

# THE ANATOMY OF SOCIAL MURDER: LESSONS FROM GREECE

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**Abstract:** *This essay examines the tragic death of Antonis Karyotis at Piraeus Port in Greece on September 5, 2023, delving into its significance as a reflection of broader social and political issues. It posits that Karyotis's untimely demise, epitomizes Friedrich Engels' concept of 'social murder'. Additionally, the essay employs Michel Foucault's biopolitical framework to scrutinize how power operates through the management and regulation of populations, further elucidating the complexities surrounding Karyotis's death. By contextualizing this incident within the broader societal landscape of Greece, the essay highlights the escalating racist violence and mistreatment of migrants that have intensified post-2008 economic crisis. This crisis not only exacerbated economic hardships but also fueled social tensions, leading to heightened hostility towards marginalized groups. Furthermore, the essay draws attention to the deteriorating conditions of the working class within the labor market, exacerbated by stringent economic policies implemented in response to the crisis. In conclusion, the essay underscores how Antonis Karyotis's death serves as a poignant reminder of the systemic economic and social inequalities plaguing Greek society, with the state implicated in perpetuating and exacerbating these disparities. It calls for a critical examination of power dynamics and a collective endeavor towards social justice and structural reform to address these entrenched issues.*

**Keywords:** Social Murder, Working Class Demise, Greece, Biopolitics, Antonis Karyotis.

## 1. Introduction

The tragic incident at Piraeus Port in Greece on September 5, 2023, involving the death of Antonis Karyotis, has sparked widespread anger and condemnation. Antonis, a 36-year-old man from a poor family in Crete and under psychiatric care, intended to board the Blue Horizon ferry to Crete. However, after disembarking and attempting to re-enter, he was forcefully prevented by a crew member, leading to his fall into the harbor and subsequent drowning. This essay analyzes the event within the broader context of societal and political issues in Greece, particularly regarding the treatment of the working class and marginalized groups. It argues that the Greek state's policies and practices contribute to what Friedrich Engels termed 'social murder', where violence is normalized as an institutional tactic. The essay begins by linking the event to the escalation of racist violence in Greece, especially against migrants, in the midst of the post-2008 economic crisis. The Greek state has faced criticism for its handling of migrant issues, with reports of violence against migrants and poor treatment of foreign nationals in prisons and detention centers. It then proceeds to analyze the prevalence of literal death in Greek daily life, as well as the biopolitical underpinnings of the event and the broader state of the working class. It argues that the Greek labor market has undergone significant changes, with laws allowing extended working hours and weakening workers' rights, reflecting a return to conditions described by Marx. The poor and marginalized, including prisoners, immigrants, and the working class, are often neglected or exploited under these conditions. The essay concludes by stating that the case of Antonis Karyotis highlights these broader issues of economic and social inequality, state practices, and societal attitudes toward marginalized groups in Greece.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Research approach

This essay adopts a multidisciplinary approach, integrating perspectives from sociology, political economy, and philosophy. It seeks to examine the death of Antonis Karyotis not as an isolated incident, but as a manifestation of broader societal and systemic issues within

Greece. The analysis is grounded in a qualitative examination of various sources including news reports, academic articles, and government documents.

To understand the complex interplay of social, economic, and political factors, the essay is anchored in several theoretical frameworks. First, it utilizes Engels' concept of 'social murder'. This framework provides a lens to examine how state policies and societal structures contribute to preventable deaths of the working class (and, more broadly, marginalized groups in this case). Second, the essay employs a Marxist analysis of labor. This perspective is used to explore the dynamics of the Greek labor market, especially in relation to the working class and marginalized communities, and more specifically to contextualize Antonis' death within the current downfall of labor rights in the Greek working-class sector. Third, the essay draws upon Foucault's biopolitical theory. This theoretical framework is instrumental in examining the way Greek state policies differentiate between various groups, often favoring some while leading to the systematic neglect and exploitation of others.

## **2.2. Data collection**

Data collection involves a thorough review of primary sources, such as government records, legal documents, and first-hand reports from witnesses of the incident, as well as secondary sources, such as academic literature on Greek socio-political dynamics, news articles, and reports from human rights organizations. Also, the essay uses media analysis to examine the portrayal of the incident and its aftermath in both Greek and international media, understanding public perception and response.

## **2.3. Limitations**

By employing a multi-theoretical and data-driven approach, the essay aims to provide a comprehensive analysis that situates this incident within the wider tapestry of contemporary Greek society's challenges and systemic issues. However, the essay acknowledges the limitations inherent in its analysis, including potential biases in source materials, the evolving nature of the incident's legal and social ramifications, and the constraints of analyzing recent events with ongoing developments.

## **3. The death of Antonis**

On September 5, 2023, a significant incident occurred at the Piraeus port in Greece, subsequently eliciting anger and condemnation within the Greek population. This incident revolves around the tragic loss of Antonis Karyotis, a 36-year-old man, who, on the specified date, reached the Piraeus port with the intention of boarding the Blue Horizon, a ship scheduled for a voyage to the island of Crete. The man had bought a ticket and boarded the ferry, said Shipping Minister Miltiadis Varvitsiotis (Le Monde, 2023). For reasons that remain elusive, Antonis disembarked the vessel but later sought to re-enter. At this juncture, a crew member forcefully obstructed his reboarding attempt, pushing him into his immersion in the harbour waters. The ship continued on its way without stopping to offer assistance. A few minutes later, Antonis drowned. The official confirmation of his death was subsequently established when his body was transported to Nikaia Hospital in the proximity of Piraeus.

Greek media reports described Karyotis as originating from an impoverished family of ten in Crete, having been under psychiatric care for an extended period and sustaining himself by taking on various sporadic jobs. Karyotis's psychiatrist, as mentioned in the Kathimerini newspaper, revealed that he often travelled from Crete to Athens, as he derived a sense of comfort from being on the move. The startling incident was captured on video by several passengers<sup>1</sup>, who subsequently shared it on social media platforms. This video rapidly gained widespread attention, igniting public indignation within Greece. Within these recordings, the

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<sup>1</sup> See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vzb9WFJNBbA&ab\\_channel=GFSNews](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vzb9WFJNBbA&ab_channel=GFSNews) .

anguished pleas of other passengers can be discerned as they repeatedly ask the crew to halt the ferry<sup>1</sup>, only to be met with indifference.

The Piraeus coast guard's logbook documented an interaction with the boat's captain at 9:13 pm (ibid), during which the captain reported a man falling overboard but did not refer to the crew's involvement. Six minutes later, assistance reached the scene, but it was already too late. Around 9:40 pm, the Piraeus port police ordered the vessel to halt its course. The coast guard subsequently obtained statements from at least three passengers, each of whom recounted the sequence of events. Approximately by 10 pm, the vessel reversed its course toward Piraeus. Subsequently, the captain and three additional crew members, including the crew member responsible for Antonis's expulsion from the ship, were arrested by the police and were brought before the court. There, they were formally charged with homicide and complicity in murder. On September 11<sup>th</sup>, the captain and the crewmember who pushed Antonis off the ship, were put in pre-trial detention.

On Monday, September 11, the Minister of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy of Greece, Miltiadis Varvitsiotis, submitted his resignation. This decision came in response to the public uproar triggered by his comments in the aftermath of the tragedy. During an appearance on the television channel Open he had stated (The Guardian, 2023) that 'there are those who mourn the victim and those who mourn the people who work to earn a wage, to live decently ... and are now accused of murder', referring to the arrested crew members.

The incident triggered spontaneous protests in several ports serviced by the *Blue Horizon*. A protester's sign characteristically read 'Let's not get used to death' (Le Monde, 2023). It is this idea of normalization of death within the Greek social and political infrastructure that I believe is worth discussing. In order to understand the political and social impact of this incident, it should be analysed in the context of four underlying structural factors that shape the political and social landscape of the contemporary Greek state. Specifically, it is argued that, by subjecting working class people to harmful and violent conditions, the Greek state commits what Friedrich Engels has called 'social murder' (Engels, [1845] 2009). Violence becomes invisible in its denial, and it is thus normalized as an institutional tactic.

#### **4. Racialized violence amidst the post-2008 Crisis**

The escalating levels of racist violence in Greece over the last fifteen years are closely tied to significant political and economic shifts (Papageorgiou, 2017). The Greek economic crisis, which followed the global recession of 2008, was unprecedented in terms of both its duration and the scale of decline among developed nations. Within the European Union, Greece was the hardest hit, enduring a prolonged and severe crisis with no parallel (Matsaganis, 2018).

Before the 2010 crisis, the Greek economy's trajectory made austerity measures seem inevitable. However, the austerity policies implemented were regressive and exacerbated the recession's impact on income distribution. A significant consequence has been the dramatic increase in unemployment among primary earners, heightening the risk of poverty. With the social safety net proving insufficient and long-term unemployment expected to remain high, the challenges faced by adults and children in households without jobs have emerged as Greece's pressing social issue (Matsaganis, 2013).

The government's response to the social ramifications of the crisis was either misguided or inadequate<sup>2</sup>. Although welfare reforms led to certain improvements, most budget cuts were indiscriminate, leading to difficulties and disruptions in health and social services. The deregulation of the labor market was driven by the belief that reducing worker compensation and weakening labor institutions would boost competitiveness. However, this approach failed; while the trade balance improved mainly due to reduced imports, there was little increase in exports. Meanwhile, the situation for workers in terms of pay and conditions

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<sup>1</sup> See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xp\\_hhYwIlg2A&ab\\_channel=KontraChannel](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xp_hhYwIlg2A&ab_channel=KontraChannel).

<sup>2</sup> For all the relevant data, see Matsaganis, 2013.

has deteriorated. Although reform in public administration was essential, it was narrowly focused on reducing the public workforce rather than comprehensive modernization. The necessary sustained effort to overhaul the Greek state is yet to materialize (Matsaganis, 2013). Furthermore, substantial cuts in public spending, public employment, increased value-added tax rates, and reductions in social benefits led to a surge in poverty and ongoing social unrest, rising political tensions between the government, opposition parties, and trade unions, resulting in a highly unstable political environment.

Migration became linked with rising criminality and was perceived as a threat to the jobs of Greek citizens, also challenging notions of Greek national identity (Tsitselikis 2013). Migrants were depicted as culturally distinct and inferior, seen as less developed economically and holding non-western values deemed incompatible with Greek or European culture (Triandafyllidou & Kouki 2013). This antagonistic portrayal escalated during the economic crisis, with media and political narratives – from both mainstream and far-right parties – blaming migrants for societal problems like unemployment, economic and social exclusion, and urban disturbances (Cheliotis 2013; Triandafyllidou & Kouki 2014). Within this context, negative perceptions towards migrants grew, with a significant portion of Greek society viewing them as invaders and job competitors, making it harder for Greeks to find employment, a view which is still prevalent amongst the public (Bailey-Morley and Lowe, 2023).

Violence against migrants surged alongside the ascent of Golden Dawn. This violence manifested as physical assaults, property attacks, and verbal aggression, predominantly targeting Muslim, non-white migrants from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa (Human Rights Watch, 2012). Political entities and institutions justified the use of violence through three persistent discursive strategies: denying the systemic nature of anti-migrant violence, framing incidents as 'isolated events', and casting doubt on claims of mistreatment (Karamanidou, 2016). They also divorced violence against migrants from racism, justifying it as a response to perceived threats posed by migration. This perspective tolerated violence as a reaction to the fear and insecurities provoked by the perceived threat of the migrant Other. Simultaneously, it aligned with neoliberal governance strategies, particularly in times of crisis, by preserving in-group cohesion through the targeting of marginalized groups like migrants (Cheliotis, 2013).

As the number of migrants in Greece grew, criticism of both migrants and the government's handling of the refugee response spread. The 2019 elections brought the centre-right New Democracy party to power, reintroducing a highly securitized narrative around migration, utilizing the lack of EU support to deflect criticism (Bailey-Morley & Lowe, 2023: 20). The government also tapped into anti-Turkish sentiment to shift blame and maintain a favorable image in the ongoing competition with Turkey.

## 5. Recent developments in the economy

In general, the Greek economy has shown signs of growth in recent years. The anticipated economic expansion is forecasted to be 2.3% in 2024 and 2.2% in 2025 (European Commission, 2023). However, nominal wages, adjusted for inflation, have not kept pace<sup>1</sup>. In many cases, they have decreased due to persistent price increases. This trend is also evident in the labor market, where an increasing number of employers report challenges in recruiting staff due to worker concerns about insufficient wages. Numerous positions remain unfilled in vital sectors for the Greek economy, including food services, tourism, and construction. Simultaneously, Greek consumers are compelled to reduce their purchases of essential goods to cope with the ongoing wave of price hikes.

Greece, like many European countries, faces a housing shortage exacerbated by a surge in real estate investment, partly due to its golden visa program (Mellersh, 2023). This program, attracting foreign investors from countries such as Israel, Russia, and China, has significantly increased property purchases in Greek cities, leading to soaring rental prices. Data from the

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.euronews.com/2023/05/15/cost-of-living-crisis-in-greece-despite-economic-recovery>

Ministry of Migration and Asylum shows the program added nearly €1 billion to Greece's economy in early 2023 (ibid). However, high rents are displacing residents. Eurostat data reveals that Greece leads the EU in housing cost overburden rate, with a significant portion of the population spending over 40% of their income on housing, a predicament more pronounced among renters, refugees, and asylum seekers (Eurostat, 2023). The HELIOS program, designed to aid refugees, is now limited due to reduced state support, leaving many at risk of homelessness (Mellersh, 2023). Athens' recent tourism boom post-pandemic has revitalized its economy, which suffered during the economic crisis and COVID-19 lockdowns. Yet, this resurgence has a downside: the transformation of many central apartments into short-term rentals or foreign-owned properties, driving up living costs and reshaping neighborhoods traditionally inhabited by working-class and migrant communities (Gencturk, 2023). This shift, combined with the allure of Greece for Western 'digital nomads' during the pandemic, has placed additional economic pressure on local residents, aggravating the housing crisis and contributing to a decline in home ownership rates in Athens, which once ranked among the highest in Europe (ibid). Furthermore, the housing market crisis in Greece, is significantly impacting public services. Essential public servants like doctors and teachers, assigned to tourist-heavy areas like islands, struggle to find affordable housing. This predicament often forces them to resign or request transfers to less expensive regions. The absence of government intervention in Greece's real estate market, particularly the lack of regulatory measures like rent price caps or social housing development, is intensifying the housing crisis (ibid).

## 6. Rule of law challenges

Greece is currently contending with serious rule of law challenges (US Department of State, 2022), related to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment of foreign nationals in prison and immigrant detainees, as well as racial police violence against third-country nationals. Moreover, there have been incidents and allegations of violence by government authorities directed towards migrants and asylum seekers (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2023; Pawson, 2023). Unfortunately, non-governmental and international organizations have reported government inadequacies in investigating abusive police practices and forced returns of asylum seekers and holding those responsible accountable challenges (US Department of State, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2013).

In parallel, the current government has significantly increased its recruitment of police officers, elevating the country to the fourth position in the EU concerning the ratio<sup>1</sup> of police officers per citizen, while foreign nationals in overcrowded Greek prisons constitute approximately 60% of the prison population<sup>2</sup>. Thus, we witness the gradual displacement of the rule of law by the penal state, which employs the power of policing to punish and contain marginalized and disadvantaged populations and thus offer a form of relief to the public angst of the 'foreign enemy'.

In the following days after Antonis's murder, leaked recordings of radio conversations emerged, revealing racist attitudes among the ship's crew (The Guardian, 2023b). In one excerpt, the ship's captain is heard expressing the belief that the passenger, later identified as Greek, was a foreigner: 'I thought he didn't have a ticket [...], I thought he was black, a Pakistani... He was sitting there outside, going round and round, but he didn't show me any ticket. The only thing he told me was, 'I am going to travel'.

## 7. Death and its denial

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<sup>1</sup> <https://landgeist.com/2022/12/14/police-officers-in-europe/#:~:text=We%20can%20see%20that%20southern,high%20number%20of%20police%20officers..>

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Percentage\\_of\\_prisoners\\_with\\_foreign\\_citizenship\\_in\\_the\\_reporting\\_country\\_2020-2021.png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Percentage_of_prisoners_with_foreign_citizenship_in_the_reporting_country_2020-2021.png)

In broad terms, Marx and Engels viewed the continuous growth of capital as inherently lethal, as the ‘accumulation of misery’ for the working class is ‘a necessary condition, corresponding to the accumulation of wealth’ for the capitalist class (Marx [1867] 1990, 799, quoted in Holdren, 2023 ). The perpetual movement of capital, motivated by the quest for greater wealth, signifies more than just a financial cycle; it serves as a constant social mechanism, which is ‘not an external cause of working-class death but rather should be understood as inherently an ongoing process of killing’ (ibid).

Death has emerged as a prevalent occurrence in Greek society. To begin with, incidents of deaths in prisons are frequent, and there is a lack of thorough investigations into the underlying causes of each fatality, even when it involves instances of individuals taking their own lives (Council of Europe, 2022: 38, 75-77. This hinders the potential to learn from these incidents and implement measures to prevent future deaths. The situation in immigration detention centers is not different. In 2021, Macky Diabate, a 44-year-old Guinean national held in Kos detention center, died of a treatable abdominal infection called peritonitis, having had sought medical attention for days but ignored. Additionally, detainees had their phones tampered with or broken to prevent documentation of their situation, affecting their ability to share legal documents with lawyers and seek advice (Al Jazeera, 2021).

Furthermore, the sinking of the fishing vessel *Adriana* on June 14, 2023, off the coast of Pylos resulted in the loss of over 600 lives. Survivors and reports suggest the vessel may have been towed by a Greek coast guard boat, which the authorities deny. Phones of survivors were confiscated without proper documentation (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Over 20 interviews with survivors, along with a review of court documents and coastguard sources, uncovered evidence of missed rescue chances and disregarded offers of aid. Survivors' testimonies indicate that Greek coastguard efforts to tow the trawler may have led to its sinking, a claim disputed by the Greek coastguard.

On a separate occasion, the 28th of February 2023 marked the occurrence of the most fatal railway catastrophe in Greek history, claiming the lives of 57 individuals. Investigations revealed that the IC62 passenger train was permitted to traverse an incorrect track, disregarding signals indicating danger due to the simultaneous presence of a freight train on the same route. Initially attributing the crash to ‘tragic human error’, the Prime Minister has subsequently expressed regret for the collision, acknowledging the potential prevention of the incident through the implementation of appropriate safety measures (The Guardian, 2023c).

The Greek state has also been involved in a series of life – threatening practices concerning immigrants. Specifically, it has been employing the practice of pushbacks, a tactic which has led to many immigrants’ lives being lost. From August 2021 to July 2023, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) provided emergency medical assistance to 7,904 asylum seekers on Samos and Lesbos (MSF, 2023a). During this period, MSF documented violence and pushback practices at the Greek border. Asylum seekers described being forcibly returned to Turkey, facing violence at sea and on land. This includes being surrounded, destabilized, assaulted, threatened with firearms, and having their boats damaged (ibid). After arrival on the islands, they were intercepted, detained, and often subjected to abuse before being forcibly transferred to Turkish waters. Despite the ever-mounting body of evidence on Greek violations (ECRE, 2023), Greek authorities have failed to hold those responsible accountable, perpetuating a cycle of violence and impunity.

A notable instance is the Farmakonisi case of January 2014, where the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) issued a landmark judgment, condemning Greek officials for failing to conduct rescue operations and for inadequacies in the ensuing investigation of the tragedy, especially how victims' testimony was treated (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The government's eternal and staunch denial of the practice of pushbacks against immigrants, from the previous government to its current successor (Solomon, 2020) is emblematic of this culture of systematic denial.

Literally, the working class's demise is associated with exposure to physical mortality due to neglect, evident in unattended medical emergencies resulting in fatalities in immigration detention. It's also seen in suicide attempts within prisons and immigration detention centers. Physical death can result from tragic state neglect, like railway and shipwreck incidents, or through careful actions such as pushbacks. It's also observed when state actors or those employed to enforce social control directly engage in violence leading to death, as seen in the incident of Antonis' demise. All these incidents of murderous situations facilitated by the Greek state crucially share the element of denial as their linking point.

In another segment broadcasted by the Greek TV channel ANT1, a different crew member can be heard advising his colleagues not to disclose what they had witnessed: 'you should always have one thing in mind: we never say what we hear and what we see', he says (The Guardian, 2023a). This strategy of rendering raw violence invisible is not coincidental or a one-time event, caused by the crew member's fear of getting caught. It is embedded in a systematic denial of violence that the Greek state employs in its course of governing those at the margins of society. Even at the suspicion that the passenger attempting to enter the ship was a foreign national (crucially, not a possible tourist consumer but a 'social waste', a 'black, a Pakistani'), untampered violence was first executed and then denied.

### **8. The biopolitics of killing the poor**

It is worth mentioning that in 2015, a ship from the same company allowed well-known TV presenter and celebrity Eleni Menegaki to delay its departure by 40 minutes<sup>1</sup>. The ship eventually set sail at 08:30, instead of its originally scheduled time of 07:50 in the morning. This incident, as tragically ironic as it may be, further highlights a gravely important issue: the state and its apparatuses can prioritize some lives at the expense or neglect of other lives. Foucault (1998: 138) explains that, within a biopolitical framework, '[o]ne might say that the ancient right to take life or let live was replaced by a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death'.

Safeguarding and promoting the elite's interests often involves the exclusion or abandonment, to the point of killing, of the working class, who is portrayed as undesirable and/or threatening. As Foucault contends (2004: 256), 'killing' contains 'every form of indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection and so on'. In other words, the defence of the population deemed worthy of protection is made possible through the rejection or abandonment of a population determined to be undesirable or a threat. 'In the biopower system', Foucault (ibid: 257) contends, 'killing or the imperative to kill is acceptable only if it results not in a victory over political adversaries, but in the elimination of the biological threat to and the improvement of the species or race'. In Foucault's biopolitical framework, current issues are less about sovereign authority and more about managing the right to life and death as a means of societal protection. This concept moves beyond the sovereign's traditional power of deciding life or death to a more nuanced approach of enabling or denying life, emphasizing population management rather than individual focus.

Foucault also discusses the role of state racism in this context, not just as a sovereign act but as a government strategy to distribute life within a framework of value and utility (Foucault 2004: 258).. This form of racism seeks to purify the population by differentiating between lives deemed worthy or unworthy, blending various forms of power like security mechanisms and disciplinary techniques. In this context, the dynamics of neoracism reflect those in neoliberalism; while neoliberalism governs the economy indirectly through population management, neoracism directly targets specific population groups (Rasmussen, 2011: 46–7 in Koros, 2021: 248)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thetoc.gr/koinwnia/best-of-internet/to-blue-star-perimene-ti-menegaki-40-lepta-prin-apo-xronia-kai-tora-o-kathusterimenos-epibatis-to-plirose-me-ti-zoi-tou/>.

Foucault's concept of 'killing' framed as the abandonment and exclusion of specific lives, in the pursuit of safeguarding those lives deemed worthy of protection, provides a valuable foundation for contemplating how the Greek state, along with its numerous interconnected biopolitical mechanisms, functions to eliminate those individuals considered undeserving of protection: prisoners, immigrants, sexual<sup>1</sup> and gender minorities, and the working class in general.

## 9. Killing the poor

Greek tourism plays a substantial role to the Greek economy, amounting to 20% of Greece's total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Karakatsani, 2023). In stark antithesis to the idyllic image of Greece as a holiday paradise, exploitative work conditions, particularly in recent years, have become alarmingly prevalent (FRANET, 2014). It is noteworthy that, in this context, heightened levels of exploitation are currently legitimised by law. In September 2023, the Greek Parliament approved a Labor Ministry bill permitting full-time employees to take on a part-time secondary job, allowing them to work up to 13 hours a day under specific conditions (Kathimerini, 2023). This legislation also grants employers the ability to institute a six-day workweek if necessary. Additionally, within the first year of employment, an employee can be dismissed without prior notice or compensation unless otherwise agreed. The bill also introduces a probation period of up to six months, mandating employers to provide detailed work terms. Moreover, the bill criminalises occupation of workspaces during strikes, by imposing a minimum monetary penalty of 5,000 euros and a minimum six-month imprisonment term for those impeding employees from working during a strike, essentially weakening the right to strike. Portrayed as advantageous for workers (ibid), these laws, in reality, roll back labor regulations to a condition reminiscent of the period delineated by Marx more than a century ago. During that time, individual capitalists sought methods to circumvent work-hour limitations that had emerged as 'the outcome of prolonged class struggle' (Marx, [1867] 1990: 395). They achieved this by mandating that workers work a cumulative total of ten daily hours stretched over a span of fifteen hours, resulting in more time commitment from the workers without violating the law (ibid: 403). Within capitalist structures, certain individuals have their fundamental human needs overlooked. As Simon Clarke articulated (1993: 281), capitalism functions as a 'system of production in which the production of things is subordinated to the production, appropriation, and accumulation of surplus value'. This arrangement effectively separates the creation of goods from the actual necessity for those products. Consequently, human well-being is, at best, a secondary concern within the framework of capitalism.

This can be seen in both the exploitative and miserable conditions of workers in the Greek tourism industry and Antonis' death. Economic hardships have led seasonal workers in the Greek tourism industry to accept extremely deplorable conditions, like waiters in Rhodes serving customers while standing waist-deep in water<sup>2</sup>. More generally, adverse working conditions, unsuitable accommodation, frequent back-to-back and night shifts, double and triple duties and undeclared work are characteristic features of the working conditions of the Greek tourism industry. As Engels had noted already in 1845 for the English working class, the Greek state 'places workers under conditions in which they cannot live – forces them, through the strong arm of the law, to remain in such conditions until that death ensues which is the inevitable consequence'.

The Marxist notion of a relative surplus population, characterized by an excess of available labor relative to the available job opportunities, proves pertinent in establishing a connection between the exploitation of workers within the Greek tourism sector and the tragic death of Antonis. The overarching dominance of society by the pursuit of surplus value in

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<sup>1</sup> On that, see the killing of Zack Kostopoulos, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/03/greek-court-acquits-four-police-officers-over-death-of-lgbtq-activist>.  
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.keptalkinggreece.com/2023/07/03/rhodes-beach-bar-waiter-wading-water-sea/>.



capitalist systems tends to foster a sense of inhumanity and apathy towards the constituents of these societies. Furthermore, this phenomenon engenders discernible patterns over time, as the relentless drive for accumulation reinforces the inclination for individuals to instrumentalize one another, consequently giving rise to novel modes of organizing predicated on such instrumentalization. This instrumentalization extends beyond the exploitation of workers by capitalists; it encompasses a broader concept of individuals leveraging others as mere instruments to achieve their own objectives (Holdren, 2023).

As Beatrice Adler-Bolton has put it, 'under capitalism, you work, you earn a wage, and then you are entitled to the survival you can buy' (2022). Antonis, could not buy his survival, as he had not profit-making potential for the capitalist class of the Greek state. The grim and haunting picture of the crew member pushing off Antonis to the sea, is a picture of rich symbolism. Antonis is being cast into the sea as a sort of impediment to financial accumulation, as his persistence to board impedes the ship to depart and the Greek economy to run. In this juxtaposition, individuals in need are perceived as a threat to the state's potential for exponential economic growth. Similarly, 43 years ago, the Dead Kennedys sardonically sang about the request of the wealthiest to eradicate the impoverished population of America using a neutron bomb, portraying them as mere obstacles to the nation's progress<sup>1</sup>.

This fantasy also affects the emotions of 'ordinary citizens' who may perceive people in need as consumers of valuable time, due to the establishment of a neoliberal grammar in daily life due to austerity (Kyriakopoulos, 2016: 655). A deep rooted connection is forged between the stereotype of wasteful and needy individuals and the contrast with those who profit from exploitative conditions, which harm both individuals and the environment<sup>2</sup>. On account of this apotheosis of profit making over (undeserving) human lives and nature, any form of exclusion becomes a sign of indifference towards those who cannot align with the prevailing vision of success. Antonis was one of them. His death was not so much a product of the (indeed) general coarsening of attitudes toward the poor and the marginalised, but mainly an outcome of the structural shifts of the Greek political economy of the last fifteen years, which, as stated, are associated with austerity measures, racialized violence, labor market reforms, and grave rule of law challenges, all of which have facilitated social murder.

## 10. The Aftermath

The 'shameful event does not represent the country we want', the Prime Minister Mitsotakis said, stating in addition that the perpetrators deserve to be punished (Anadolu Ajansi, 2023). Unfortunately, and ironically, the aforementioned incident appears to align with contemporary Greece's values and priorities. Probably, the main perpetrator of the crime will get a sentence that will lead to his imprisonment for some time. So, eventually it is likely that the PM's wish for punishment will come true. However, even if it does, justice will not have been served. A state which kills the poor will never be a state of justice.

## 11. Conclusion

The death of Antonis Karyotis is more than a singular tragedy; it is a symptom of the profound maladies afflicting contemporary Greek society. As this essay has demonstrated, Antonis's death is emblematic of a wider systemic issue rooted in the Greek state's approach to governance, labor, and social welfare. The policies and practices that have evolved, particularly in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, reflect a state apparatus that prioritizes economic growth and stability over the welfare of its most vulnerable citizens. The normalization of what Engels termed 'social murder' is evident in the treatment of marginalized groups, including immigrants and the working class.

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1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgpa7wEAz7I> .

2 <https://www.eea.europa.eu/soer/2015/countries/greece#:~:text=Environment%20and%20tourism&text=Such%20tourism%20has%20also%20a,destinations%2C%20and%20overcrowding%20on%20beaches..>

The tragic incident at Piraeus Port is a stark reminder of the consequences of a society that marginalizes and neglects its vulnerable populations. Antonis, a product of the very societal structure that ultimately failed to protect him, was not just a victim of an isolated act of violence but of a broader systemic failure. The state's role in perpetuating such inequalities, through both action and inaction, raises critical questions about the ethics of governance and the responsibilities of a state towards its citizens. Furthermore, the response to Antonis's death, including the public outrage and the subsequent resignation of Minister Miltiadis Varvitsiotis, reveals a societal recognition of these systemic issues. However, justice and change extend beyond individual accountability. They require a fundamental reevaluation and restructuring of societal priorities and state policies. As long as state policies disproportionately impact the poor and marginalized, tragedies like Antonis Karyotis's death are not mere anomalies, but rather predictable outcomes of a fundamentally flawed system. Critical criminologists must persist in their structural critique of the symbolic aspects of current penal practices, highlighting how dominant narratives about deserving/undeserving and hardworking/dangerous social classes align with and ideologically justify a system of racialized capital accumulation that fundamentally undervalues the poor and their labor (De Giorgi, 2018; 2007).

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