It has been widely argued that citizenship is not an inherent but a constructed concept and thus has to be taken into consideration within the historical framework in which it has been developed. This framework is no other but that of the nation-state. Saskia Sassen (2006:281) in her renowned book ‘*Authority Territory Rights. From Medieval to Global Assemblages’* gives an analytic description of citizenship ‘as the legal status of an individual in terms of state membership…The legal status entails the specifics of whom the state recognizes as a citizen and the formal basis for the rights and responsibilities of the individual in relation to the state’. Each national state can determine the articulation of citizenship in its own right and this can be said is the most important expression of universalism that particular states hold. Nationalism in this case is of cardinal importance for the definition of the boundary between the inside and the outside. It seems that in order to understand the formal institution of citizenship in Greece we have to go back to the actual nation-building process and demonstrate the features and actual struggles which gave citizenship its particular shape. That is to trace the historicity of the formal institution of citizenship.

The institution of citizenship in Greece besides the profound influence exerted by western nationalist movements and the French Revolution has also been profoundly affected by the very heterogeneity of what used to be defined as the Hellenic World and the territorial indeterminacy triggered by the Eastern Question. In fact the small Greek Kingdom that managed to gain independence in the 1830s was nothing but a small puppet nation that could represent nothing but a small portion of the Greek population which kept on being scattered around in different locations in the Ottoman Empire. Greek irredentist claims of Panhellenic unity that could bring together into a unified national territory all ethnic Greek populations could reach its geographical apogee only but with the acquisition of the lands that constituted the Byzantine Empire. The nation building project, but most importantly national identity, have been based on such an irredentist vision, Megali Idea’ (the Great Idea) in order to delineate a cause for the necessary national unity and consent amongst the mosaic that constituted the autochthonous inhabitants of the newly found Greek Kingdom. The Great Idea captured the imaginaries of the Greeks and offered the necessary platform for the territorial integrity of the nation-state but also for the homogenization of the population. Under such a grand scheme modern Greeks had great plans to fulfill. The story went like this. Their revolution was an ongoing process that would finally unite the Greeks under the same jurisdiction. Hellenism will be able once more with its unification to fulfill its historical destiny, to revive its ancient glories and prove itself as the cradle of civilization.

Indeed, the Great Idea was not just an ideology but the actual policy promoted by the institutional state. The central authorities of the Greek state used consciously the educational system to spread its influence eastwards in order to familiarize the orthodox Christian inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire with Greek nationalism. Through the active and aggressive orientation of the Greek Kingdom’s educational system towards the Orthodox populations of the Ottoman Empire some sort of cultural mission was taking place with national awakening ramifications. A network of elementary schools and teachers flourished, local cultural clubs started spreading and Greek consulates were everywhere. The university of Athens with its civilizing mission of transmitting the European spirit to the East became the major organ of nationalist propagation. Teachers, journalists, lawyers and doctors that graduated from the University of Athens participated in the mechanism of this imaginative process. This effort helped the Greek element to flourish once more in these areas and to become the dominant ethnic group[[1]](#footnote-1). After all, the Greek populations’ economic and cultural activities were taking place within the greater territory of the Ottoman Empire rather than the marginal and territorially insignificant Greek Kingdom. As a result, the newly found state assigned itself the role of the representative of the unredeemed ethnic greek populations in the Ottoman Empire, some sort of ‘mother country’. However, the geopolitical landscape dictated by the Eastern Question perplexities, with most of the Greek speaking and orthodox populations beyond the borders of the newly found Greek state, made the definition of citizenship proper quite a difficult experiment. As it is well known the tensions created by the Eastern Question were to be finally resolved with the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.

To delve into the Eastern Question problematic is quite crucial for understanding the different stages in the institution of Greek citizenship which has been highly interlinked with the pragmatic mobility of the Greek borders to include more Greek populations yet ‘unredeemed’. Such an analysis gives us the opportunity to discern the patterns used by the Greek state to define its citizens in the past but also creates the necessary interpretative framework in order to understand the historical twists and turns of the formal institution of citizenship that would hopefully shed light to recent developments on the law of Greek citizenship. Thus, to recapitulate, the Greek nation-building process coupled with its territorial integrity has been marked by a deeply heterogeneous territory that of the Ottoman Empire and the continuation of the struggle for liberation of all Greek populations that lasted well beyond the settlement by the Treaty of Lausanne of the Eastern Question to the relinquishing of power by Italians of the Dodecanese after the end of the II World War in 1947. The Greek Kingdom constituted itself as the official representative and protector of all ethnic Greeks beyond its border and managed to articulate such a claim through the irredentist narrative of the ‘Great Idea’. To set itself as the centre of the unredeemed Hellenism was a consciously active policy of survival. In the meantime, the Greek Kingdom had to find a way to define who was to be Greek and whom not in its confined territory but also in front of its western benefactors who did not want to destabilize the balance of powers in Europe after the restoration of monarchy.

In this context, the institution of citizenship has been developed in two distinct but interrelated stages. The first stage was to be marked by a compromise between western notions of citizenship and Orthodox Christian realities on the ground. The first Constitution of modern Greece, the ‘Epidauros Constitution’ of 1822 defines as Greeks ‘natives (autochthonous) who believe in Christ’. As a consequence, Greek citizenship was defined by its ethno-religious features, and the previously ethno-religiously defined millet became nationalized. Nationalization of religion served different purposes. On the on hand, provided the necessary criterion of differentiation by the rest of the Ottoman population, while also claimed to represent all the Orthodox Christians not yet liberated. On the other hand, by being Christians the Greeks were trying to represent their modern selves as part of the civilized West. (2003: 49-81). But, the most important point that has linked religion and nationalism in Greece was the prevailing idea that the institution of Orthodox Christianity was the crucial mechanism, the cultural institution that managed to keep Hellenism alive during the difficult four hundred years of ‘Turkish yoke’ through the preservation and dissemination of greek language, orthodox religion and local customs and traditions. Thus, as Kitromilides (1989) has argued through a nationalist reinterpretation of the ecclesiastical past of the Balkans, the Orthodox Church has managed to get legitimized and highly praised by the overwhelming majority of Greeks. Up until now, Orthodoxy, Greek identity and belonging to the national community overlap and religion constitutes an indispensable element in the imagined community’s structure.

Indeed, the nationalization of the millet community is best illustrated by the terms commonly used to indicate nationality in Greek language, terms such as genos (Christian Orthodox race) and ethnos (nation) are interchangeable in Greek language. As Elpida Vogli has contended being part of the ethnos (nation) is been considered a modern concept designating the relationship of the citizen with the actual territory of the newly founded nation-state, the political institution called Greece. In reality, ethnos does not bear the same meanings as the word nation does in English language, rather relates more with the English term ethnicity and thus carries predominantly ethnic origin connotations. Whereas being part of the ‘genos’ had more or less millet connotations and meant being subject to the Sultan under the Ottoman Empire. Sia Anastasopoulou (2004) has suggested that the terms genos (Christian Orhtodox ‘race’) and millet (religious community), even though the concept of the millet has not find its place in modern Greek language, are more or less coincident in the modern greek imaginary. She has indicated such a coincidence through the ideological osmosis of two other very well know terms. These terms, ecumenicity (oikoumenikotita) and irredentism (alytrotismos) have been also indicative of two distinct ideological approaches towards the newfound nation-state that had to be incorporated in order to counterbalance each other’s effects. Such a designation keeps on haunting the institution of Greek citizenship up until now. Genos and ethnos are interchangeable terms and constitute the actual proof of the continuity of the Greek nation during the centuries.

The European benefactors after the liberation of the Greek Kingdom tried to contain the Greek urge for continuation of the revolution. One of their demands was for the definition of Greek citizenship to be differentiated by ethnic nationalism and the various Greek populations inhabiting the Ottoman Empire and being defined in strictly territorial terms. Such a claim was in absolute connection with the liberal climate of the day where the relation between people, land and state were renegotiated. Liberal thinkers such as Korais were absolutely content with such a definition which after all was to define in political terms who was to become citizen of the Greek state and create the basis for popular sovereignty. After all the definition of the Greek citizen was a definition that emerged within the context of the modern nation. This interpretation suggested that the formal institution of citizenship was meant to be distinct from ethnic descent or religion and was meant to define the citizen of the Greek state, its rights and responsibilities. The fact that a secular interpretation of citizenship did not finally manage to prevail but rather got infiltrated by what Kitromilides (1989:157) has defined as ‘cultural Hellenization’, the conception of the nation primarily as a cultural community could also be seen to prevail in the problematic relation Greeks do seem to have with the national authorities and especially the institutions that collect taxes. It is very characteristic that the new tax levied on all properties after the adoption of the IMF memorandum has been called by the media xaratsi, this designation has been adopted widely by the general public as an accurate description of the new tax’s character. Hence, the political mechanism is once more differentiated by the cultural mechanism, the ethnos (nation).

The Treaty of Lausanne signaled the end of the Great Idea as the official national narrative and has been one of the most cardinal historical disruptions in the life of the modern Greek nation-state. The arrival of about one million and a half co-ethnic Greeks from Asia Minor not only changed the composition of the working class, but also the social and cultural landscape of the country. From then onwards Greeks had to reinvent their modern social imaginaries to fit in the new realities. The ‘unredeemed’ Hellenism had to be confined within the territorial boundaries of the Greek state. That is since expansion became impossible the imperial approach to the nation took the opposite direction centering the state. In fact, Greek irredentism was to become internally ecumenized. The task of this peculiarly inverted imperialism was transformed into a mechanism of differentiation and hierarchization of ethnically Greek populations. A similar process, this time in a globalized context, seems to have taken place in Greece since the 1980s with the implosion of the USSR and the subsequent migrants’ flows from the global South and East under new demands created by the post-Fordist flexible mode of accumulation. As a result, the Greek state found itself in a sea of changes that were threatening its modern character. Greece had to respond to new challenges and pressures coming from different directions, on the one hand, there was the process of Europeanization and, on the other hand, the massive influx of immigrants in the beginning of the 1990s was about to transform once more the demographic composition of the country, its social and cultural landscape but most of all the composition of the working class. For these reasons, the migrant movements of the 1990s resemble in its effects the exchange of populations that took place in 1923. The imagined community of the nation had to be reinvented once more in the end of the twentieth century so as to accommodate the new landscape that was about to be created. And as Saskia Sassen (2006, 280) contends, it appears that ‘when the meaning of the national changes, citizenship as a national institution also changes’. In the following pages I will try to follow the reorientations in the imagined community’s meanings through the formal institution of citizenship, as they interact within the framework of the European integration and the transnational migrant glows.

Since the 1980s the attribution of citizenship has contributed to the revival of the imperial past of a specifically Hellenized ecumenical unity, of which the outmost culmination was the ‘Great idea’. The ‘Great Idea’ this time inverted, a self-referential process determined to reinvent Greekness into the global context of the 21st century in order to reproduce itself perpetually leaving intact the main tenets of the theory of Helleno-Christianism. But this time not in territorial terms since this claim has been banned once and for all after the Treaty of Lausanne but in order to correspond to the demands of a homogeneous ethnic and culturally Greek population. For this state policy to become possible the Greek state assumed once more the role of the centre for ‘unredeemed’ Hellenism, the role of the mother country to protect Greek minorities. Greece’s participation in the European Union facilitated this cunning process under the pretext of complying with human rights rules. That was to become another stage in the cultural Hellenization of the nation.

To begin with I would like to describe the influx of the immigrant populations coming to Greece. I am going to separate them in two groups. Both groups migrated to Greece predominantly with the crisis of the Fordist model for economic reasons. But there is a specific characteristic that divides the ones from the others into two distinctive groups. The privileged group claimed ethnic and cultural origins towards the Greek state and thus demanded to have a right to the reimagining of the national community and in most cases asserted its right to citizenship. These groups have been predominantly constituted by a diverse population of Greeks working as guest workers in Europe not in need after the eruption of the oil crisis and the transformation of the model of employment from that of the guest worker to the undocumented migrant. It appears that a phenomenal reverse migration pattern occurred in this case, since in the period 1950 to 1966 more than half a million Greeks went for work in Germany. Other groups were second and third generation Greeks form the USA and Australia who decided to return and pensioner returnees. Also the Greek minorities of Egypt, Zaire and about 56.000 Greeks who had lost their citizenship during the Civil War (1946-1949) and had sought political asylum to Eastern Europe for protection (Christopoulos, 2013). These populations are the first to mark the reversal of the migration pattern after 1977.

A special category of this group, and the most important, has occurred with the collapse of the USSR and the arrival in Greece, according to the General Secretariat for Home Comers of the Ministry of Macedonia-Thrace, of 180.000 Greek Pontics. From this population 52 per cent comes from Georgia, 20 per cent from Kazakhstan, 15 per cent from Russia, 2 per cent from Ukraine and 2 per cent from Uzbekistan. About 125.000 of them have been granted the Greek citizenship on exceptional circumstances[[2]](#footnote-2). The Greek state has largely encouraged repatriation from former USSR countries deploying special policies to meet their needs and granting them easily citizenship. Last but not least the Southern Albanian Greeks who were to migrate in Greece after the collapse of the USSR and the opening of the borders between Greece and Albania in the 1990s, reached the total number of 185.000 due to the Ministry of Interior and most of them hold Special Identity Cards for Omogeneis (co-ethnics) issued by the Greek police[[3]](#footnote-3). Their repatriation was to be deemed unnecessary and thus formally penalized. Due to their arrival in Greece, Greek co-ethnics from Albania hold a temporary status of ‘homogenis according to their statement’ which could only protect them from deportation (Pavlou, 2008). Overall and due to their deprived status they share the lack of formal rights as all the rest of immigrants even though they hold special bonds to the Greek state. This peculiar form of institutional racism made them vulnerable and easily exploitable positing them at the lower tire of the labor market, forming part of the low waged manual labor force.

At the same time, the Albanian massive influx was taking place and other former USSR ethnicities such as Bulgarians, Rumanians and Poles were entering Greece. As was already mentioned above, while most of these changes were taking place kin minority groups of co-ethnics were legalized under the pretext of special laws made specifically for the inclusion of these new ethnically Greek populations. Whereas migration was becoming illegalized through its criminalization, since the first migratory law concerned migration control; under this law migration became impossible[[4]](#footnote-4). Thus despite the fact, that as Christopher M. Lawrence has suggested, the apparent weakening of the Greek state that has followed its incorporation into the EU, the production of a Greek nation continues to be instrumental in defining and regulating socialrelations. Therefore, an ethno-cultural definition of Greek nationality and a reluctance to accept immigration as a long term feature has structured the discrimination and inequality along the axis of Greek/non Greek (Triandafyllidou Anna, 2010).

In the era of the end of the decolonization period and the reversal of the migration movements towards the so-called mother countries Greece represents a peculiar case. On the one hand, is been categorized as one of the new immigration countries. While, on the other, the Greek state has also tried to enunciate its former status as the mother country of all Hellenes. In such a context, as Mezzandra (2010)[[5]](#footnote-5) has already noticed in the case of Italy and for Europe in general, the crucial point is not to assign different populations to different territories, but ‘rather aim to regulate, to ‘manage’as European rhetoric wants it, the intersection of their bodies...within a single territory’. The Greek state in its attempt to enunciate such a policy has incorporated ‘differential racism’, or as Etienne Balibar (1991) contends a new form of racism ‘neo-racism’, in its institutional armor. The close connection between immigration policy and national identity is enough to prove the dependence of the attribution of citizenship to social subordination based on differential hierarchization of an ethno-genealogical conception of nationhood. The immigrants fall outside such a hierarchization not just because they do not ethnically belong to the nation but specifically because they cannot participate to the particularly Greek consciousness which is significantly interwoven with the Orthodox genos, of a population accustomed to greek culture, language and orthodox religion. This is exactly what Balibar (.23,24) has called ‘racism without race’ where ‘culture can also function as a nature’[[6]](#footnote-6)

The law on the attribution of citizenship to third country nationals is a law made out of the crisis. The new law on citizenship that was to become a law of the Greek state only for a short period of time was breaking with the aforementioned parochial and utterly nationalistic attribution of citizenship up until now and put Greece formally to the context of the 21st century globalized world. No special deliberation between the parliamentary parties or the general public before the enactment of the law Nevertheless, it should come as no surprise, firstly, because the former Prime Minister George A. Papandreou was willing to proceed to the attribution of citizenship to the second and third generation immigrant children in Greece. And last but not least, the mass participation of these children in the December 2008 revolt rendered their illegal status a constant security issue for the Greek state. Authorities then understood that narrow definitions of citizenship are increasingly inadequate to respond to the political dynamics available beyond the law. If the political means membership in the ranks of citizenship, these children came to prove that rights are not given but constitute a process of making a rights-bearing subject (Saskia Sassen, 278). The suspension of this law turns Greece back to a parochial and nationalistic narrative that probably corresponds to the dissolution of our liberal democracy under the guidance of transnational institutions such as the IMF.

1. Kitromilides, M. Paschalis, “‘Imagined Communities’ and the Origins of the National Question in the Balkans”, European History Quarterly, Vol 19, 1989, pg 149-194 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Christopoulos, Dimitris, ‘Country Report Greece’ EUDO Citizenship Observatory, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies January 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Anna Triandafyllidou, Anna Dimensions and characteristics of Migration towards Greece, *‘Migration in Greece of the 21st century’*, eds Anna Triandafyllidou, Thanos Mroukis, 2010 Ekdoseis Kritiki AE (in Greek) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Law 1975/1991 ‘Entry-exit, sojourn, employment, deportation of aliens, procedure for the recognition of alien refugees and other provisions’ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Mezzandra, Sandro, ‘Anti-racist research and Practice in Italy’, darkmatter Journal 10 oct 2010 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Balibar, Ettienne, Race, nation, class: ambiguous identities, eds. Etienne Balibar, Immanuel Wallerstein London, Verso 1991 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)