect the community and identity (see Sontag, 1981). It is like the ethics of possession, competitiveness and self-interest is acknowledged as a safe grounds to cope with dispossession due to the debt crisis, when incrimination and exclusion is exercised through the vision of the robust and successful state: via the very establishment of the camps the lost order responsible for the current misfortune is regained.
6. ESTABLISHING INDIFFERENCE

The face and the state act like magical counterparts. In order to seek protection from the outside, in times of crisis, the subject needs to feel recognized as a physiognomy ‘that matters’. Hence, any unsophisticated acceptance of the austerity reforms due to the public impression that the state is burdened by the corrupt social welfare system (with all the possible repercussions such impression holds for the ‘weak’) is an act to gain magical power not from the weak, but from the state’s authority to name them. This acceptance expresses a wish for protection toward the one authority that can legitimately exercise violence. It is a self-imposed spell that conceals from oneself the possibility of being weak by obliterating the memory of what the state of need might imply. Certainly, to understand what is at stake with the austerity measures that are suggested for dealing with the debt crisis, we should not consider neoliberalism as if it is abstracted from everyday relations. To the contrary, we ought to confront the personal and collective institutionalization of accusation that strengthens the affect of possession within everyday relationships. Precisely because the austerity measures cannot but acquire their meaning within the self-referential narration of crisis, which encourages the subject to engage with fictions about success stories for surpassing crisis’s dystopian realities.

Within this narrative of accusation and promise, a politics of self-affirmation (both individual and national) becomes the recommended way to accept crisis and deal with the financial, social and psychic difficulties it entails. From this perspective, indifference becomes a privileged affective space in conditions of deprivation for those claiming a ‘deserved’ protection. It is an affective space institutionalized in order for the subject to free itself from the responsibility of the exclusion of others and make intelligible the affect of having as a desired eventuality. Indeed, the current debt crisis can be seen as a powerful colonizing force in ethics. It
is, certainly, a forcible way to embed a specific affect of having in the relationships of everyday life.

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