

# Immigrant Assimilation Beyond Secularisation: The Peculiar Case of Greece

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**Abstract.** This chapter deals with the exceptional case of immigrant religious assimilation in Greece. Within the European context of immigration countries characterised by ongoing secularisation process and immigrant assimilation towards natives' values and attitudes, Greece is considered as a particular case because of the tendency of immigrants to assimilate towards stronger religious identities of natives. It is argued that such identities concern identification with the nation, which can be instrumental for immigrant's acceptance and integration in the host society. This can be due to some peculiar characteristics of the Greek social, institutional and political setting which makes national identity and Orthodoxy so interwoven. By investigating the conditions in which such a "strategic assimilation" emerges, this chapter also examines whether the Greek case can be relevant for other countries across Europe, calling up for follow-up studies, especially about the role of religious socialization within-families.

**Keywords.** immigrant assimilation, secularisation, Greece, Europe, religious identities, generational transmission

## 1. Introduction

In the last decades, European countries have been receiving foreign-born populations which resulted in a kaleidoscopic mix of different groups, religions, values, and patterns of behaviour. For what concerns religion, the increasing numbers of migrants coming from very religious –and also denominationally different– countries brought in a potentially interesting "disturbance" in the secularization processes that are widely recognized as currently unfolding in Europe. Considering the role that religion plays in the integration of families with immigrant background into the new societies [1, 2, 3], patterns of religiosity among immigrants and within migrant families become of central importance for sociologists.

In studying such patterns, it is often recognized the tendency of immigrant groups to assimilate to the natives [4], becoming increasingly similar in regard to values, attitudes and behaviours. In a context like the European one, where secularization is proceeding at a fast rate, this should be translated into the diminishing relevance of

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religion for such groups too. However, when referring to patterns of change between immigrants' generations, we think that Greece deserves much more attention as a case study when considering its particular characteristics.

Along this chapter, we argue that Greece differs from other Western European countries due to its historical background, its geographic and cultural positioning between East and West and the important role of Orthodox Church in the construction of national identity and in politics [5]. As a matter of facts, Greece is seen as oscillating between (a not secularized) tradition and modernization. Despite the presence of an indigenous Muslim population,<sup>2</sup> Greece has been one of the most demographically homogenous countries in Europe in ethnic and religious terms [6]. Yet, this homogeneity has been challenged since 1990s due to the continuous arrival of important numbers of immigrants that turned Greece into an immigration country. According to Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum and Eurostat, the number of those coming from non-EU countries in 2021 is about 939,398 [7], while the largest non-EU immigrant groups are Albanians (422,954) – almost half of total immigrant population, Georgians (29,259), Chinese (26,586), Pakistanis (25,583) and Ukrainians (21,180). Data deriving from the Census of 2011 show that Bulgarians (75,917) and Romanians (46,524) are among the most numerous immigrant groups in Greece.

In light of these considerations, this chapter aims at showing and investigating the patterns of religiosity within families of immigrants in Greece and to discuss their peculiar character. The Greek case is examined as an “exceptional case” [8] that can contribute to magnifying sets of relations that otherwise would lack visibility. In fact, it is argued that some distinctive characteristics of the Greek social, institutional and political setting are contributing to make such a country deviating from the general pattern of assimilation toward secularisation widely observed in Europe. In fact, it is claimed that the immigrant religious assimilation occurring between first and second generations in Greece means a strengthening of religious identities as a way to become more similar to the native majority and to integrate in the host society [9]. Overall, this chapter also contributes to the debate on religiosity patterns of immigrant families in Southern Europe, which has remained under-researched [10].

In the next section, we introduce the theoretical debate on religious assimilation, highlighting the significance of secularization processes in Europe and religious patterns between first- and second-generation immigrants. Then, we account for those characteristics making Greece an interesting case that deserves further investigation on the one hand, and for the theoretical and epistemological significance of exploring exceptional cases on the other. We proceed by analysing the empirical evidence based on European Social Survey (ESS) data, and then we continue with the interpretation of immigrant religious patterns in Greece and the possible relevance of our findings to other countries. We close this chapter with some conclusive considerations and the limitations of this study.

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<sup>2</sup> The Muslim minority of Western Thrace numbers approximately 100,000 to 120,000 people of whom 50% have Turkish origin, 35% are Pomaks, and 15% Roma (Gemi, 2019). Antoniou (2003) states that most Pomaks and Roma identify themselves as Turks. This minority enjoys a series of rights concerning legal issues (application of Sharia law), language and education. These rights apply only in Western Thrace and have no validity for the rest of Muslim immigrants (and population) across the Greek territory.

## 2. Religious assimilation, secularization in Europe and second generations' religiosity

The debate around the incorporation of immigrants is usually framed around what scholars call the *assimilation theory* [4]. Quite basically put, given the exposure to a new culture and a new context, and given the increasing interactions with the natives, immigrants have the tendency to become similar to the population of the receiving societies on a broad set of values, attitudes and behaviours, religion included [11]. This is to say that as the influence of the new context increases (and that of the origin weakens) over time, migrants tend to become increasingly similar to the natives on a series of attributes. Therefore, what makes more interesting the study of immigrants' assimilation patterns is the fact that individual attributes (being them values, attitudes, behaviours) can be intended as simultaneously embedded in two different contexts: those of the country of origin and those of the destination one.

As far as it concerns immigration in European countries and religious assimilation, two characteristics constitute the main lenses to be used to interpret such processes. On the one side, there is large consensus that European countries are on advanced stages of *secularization* [12, 13, 14]. On the other side, it is often intended that such phenomena of secularization and religious decline are driven by *generational replacement*: it is not that people change their belief system over time (or when key life-events happen), but rather new –and less religious– generations are progressively replacing older ones [14, 15]. It is, therefore, from the changing composition between older –more religious– cohorts and younger –less religious– ones that processes of secularization emerge.

Saying this, if we intend a “*generation*” as a group of people that have experienced the same social, historical, and political settings in the same moment and in the same place –thus stressing the significance of the formative years for the development of values, attitudes and set of preferences, the relevance of this concept when it comes to immigration is easy to see. As a matter of fact, first generations have been completely socialized in the origin country and then moved to the host one, while second generations have been completely socialized in the new context. If we want to use an evocative picture, they may be seen as the link in the chain between their parents and the natives, because they are contemporarily exposed to the family environment (made by parents socialized in the origin country) and to the group of – native – peers.

Given the advanced patterns of secularization mentioned above, what is relevant for the study of religious assimilation is that –on average– immigrants come from more religious countries and that, therefore, they are usually more religious than the native-born population [16, 17]. Because of the relevance of the processes of socialization for the development of religious values, it is therefore not expected that first-generation migrants will change their religious attributes as a result of the assimilation pressure in the new context: their religiosity has already formed and stabilized. If an assimilation pressure exists, it will unfold during the formative years, and therefore only immigrant children will be “pushed” toward some characteristics of the native population, religiosity included. If this happens, the expectation is therefore to see second-generations' levels of religiosity to be more similar to that of the natives (and therefore lower) if compared to that of their first-generation migrant parents.

### *2.1. Individual and contextual characteristics shaping assimilation processes*

Within the above general reading, both individual and country characteristics can mediate this tendency toward assimilation. Among these, Muslim/Christian divide, the denominational concordance between origin and destination country, and the level of secularization of the destination country play a central role.

As far as Muslims and Christians are concerned, firstly, many scholars have shown that differences in levels and patterns of religiosity across generations are relevant to assimilation process. While the general reading for Christian migrants is that of a decline across generations [18, 19, 20, 21, 22] and over time [23], quite different patterns have been found for Muslim families of immigrant background. Indeed, many studies [11, 16, 24] have indicated stability – or even small increases – in Muslim migrants' religiosity.

Secondly, in reading these differences in the assimilation processes, an emerging approach refers to the so-called “similarity-biased social influence” [25]. The fundamental idea behind its basic statement is that only similar people can influence each other. If this is true, people tend to assimilate to others and, therefore, to adjust their opinions, values, and practices, only when such traits are sufficiently similar; when such traits are too different, such an assimilation will not happen. When looking at religion, not only may Muslim migrants not assimilate to (Christian) natives because their religiosity, together with many other cultural traits, are so different, but something similar may also happen within Christian migrants.

Thirdly, though, it is not only the denomination of the native majority that plays a role in this game. As a matter of fact, European countries –despite being all on the same secularization track– are very heterogeneous in terms of religious levels. For example, European Social Survey data (2020) show that the percentages of those who do not belong to any religion range from 77% in Czech Republic to 7% in Greece or 9% in Poland. Similar gaps can be also observed when looking at the service attendance or other more subjective indicators, including the self-reported level of religiosity. If the idea of assimilation holds, migrants moving to more religious countries should be exposed to lower secularization pressures, and, therefore, we can expect lower religious differences between parents and children.

To sum up, this section sketched out how generations, individual and contextual characteristics have a major role in shaping migrants' patterns of religiosity. Within this general reading though, some peculiar characteristics of the social, institutional and political setting can result in some deviation from the general pattern. As argued in the next section, Greece can be one of those deviant cases which this chapter attempts to investigate.

## **3. Greece as a particular case to study within the European landscape**

When it comes to the study of the patterns of the religiosity of immigrants and their families, Greece has some characteristics making it a really interesting and potentially deviating case.

Such particularities mainly concern “religion, religiosity, and religious freedom” that largely “deviate from the European modernizing paradigm” [26]. What mainly differentiates Greeks from their western counterparts is their tendency to strongly associate religious affiliation to ethnicity, which means that being Christian orthodox is a necessary condition to be Greece [5]; or, similarly, “an ethnic Greek is also a Christian

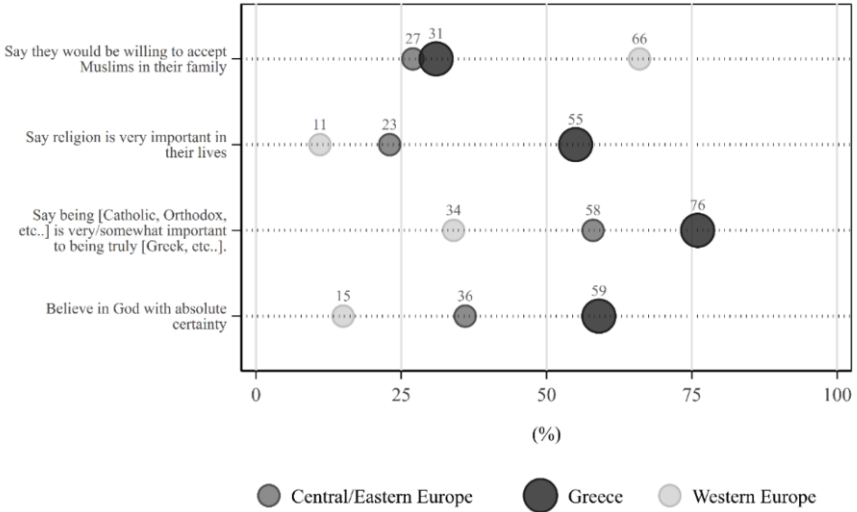
Orthodox” [6]. As we will see shortly, such particular characteristics derive mainly from conflicting past influences of the Byzantium and of the West.

This strong role of the Orthodox religion is also translated in the institutional and political settings. The Greek constitution recognises the Orthodox Church of Greece as the prevailing religion, while the Greek state is not separated from the Greek Orthodox Church. The public law also recognises two minorities: an autochthonous Muslim minority of Western Thrace (in north-eastern Greece) and the Jewish. Triandafyllidou and Gropas [27] reported that these distinctions in themselves have obstructed religious freedom and have led to discriminatory legal and administrative attitudes against these religious groups. Nowadays, the population in Greece is approximately 10,8 millions, 81% to 90% of that being Greek orthodox, 2% Muslim, 0,7% other religions<sup>3</sup> and 4% atheist [28].

This peculiar situation just mentioned is also visible when considering Greeks’ attitudes towards religion, national identity and diversity. Looking at Figure 1, we observe that only 31% of Greeks do declare willing to accept Muslims in their families, a percentage that is very close to the attitudes of other Central and Eastern European countries (27%). Contrary, this percentage is of 66% among Western Europeans. When considering answers related to religiosity and belonging to the nation, not only do Greeks differ even more from other Western Europeans, but the former’s attitude diverges from people in Central and Eastern European countries in some cases. 55% of Greeks say that religion is very important in their lives (23% among Eastern Europeans; 11% among Western Europeans), while three-quarters of them say being Orthodox is at least somewhat important to being truly Greek (58% among Eastern Europeans; 34% among Western Europeans). Moreover, almost 6 out of 10 Greeks say that they believe in God with absolute certainty (36% among Eastern Europeans; 15% among Western Europeans). What really strikes the eye is the empirical confirmation that Greek orthodoxy still has a crucial role in building national and ethnic identities, as we already mentioned. All in all, we see the Greek situation more strongly resembling – and even overtaking – that of the Eastern European countries rather than that of the other Mediterranean and Western ones.

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<sup>3</sup> Greek Catholics and the Jewish community are the most numerous religion groups after Muslims, numbering 50,000 and 5,000 members respectively.

**Figure 1:** Share of people who...

Source: Pew Research Center [29]

Coherently, drawing on ESS data, Georgiadou and Nikolakopoulos [30] stated that 88% of youths declare that religion is of great or very great importance to them, although interestingly this is not interpreted as high religiosity nor frequent religious practice. Instead, religious faith referred more to identification with and belonging to the Greek nation. In other words, Dragonas [26] claimed that “Greek religiosity has to do less with spirituality and a religious deepening among believers and more with the ethno-religious nature of the Greek Orthodox Church”. It is exactly this functional role of orthodoxy for the building up of ethnic and national identity that makes Greece so interesting to study as a deviant case.

#### 4. Why to study a deviant case?

Social scientists are interested in the typical, in the representative, in the common reading. It is through the observation of recursive patterns that we identify regularities, and we abstract the interpretations from which we derive the theories. But, what if some anomalies in these recursive patterns emerge, as is the case of Greece for assimilation toward secularization as we see below? Given the emphasis we place on generalisation, the latent tendency is often to neglect the relevance of such anomalies, or at least to exclude them from a general reading which is intended as to apply everywhere and anywhere *except* for that specific situation.

Therefore, in confronting with strong approaches such as that of assimilation, the tendency is to consider assimilation as what *should* happen. Here, the strategy we want to pursue is different. The situation we are observing for Greece is so particular and interesting that we want to place ourselves in the perspective of learning from this “anomaly”. To this respect, it is Ermakoff [8] who provides some interpretative lenses

to go beyond normative expectations and to transform deviant cases into research opportunities.

Deviant cases, in this sense, are not sources of confusion, nor something we need to state not fitting our theory or hypotheses. Instead, these can act as a way to magnify relations that otherwise will be hidden behind the general pattern. Exceptional cases can serve purposes of research in three different ways. They can have a *critical* role, because of their capacity to question assumptions and expectations. They can have a *paradigmatic* role, because they can exemplify a characteristic feature of a “social object” that has never been investigated. They can have a *heuristic* role when they “magnify sets of relations” that in other situations would remain invisible. This last one is clearly the scenario best fitting with our situation.

Drawing on Ermakoff’s view, we want to use Greece as a deviant case to produce “novel facts” that are not only facts that have “been contradicted by previous or rival [research] programmes” [32]. By a reasoning based on subtraction, we aim, on the one hand, to refine the scope conditions<sup>4</sup> of our theoretical claim, namely when, where, how and under which conditions such a claim works (i.e. it works everywhere except for that country, that period, that group of people etc.). On the other, a little more ambitiously, we aim to use our deviant case as a prototype, that is as a way to magnify and clarify a relation that has been neglected so far. What if some conditions, or some combinations of conditions, exist? Does this have an effect on our theory, which is supposed to work universally?

## 5. Greece as exceptional case: empirical evidence

In proceeding with the analysis of the empirical evidence, it would be useful to highlight two main elements derived from the previous paragraphs. On the one side, the religious differences between migrants parents’ generation and children’s generation can be intended as a rough measure of assimilation pressure or, at least, of assimilation speed. The bigger this difference is, the stronger –and the faster– the assimilation. For example, when there are very big generational differences for a very religious group of migrants who moved to a very secular country, we can presumably infer that the assimilation pressure toward natives’ (low) levels of religiosity has been strong. As we will see, levels of religiosity for the second generations turn out being very similar to that of natives in many European countries, thus adding that a religious assimilation in such countries needed just the passage from one generation to the following to be completed. A second relevant element we can derive from what mentioned before is that the Greek case seems to be quite different if compared to the majority of European countries: we argue that this is not only due to the higher religiosity of natives compared to the majority of immigrants, but also to the fact that the strong link between Orthodox religiosity and Greek identity serves as a potential resource that immigrants can mobilize to facilitate their integration in the Greek landscape.

Unfortunately, a deep quantitative investigation of the religious differences between immigrant generations in Greece is almost impossible due to the lack of individual data on the topic. In order to –partially– overcome this limitation, and to compare the Greek situation with that of other European countries, the choice is to rely on the ESS (2020)

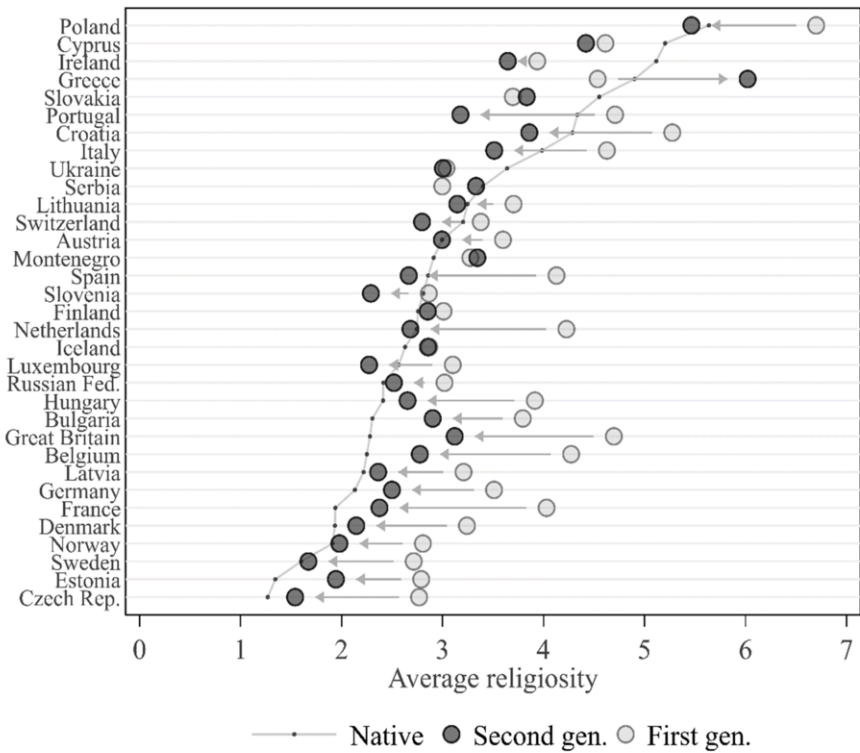
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<sup>4</sup> Scope conditions are intended as the statements defining the circumstances in which a theory is applicable and their definition can serve to reconcile contradictory findings.

data [33]. This enables us to show the differences among first-generation immigrants (here identified as those born abroad), second-generation immigrants (here identified as those born in the country of survey from at least one parent born abroad) and natives.

Based on such data, two main figures emerge. Figure 2 provides a descriptive reading of the differences in the levels of religiosity between natives, second- and first-generation immigrants, while Figure 3 reports the differences in the share of people declaring a religious affiliation (left panel) and the affiliation to an Orthodox religion (right panel). Concerning Figure 2, we must specify that religiosity is intended as an index putting together information about attendance to services, private pray and self-definition,<sup>5</sup> three of the most important –and more studied– dimensions of religiosity.

**Figure 2.** Religious differences between first- and second-generation migrants based on ESS data, wave 1-9



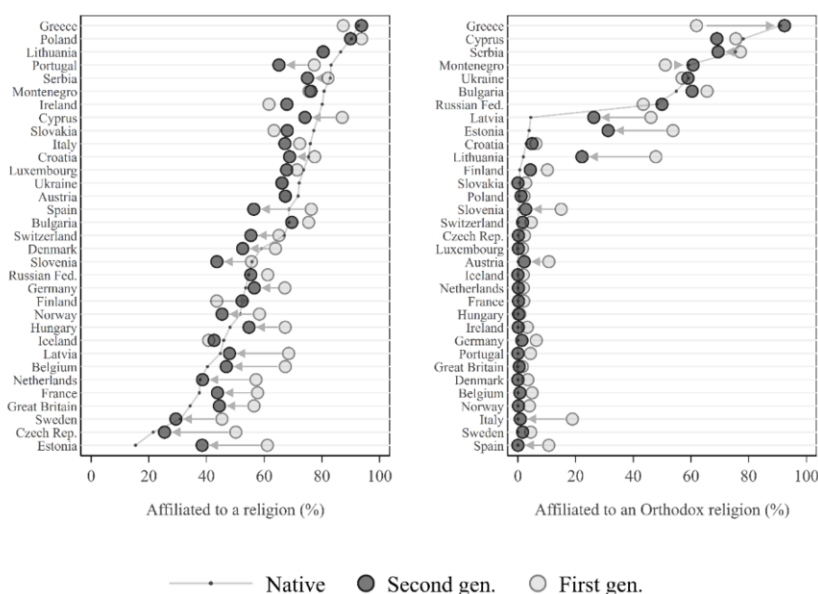
Source: Authors' elaboration on ESS data

<sup>5</sup> Such a choice has been made in order to provide a single compact graph that is easy to read. In any case, the general message (the picture in Greece is different from that in other European countries) remains the same even when focusing on the three dimensions separately, when adopting a more stringent definition of second-generation migrants (born in country of survey with both parents born abroad in the same country) and also when alternatively excluding some categories of migrants, such as Albanians, immigrants with a Turk Ancestry, Muslim, non-Orthodox. The same robustness checks have been also performed for the graphs reported in Figure 3.



Figure 2 clearly shows that there are evident tendencies toward religious assimilation in almost every European country covered by ESS. As a matter of fact, religious differences between second- and first-generation migrants always exist in the sense of second generations being –on average– less religious than first generations. Moreover, Figure 2 is also a good indication that migrant religiosity always tends to decrease and to become similar to that of the natives, no matter what the “starting point” is (even though bigger differences are generally observed in the most secular countries). Given this homogeneity in the interpretation of the results, and their coherence with the general theoretical tenets behind the assimilation theory, the existence of a case that deviates so much from this general reading raises curiosity and calls for attention. As a matter of fact, Greece is the only country in which we observe higher levels of religiosity for the second generation if compared to the first. Following what said above, this means that children’s religiosity tends to be higher than parents’ one and that the basic mechanisms of assimilation resulting in secularization are working differently here. There are clearly weak pressures toward secularization in the Greek religious landscape. Having this in mind, a further piece of the puzzle is provided by Figure 3, showing the difference in the affiliation to a religious denomination.

**Figure 3.** Differences in religious affiliation between first- and second-generation migrants based on ESS data, wave 1-9



*Source: Authors' elaboration on ESS data*

The first information coming from these graphs is that almost every citizen in Greece (.93%) declares affiliation to a religion, no matter being it a native, a second- or a first-generation immigrant. This makes Greece the European country (together with Poland) showing the highest share of religiously affiliated people. This is not so surprising as it

reflects what official statistics show [28]. However, the most interesting indication comes from the right panel of Figure 3. Given that there are almost no differences in the share of affiliation to *any* religion between first-generation, second-generation and natives (left panel), and given that such a difference is rather big (-30 percentage points) when it comes to Orthodox religion, the indication is that many immigrant –second generation– children with a non-Orthodox background tend to declare an Orthodox denomination when interviewed in Greece. As a matter of fact, the share of second-generation immigrants declaring an Orthodox denomination is almost the same to that of natives (~90%). This is interesting given the consistent number of immigrants with a non-Christian background (such as Albanians, but also Africans and Asians).

Although the literature on religious patterns among second-generation immigrants in Greece is scarce, previous studies on Albanian migrants' children offer some confirmation to this reading. Studies on integration and identity formation [33, 34, 35] have shown that second-generation Albanians have been often baptised Orthodox and/or disavowed the Muslim religion responding to the assimilationist pressures within the Greek society. In other words, this has been a way to indicate their *Greekness* in order to integrate and be de-stigmatized and avoid discrimination [7]. So far as is known, there is a gap in the literature with respect to religiosity among other second-generation migrant groups, as well as a lack of quantitative research on this topic. This is what makes these descriptive indications a very interesting starting point.

In fact, putting together all the cues coming from ESS data and very little research on immigrant families' religiosity in Greece, we can draw a picture in which almost all European countries stand within the same interpretative framework –that of an assimilation toward secularization– while only one country deviating from it. This is to say that we have a relation (that between migrant generations and religiosity resulting in a religious decline) working in the same way almost everywhere, except for a country: Greece. Therefore, it should exist something in the social context, in the history, in the institutions and political setting of Greece that makes this country diverging from the general theory when it comes to migrants' religious assimilation and secularization, as argued in the following section.

## 6. Interpreting the peculiar case of migrants' religiosity in Greece

The peculiar religious patterns between migrants' generations in Greece can be interpreted by considering a series of intertwined historical, cultural, political and geographical reasons that shape representations of the Greek national identity and its relationship with the Orthodox doctrine.

First, *Greekness* is intrinsically connected with Christian Orthodox religion as the Greek national identity has been also constructed by the Greek Orthodox Church. This institution is represented as the protector of the Greek nation during the Ottoman rule, while backing the narrative according to which Greeks are “blessed by God” [36]. In addition, the modern Greek state from its very constitutions defines the Greek citizen as “the inhabitant who lives within the Greek territory and believes in Christ”.

Second, present-day Greece has a long history of four (and in some places five) centuries of Ottoman domination [26]. Some evidence from the Ottoman period can be still found in the landscape of numerous minarets and mosques, although most of the Muslim buildings during the Ottoman rule have been demolished after the foundation of the independent Greek State. It is on this basis that Islam in Greece has been usually

associated to the Ottoman-Turkish oppressors who became the “other” upon which the national identity in Greece has been constructed [37]. This also implies a natural equation of Muslims to Turks, as the Ottomans (Turks) and their religion become the nation’s other. Such associations of Islam with Turkey and of Muslims with Turkish people often re-emerge when native Greeks interact with Muslim immigrants in Greece.

Nowadays, the relation between the Greek State and Orthodox Church and the latter’s role in defining the Greek national identity are still reflected in the privileged position of the Orthodox Church [26]. In turn, this is translated, for instance, into Church’s involvement in some state affairs such as the curriculum and textbooks for the class of religious education in schools which is compulsory for pupils of primary and secondary education schools. Although an exemption is provided for whose parents who do not desire their children take religious education classes in schools, students may feel discriminated in those cases in which school headmasters demand parents to declare their children’s religious identity, so that pupils can be exempted. This is because the Minister of Education has occasionally issued some circulars blurring the decisions of the Independent Hellenic Data Protection Authority related to religious identity at schools. Other instances indicating Greek Church’s involvement in state’s affairs were when the Orthodox Church opposed to the abolition of the law providing the compulsory indication of Greek citizens’ religious affiliation in the identity cards by asking a referendum on this issue; or, when local religious leaders voiced against the law granting citizenship to migrants of second generation.

Third, Athens –where the majority of immigrants reside– remained the only European capital without an official mosque until June 2019, while the only Islamic cemetery within the Greek territory is found in Thrace (region in Northern Greece). Although the law providing the construction of mosque had been passed in 2000, Greek governments (regardless of whether were ruled by the Conservative party New Democracy or the Socialist party PASOK) struggled in finding an agreement on where the mosque should be built [27, 38]. This was mainly due to administrative obstacles, public (local) opposition to the construction of a highly visible mosque that could attract Muslims in a certain area, and a discreet obstruction of the establishment of the mosque by the Orthodox Church [27]. Nowadays, there are three officially registered mosques and almost one hundred informal places of religious worship under the label of cultural associations across Greece [28].

Two more reasons of political nature are relevant in the Greek case. On the one hand, it should be underscored that immigration policy has been reactive and fragmented, without promoting initiatives for integration for at least two decades since Greece became an immigration country [5]. Not only does this concern Muslim migrants, but the whole immigrant population. On the other hand, Greek people’s perceptions of and concerns against Muslims have been expressed through the electoral triumphs and action of Golden Dawn [39, 40] –a neo-Nazi political party of national-socialist ideology that was recently branded a criminal organization– from 2012 to 2018. Apart from expressing xenophobic and anti-Islamic public discourses (reproducing the link between the fear of Islam and Turkey), some of its members have been guilty of attempted murders and assaults against (Muslim) migrants, while two individuals linked to Golden Dawn were convicted of the murder of a Pakistani migrant.

Fourth, ongoing tensions and conflicts with neighbouring Turkey inflame nationalist discourses and fear of Islam. For instance, Sakellariou [36] suggests that older<sup>6</sup> and more recent crises during the 1980s and 1990s<sup>7</sup> that could have led out to wars reinforce collective memory and trauma of Ottoman rule, which equates to perceiving Turks (and Muslims) as an enemy of Greece. Similarly, constant accuses against Turkey of violating Greek airspace and maritime boundaries constitute elements that render Turkey a permanent threat to Greece's sovereignty. Critics against current Turkish government for encouraging asylum seekers to enter Greece has become a new reason that creates tension between the two countries.

Turning now to the differences in religiosity and religious affiliation between immigrant parents and children that we are observing in this chapter, we can now try to read them with the lenses of the strong role of Christianity for the building-up of a sense of *Greekness*, the reasons behind which we have just described. An effective way to do so is to distinguish between three main groups of migrants residing in Greece: the Albanian Muslims, the Eastern Christian Orthodox migrants and the other (mainly African and Asia) Muslim migrants.

Concerning the case of Albanians, it should be stressed that Albania has a Muslim majority, but also a constitution that makes religious pluralism and tolerance, together with the principles of secularism the benchmarks of the Albanian national identity [41, 10]. Starting from this, it sounds plausible that children of very secular parents have bigger room for religious increase if compared with children coming from families putting a lot of emphasis on religious principles. As a matter of fact, first-generation Muslim parents who arrived in Greece in the 1990s and 2000s had lived in a communist country where religious freedom was banned from 1967 to 1990 [6]. Secularizing policies in Albania resulted in a highly secularized population [42], which made no religious demands upon its arrival in Greece or had "absolutely no religious conviction or identity" [43]. Coming from a much more secularized country than Greece, assimilation pressure of Albanians can be towards more religious identities, therefore the opposite if compared to the classical "religious migrant in secular country" pattern. This has been confirmed in previous studies claiming that many Albanian Muslim migrants declared either atheists or belonging to the Orthodox Church upon their arrival to Greece, as a way to achieve acceptance and better employment opportunities in the host society [6]. Moving to second-generation Albanians, it can be claimed that strategies to cope with discrimination and stigmatization can entail even a sort of conversion. This is confirmed in a study conducted by [35] who showed that many Albanians parents see their children's religiosity as instrument in their integration, thus baptising them to Orthodox Church and giving them a Greek name. This author claimed that this practice was less far common in Italy, another country with a considerable Albanian presence, which highlights the particularities of the Greek case where assimilation pressure is high. This situation has been described by some authors with the label "strategic assimilation" [35], meaning an assimilation toward more pronounced religious identity aimed at smoothening the Albanian integration in the Greek landscape [34].

When it comes to the group of second-generation Orthodox Christian migrants (mainly from Eastern Europe) instead, such a stability –or even increase– of religiosity

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<sup>6</sup> The Greek-Turkish War of 1897, the "Asia Minor Catastrophe" of 1922, and the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974.

<sup>7</sup> Disputes over oil-drilling rights in the Aegean Sea in 1987 or over the sovereignty of Imia/Kardak islet in 1996.

can occur due to higher assimilation pressure in a country where the majority belongs to the same denomination. This is coherent with the main idea of the “similarity-biased social influence” that we sketched in the first section. This can be the case of Romanians, Bulgarians, Georgians, and Ukrainians, as well of Christian Albanians (some of whom of Greek origin and Cristian Orthodox background), and other migrants sharing the same doctrine with Orthodox Greeks. For instance, this can be the result of confrontation with the values of the Greek society through their Greek peers and friends, as well as in school [44]. Indeed, a recent research showed that religion is high in Greek teenagers’ value system and constitutes a determining factor of their identity [45]. Moreover, Orthodox Christian migrants in Greece come from former communist countries where the idea of a strong relationship between religion and identity is typical [46, 47]. In addition, the transmission of religious practice from parents to children is favoured by the privileged position of Orthodoxy in Greece, together with the presence of religious infrastructure of their own denomination, as explained above.

The third group of analysis, that of (non-Albanian) Muslims, is the one for which it is more difficult to advance an *ad hoc* reading. On the one side, because it is a very heterogeneous one, being it composed by many different national groups ranging from Maghrebis (Egyptians, Moroccans, Algerians, Tunisians), centre-African (Somalians, Sudanese, Senegalese), people of the middle East (Lebanese, Syrians, Turkish, Iranians, Iraqis, Afghanis) and Asian people (mainly Pakistanis and Bangladeshi). On the other side, because it is presumably the group which is harder to reach with survey not explicitly targeted to this population. In any case, a very safe approach is to extend to these groups the same reading we have for Muslim groups in other European countries. The fact that many studies [24, 11, 16] found stability –or even small increases– in Muslim migrants religiosity is perfectly coherent for our course of argumentation. In addition to this reading, what can be pretty typical in the Greek case is that the representations of Turks and Muslims as “other” coming from the past history may influence the way in which Greeks approach newly arrived Muslims [38], thus discouraging them to declare their Muslim faith. This, again, can provide some explanation in relation to the high rates of affiliation to Orthodox religion among immigrants with a non-Christian background.

In light of these considerations and relying on Ermakoff’s work [8], we are reflecting on a series of questions in the next section: what if other countries are on the same path of Greece, or are becoming more similar to Greece concerning some characteristics? Should we expect the same patterns among immigrants? Should we expect these countries to become more and more similar to the Greek prototype? Or should we conclude that the Greek case is so peculiar as to be the only exception possible in a theory working that way everywhere else?

## **7. How can the Greek case be of reference for other countries?**

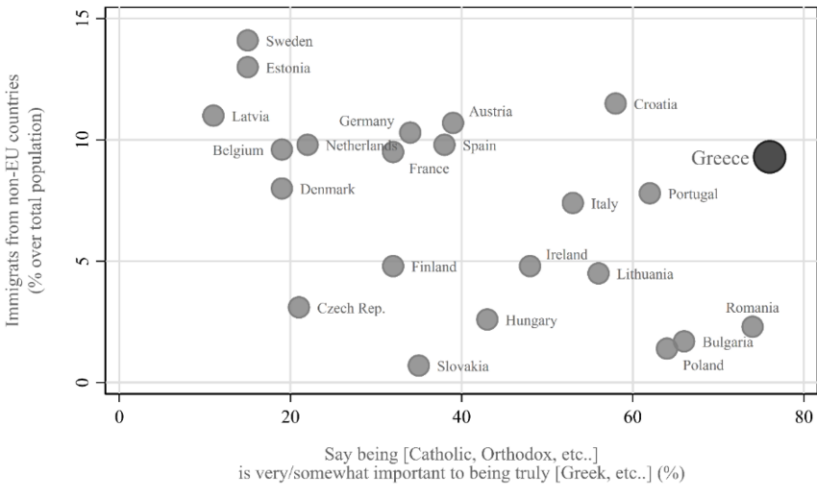
The fact that Greece –quite differently from other European countries– shows strong signs of religious stability or increase between migrant generations represents a very interesting case per se, but it could be very interesting also for the identification of the potential conditions behind this pattern. If we are able to identify the conditions that can foster a religious stability between migrants, we could be also able to specify some expectations concerning other countries that can possibly share and/or replicate some of the Greek peculiarities. In considering data interpretation in the previous paragraph, we

can now specify three main conditions that, if contemporarily present, can discourage second-generation immigrants to lose their religious faith and to follow the majority in a sort of assimilation to religiosity, or to religious identity, as intended by the Greek society: a national identity reinforced by and interwoven with orthodoxy.

The *first and most important condition*, we believe, is the strong relationship between religion and national identity, which results in high level of religiosity in the Greek society. In this regard, being it cemented in centuries of historical events, such a relationship is expected to be stronger in Greece if compared –for example– to former Communist countries in which a light form of de-secularization has mainly to be intended as a way for “burning the bridges” with the Communist past [48]. In any case, the strong role of Orthodoxy for the building-up of a collective identity makes Greece much more similar to the Eastern European countries rather than to the Mediterranean and western counterparts, as also Figure 1 and Figure 4 show.

The *second condition* is a high share of immigrants, especially from non-EU countries. This because these groups of migrants and their families –under specific conditions– can see a declaration of belonging to the Orthodox denomination as a quite effective way to integrate in the Greek society, especially if they come from a Muslim culture which is ostracized in Greece because of centuries of Ottoman domination and also by the problems with the Turk neighbour.

**Figure 4:** Share of immigrant from non-EU countries and people stating a strong link between religiosity and national identity



Source: Pew Research Center [29]

Figure 4 puts together official Eurostat statistics and the same information about the role of religion for national identity reported in Figure 1 in order to inspect together the first and second conditions. As a matter of fact, Greece is the only country showing both the strong role of religious belonging for national identity-making and a conspicuous

presence of non-EU migrants. While Eastern European countries somehow are characterised by a similar strong role of religion for national identity construction, they are not immigrant destinations. Contrarily, although Mediterranean and other European countries are immigrant destinations, the role of religion in the construction of an identity is becoming weaker and weaker. Overall, this combination is what makes Greece so peculiar in the sense that this country puts together characteristics from both Eastern and Western Europe, being also the only majority-Orthodox country without a Communist-domination past.

These two conditions alone should be enough to depict Greece as a very particular context for what concern the religious assimilation of migrants, but a *third one* comes out very important, and relates to the role of Albanians (who constitute more than half of the immigrants in Greece). In fact, Albanians have the almost unique feature of being at the same time mainly Muslim but also very secularized. This results in a rather weak identification with the Muslim faith up to the point where they may also tend to declare a non-Muslim Orthodox identification –or even to convert– if this is expected to be functional to their assimilation. However, it should be reminded out that changes in religious affiliation can be just outward or superficial in the case of conversion [34]. This means that Albanians' declared Orthodox faith should not be automatically translated into actual practice nor even into personal religious convictions. Indeed, scholars on Albanians' religious affiliations across Albania argued that people do not flee their belonging repressed by their religious affiliation even when they convert to another religion [49].

Putting together these three conditions, which are a strong role of religion for national identity, a large share of non-EU migrants, and a relevant group of non-Orthodox migrants which accepts to declare another faith in order to integrate, our educated guess is that Greece, at the moment is quite a peculiar case and is destined to remain as such. If we want to speculate that what happens in Greece can be possibly observed in other countries, the most opportune direction to look at is the Balkans, where especially Serbia and Montenegro, but also Croatia, seem to share some characteristics of Greece [42]. As a matter of fact, in such countries, there are both an Orthodox majority (Catholic in the case of Croatia) with a strong role concerning identity and a relevant share of Muslim immigrants (mainly Bosnians, but also Albanians). Somehow similarly to Greece, these immigrant families might have no choice than declaring Orthodox in order to integrate. Similarly, our findings could be presumably relevant also to the former-Communist Eastern European countries, where we can observe a comparable role of orthodoxy in making up national identity, especially after the fall of the regime. Quite differently to Greece, however, such a role is much more recent, and it is not cemented by centuries of Ottoman domination and historical events that so strongly shaped the construction of the Muslim otherness. In addition to this, all the former-Communist countries are far from being immigrant destinations; at most, they are mainly confronted with a sort of "internal" migration from other former-Communist countries, which is quite different from what the second condition is about.

## 8. Conclusions and limitations

We have seen that a combination of contextual characteristics may explain why Greece appears so different from the other European countries when it comes to the secularization of migrants. Starting from the generally high levels of religiosity observed

in Greece, these conditions together can instigate both a religious stability (or even increase) and what previous research calls a “strategic assimilation” [35], meaning non-Orthodox migrants in Greece declaring an Orthodox denomination in order to smoothen their integration process. However, it should not be forgotten that this sort of “functional conversions” should not be confused with real religious conversions, in the sense that this new Orthodox faith remains somehow nominal and probably do not translate into actual practice, belief or even religious convictions; which is true for native people too. Being the peculiar situation of Greece emerging from five centuries of historical, social and political events, we argue that this peculiarity is intended to remain so. No other European country (with the exception of the Balkans to a minor extent) is expected to replicate all the three conditions we identify as best fitting the Greek case.

In addition to this main theoretical and epistemological argumentation, the added value of this chapter, we believe, is to also provide a quantitative reading of the religious differences between immigrant parents’ and children’ generations in Greece. Given the gap in the literature with respect to such a phenomenon, especially for what concerns southern-European countries) [10], as well as the lack of quantitative research on this topic, this makes such an attempt valuable.

Clearly, the lack of official statistical data or survey data especially targeted to migrants in Greece forces us to refer to European Social Survey which, despite the presence of useful information to identify the interviewees with a migrant background, is not designed *ad hoc* to reach such a population. This is particularly relevant especially because, being ESS questionnaire administered in Greek language (as in the other native languages in the other European countries), this may result in a potential over-representation of the better-integrated migrants, namely those who are at least able to speak Greek quite fluently.<sup>8</sup> This potential distortion, we believe, is less relevant when it comes to second generations. Another drawback linked to the use of ESS data is that, given their structure, it is not possible to push the argumentation about generational differences too far<sup>9</sup> nor to speak about conversions and/or individual changes. In this regard, we believe that the descriptive indications we provided in this chapter surely represent a very interesting starting point and definitely call for follow-up studies.

In order to expand from here, future research should include an explicit focus on the factors influencing the transmission of religiosity within families. In particular, it is the interplay between contextual pressures and family socialization that make this topic so interesting. In fact, when speaking about native majorities, it is often thought that families have a less relevant socializing role in very religious countries because it is the contextual pressure that matter most in such contexts. It would be more that fundamental to study whether the same applies also when looking at migrant families [50].

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<sup>8</sup> We should not forget, however, that the ESS samples are drawn starting from population lists.

<sup>9</sup> This because we are not comparing parents with children, but rather different groups.



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