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# ‘Are the ‘others’ coming?’: Evidence on ‘alien conspiracy’ from three illegal markets in Greece

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**Abstract** In the early 1990s Greece accepted a large number of immigrants from a variety of contexts. Since then ‘organised criminality’ has become an important aspect of the immigration nexus in the country, and ethnicity has been viewed as an extremely important-if not the primary–explanatory variable. Simultaneously, there has been very little empirical research on ‘organised crime’ in Greece in general and ‘organised crime’ and ethnicity in particular. The purpose of this article, which is based on previous research that the author has conducted on three illegal markets in Greece (a. migrant smuggling business, b. the cigarette black market, and c. the market of stolen cars and car parts), is to show the extent to which these illegal markets are controlled by foreign nationals, and establish whether there is such thing as an ‘alien conspiracy’ in the particular country.

## Introduction

The relationship between ethnicity, migration, and ‘organized crime’ has been one of the most widely researched issues in criminology. In fact ethnicity, migration, and ‘organized crime’ are terms that evolved together especially in the American context, which was unwilling to accept that “...modes of criminality, which are perceived as especially menacing” ([24]: 824–825) can be a native feature. Some authors have argued that ethnicity and migration, through to the exclusion, marginalization, and blocking of legitimate opportunities, are characteristics that facilitate ‘organized crime’. Bell [9], for example, saw ‘organized crime’ as the ultimate attempt by the migrants in the United States to move towards the upper echelons of the American society, and pursue their American Dream (see also [31]). Some others talked about an ‘alien conspiracy’ undermining the American way of life and market, a very popular perspective especially after World War II. Thus, although the concept of

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‘organized crime’ *initially* had no ethnic connotation [55], the notions of ethnicity and migration have been at the core, and in the media and public perception the phenomenon is represented at its best by the ‘Mafia’ (see [10]), Jewish, Irish and other migrant ‘organized crime’ groups, which were thought to be overrunning the illegal markets in the United States. In Europe, although the debate on ‘organized crime’ and illegal markets was not continuously preoccupied with ethnicity (see, for example, [25, 55]), similar research on the involvement of ethnic minorities and foreigners in ‘organized crime’ has been conducted. Although there are a number of authors, who reject the ethnic model as an important explanatory element, as Bovenkerk et al. [13] suggest, the image of the ethnically distinct ‘organized crime’ group is “...adhered to not only by the public but also by most criminologists...”. ‘Organized crime’ has been largely viewed as an ‘alien conspiracy’ [42], and this has constituted one of the most influential perspectives on ‘organised crime’ discourse, one that has greatly influenced how ‘organised crime’ has been viewed as well as the design of public policy against ‘organised crime’.

In the early 1990s Greece accepted a large number of foreigners as immigrants from a variety of contexts. It is extremely difficult to provide accurate figures regarding the number of foreigners as there are an unknown number of *undocumented* foreigners in the country. However, we could provide the numbers of *documented* foreigners. According to the last Greek Census in 2001 the total of documented foreigners in Greece was 797,091 [17]<sup>1</sup> in a population of 10,964,020. The largest foreign group by far are the Albanians and are followed by Bulgarians, Georgians, Romanians, Russians, and Ukrainians.

Since the very beginning of the 1990s ‘organised criminality’ has become an important aspect of the immigration nexus in Greece, and ethnicity has been viewed as an extremely important—if not the primary-explanatory variable. As Xenakis [61] has argued, it was in the 1990s that ‘organised crime’ was defined and understood as a problem in the Greek context. The ‘organised’ criminality of non-Greeks in Greece has been a political and academic ‘hot potato’. It is a fact that connecting minorities and migrants (terms that already have an emotional appeal, see [50]), with crime and ‘organized crime’ has been a practice that led to a “number of theoretical and political miscalculations and misconceptions” ([12]: 110), and fuelled the ‘crime-prone foreigner’ stereotype. However, avoiding or turning a blind eye to the topic of the relationship between ethnicity and ‘organised crime’ in Greece altogether would be at the expense of both Greeks and foreigners. This is because at the moment the stereotype of the ‘organised’, foreign criminal is very well consolidated in the Greek social consciousness, ethnicity remains at the core of public discourse on ‘organized crime’ in the country, and clear answers about the link between foreigners and ‘organised crime’ are needed.

Simultaneously, there has been very little research on ‘organised crime’ in Greece in general, and ‘organised crime’ and ethnicity in particular. The purpose of this article, which is based on previously published or publicised research that the author

<sup>1</sup> This is the number of *foreigners* as opposed to *immigrants* from specific countries that are subjected to criminalising processes (e.g. non EU Europeans such as Albanians). The term *foreigners* includes individuals who are immigrants and non-immigrant foreigners who, for instance, come from European Union member states.

**Table 1** Sources of information and data, by illegal market

Illegal market	Sources of information and data
Migrant smuggling business [6]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Interviews with Hellenic police officers in 2002;</li> <li>-Unpublished statistics on individuals arrested for migrant smuggling obtained from the Hellenic Police in 2003. These statistics refer to the first 8 months of 2000 and 2001;</li> <li>-Interviews with Albanian and Kurdish migrants living in southwest Greece (2002 and 2004);</li> <li>-Interviews with two Kurdish individuals, who were actively involved in the smuggling of migrants</li> </ul>
Cigarette black market [5]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Official statistics from the Hellenic Coast Guard and the Customs Authority;</li> <li>-Interviews with cigarette smugglers (three Kurdish retired cigarette smugglers, a Greek retired procurer, a Greek retired bootlegger and two ‘runners’);</li> <li>-Pre-trial reports from the Hellenic Coast Guard and the Hellenic Police;</li> <li>-Annual reports on ‘organised crime’ for the years 2004 and 2005 published by the Hellenic Ministry of Public Order (MPO);</li> <li>-Articles from high-circulation newspapers, financial and business news papers, locally circulated newspapers and press releases from the Ministry of Mercantile Marine and the Bureau for Special Inspections (<i>Ypiresia Eidikon Eleghon – Y.P.E.E.</i>);</li> <li>-Interviews with customers of the cigarette black market</li> </ul>
Market of stolen cars and car parts [4]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Statistics from the Hellenic Ministry of Public Order (MPO);</li> <li>-Articles from high-circulation national and local newspapers;</li> <li>-Pre-trial reports from the Hellenic police;</li> <li>-Interviews with Hellenic police in 2002 &amp; 2007;</li> <li>-Informal conversations with employees &amp; entrepreneurs in the legal car business;</li> <li>-Interview with engineer from the <i>Directorate of Transportation</i>;</li> <li>-Interview with used car dealer selling stolen cars;</li> <li>-Interviews with 2 professional car thieves</li> </ul>

For the analytic methodologies please refer to original sources as indicated in the table

has conducted on three illegal markets in Greece (*migrant smuggling business*, [6]; the *cigarette black market*, [5]; and the *market of stolen cars and car parts*, [4]), is to show the extent to which these illegal markets are ‘controlled’ or ‘owned’ by foreign nationals, and establish whether there is such thing as an ‘alien conspiracy’ in the particular country. This endeavour is based on the assumption that the aforementioned illegal markets are part of the body of knowledge widely defined as ‘organised crime’ (see [56] analysis on the study of the cigarette black market as a contribution to the study on ‘organised crime’).<sup>2</sup> The following table indicates the sources of information and data used during the author’s empirical research on the three illegal markets (Table 1).

<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that what is perceived as ‘organised crime’ does not *only* involve illegal markets (see, for instance, [59]).

In the following sections there will be a focus on: (a) the representation of ‘organised crime’ as an imported feature and the representation of the foreign ‘organised criminal’ in Greece and (b) the case studies of the three illegal markets researched. This article will finish with a discussion and a concluding section.

### ‘Alien conspiracy’: The ‘other’ vs. Greece

According to Potter [42], who has summarised the work of previous researchers and theorists such as Cressey [14] and Schelling [45], the basic tenets or propositions of the *Alien Conspiracy Theory* are:

- ‘Organised crime’ is a foreign thing. Something that is imported from abroad and is often associated with established ethnic minorities or recent unassimilated and often assimilated migrant groups [47].
- ‘Organised crime’ is the business of powerful, rigid, hierarchical, Mafia ‘organisations’ similar or identical to those in cinematographic accounts (e.g. *The Godfather*) that resemble legal businesses, corporations or even law enforcement agencies (see [14]).
- ‘Organised crime’ groups have the objective of monopolising an illegal market and expanding it even to an international level.
- ‘Organised crime’ groups engage in a ‘campaign’ to corrupt public officials, who are seen as *essential* for the smooth running of the business [45].
- ‘Organised crime’ groups engage in a campaign to corrupt the fiscal structures.
- Ethnicity is a *key variable* by which individuals are selected in / recruited by ‘organised crime organisations’ [14, 42].

Although these tenets have been—directly or indirectly—critiqued by a number of theorists and researchers (e.g. [11, 23, 37, 40, 46, 51, 60]), they continue being quite powerful in official and media discourse. The aforementioned tenets have been integral to the perception of ‘organised crime’ in Greece in the 1990s, a perception that is extremely persistent even today. In the beginning of the 1990s Greece introduced an immigration law, Law 1975 of 1991, the mentality of which as well the initial link between foreigners and ‘organised crime’, becomes clear in its introductory text where it is stated that foreigners create enormous social problems, and try to resolve their problems by being involved in criminal activities such as—among other—drug trafficking [26].

Clearly, in the beginning of 1990s the discussions on migration policies were in essence identified with discussions on ‘organised’ crime, conventional criminality, and crime control. It was then that for the first time ‘organised crime’ started to be perceived as a major issue for the Greek context despite the fact that what could be labelled as ‘organised criminal activities’ have existed in the country for centuries (see, for instance, [19, 29]). The Greek media created a climate of threat and ‘ontological (in)security’, as Giddens [20] would argue, and became the very root of a ‘moral panic’ based on the social awareness of ‘organised crime’ (see [18]), which in turn was based on the stereotype of the ‘Other’ (see [28]). Great emphasis was given to some forms of ‘organised criminality’, which were considered unknown to

the Greek context. Until the point of foreigners' entrance in Greece 'organised crime' was a synonym of the Italian *Mafia* and *La Cosa Nostra*, and the Colombian cocaine trafficking *Cartels* all of which, however, were viewed either as cinematographically interesting to the Greek public or distant from the Greek reality. Indeed 'organised crime' was seen as a very un-Greek thing, the importation of which coincided with the entrance of foreigners in the country in the beginning of the 1990s. However, these sensational terms such as the *Mafia* and the *Cartel* have been unquestionably used by the media as if they have been objectively representing the situation with 'organised crime' and illegal markets in the country.

The stereotype of the foreign 'organised criminal' was further reinforced by a number of high profile incidents in the late 1990s. These incidents were viewed through the prism of 'organised crime', even though evidence of a link between the individuals 'starring' in the incidents and 'organised crime' was absent. For example, the case of Flamur Pislí, a young Albanian, who being armed with an AK-47 and two hand grenades, held the passengers and the driver of a bus as hostages in May 1999. One of Pislí's requests, namely to be given passage to Albania, was granted. The Greek media were talking about "a reception that Albanian mafia was organising for Pislí" and about "some members of the Albanian mafia cheering for the hostage-taker's success" (see [21]). However, Pislí was a socially isolated offender and no 'Albanian mafia' link was ever established.

It is plausible to argue that these representations must have had an effect on how the Greek public views the issue of criminality of migrants including 'organised criminality'. Antonopoulos [2] in his study on public perceptions of migrant criminality and tendency of reporting migrant criminality found that the Greek public are adamant that migrants have altered the nature of crime in the country by 'importing' a number of criminal activities that were unknown to the Greek context before early 1990s such as drug trafficking, arms trafficking, women and children trafficking, and migrant smuggling among other.

Similar views are held by law enforcement agencies. In 1998 the Anti-Organised Crime Squad (*Soma Dioksis Organomenou Eglímatos*) was established in Athens. The squad's main concern was *Russian* 'organised crime'. Greek law enforcement agencies have also produced data compiled in official reports that signify the importance of ethnicity as a description and analysis variable when it comes to 'organised crime' in Greece. This is reflected in the Annual Organised Crime Reports (AOCR), which have been based on data and information provided by law enforcement agencies and have been published by the Greek Ministry of Public Order (MPO)<sup>3</sup>. Lambropoulou [29] expresses reservations over the definition of 'organised criminal activities' by the MPO as well as its evaluation. We share similar reservations; however, in the current article we are interested in 'organised crime' *representations* too, which AOCR are an integral part of. The AOCR make explicit reference to the threat posed by non-indigenous 'organised crime groups'. Specifically, the 1999 AOCR suggests that "the ethnic crime groups that constituted a specific threat... in 1999 were the Albanians, Russians, Bulgarians, Romanians, Turkish, Iraqi, and in some cases Pakistani and groups of Bangladeshi nationals..."

<sup>3</sup> In 2007 the Ministry of Public Order was merged with the Ministry for the Interior.

([32]: 2). The AOCR also make reference to the ethnicity of ‘criminal organisations’<sup>4</sup> and specifically the ‘vast majority’ of their ‘members’. According to the AOCR of 2004 and 2005 [33, 34] out of 317 ‘criminal organisations’, 110 (34.7%) comprised of foreign nationals only, 110 (34.7%) comprised of Greek nationals only, and a further 78 (24.6%) comprised of Greek and foreign nationals although—similarly to ‘organised’ crime reports in other contexts (e.g. Germany, see [57])—the degree and nature of collaboration among Greek and foreign nationals is unclear. The ethnic identity of the remaining 19 ‘criminal organisations’ could not be established. The AOCR also make reference to specific ethnic groups and their involvement in specific ‘organised criminal activities’. For example, the AOCR for 2004 [33] refers to ‘Albanian criminal organisations’ involved in drug trafficking, robberies and thefts, Turkish, Iraqi, Chinese and Pakistani ‘criminal organisations’ involved in migrant smuggling, Bulgarian ‘criminal organisations’ involved in counterfeiting and fraud, Romanian ‘criminal organisations’ involved in human trafficking, and Russian and Ukrainian ‘criminal organisations’ involved in cigarette smuggling. The 2004 AOCR also offers a more threatening aspect of these ‘criminal organisations’ by suggesting that the above ‘organisations’ “activities...remain stable over time and appear not to be affected by external or internal factors...” ([33]: 6).

The Greek economy is also portrayed as in danger due to the foreign illegal marketers. In an article appearing in the Greek daily *Ethnos*, for instance, it is estimated that the illegal trade of several commodities by 50,000 migrants results in € 2 billion in taxes being evaded [27]. In the same article the Chair of the Commerce Association of Piraeus argued that “...the illegals have been operating uninterrupted for many years now, without paying taxes, making a profit at the expense of consumers, healthy commerce, the local community, Greek economy and employment. They put small and medium businesses in serious danger, [and] weaken the legal, healthy commerce...” (in [27]: 34). In a similar vein, the Chair of the Commercial and Industrial Chamber of Athens, noted that these illegal trade activities involve “...imported smuggled goods” and what he suggested towards the ‘eradication’ of the illegal trade was—among other—tighter control of the borders (in [27]: 35).

Thus, it appears that Greece is permeated by perceptions about the ‘organised criminal Other’, who conspires against the Greek state and society, endangers the values of the country, transforms the quality of criminality in the country, and negatively influences the stability of the financial system. Needless to say, despite the certainly with which the whole issue of ‘organised crime’ was treated by politicians, media, the public and law enforcement agencies there has been no clear view as to what ‘organised crime’ really *is*. It has been largely perceived as a group of three or more people involved in the smuggling of several commodities, using violence and corrupting individuals towards amassing huge amounts of money, which is laundered in various ways. Overall, the issue of ‘organised crime’ and the involvement of foreigners in ‘organised crime’ have been perceived through the

<sup>4</sup> According to Law 2928 on ‘Organised Crime’, which was introduced in 2001 and was heavily influenced by international efforts to ‘combat organised crime’ such as the UN Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime, a ‘criminal organisation’ is a structured and with continuous action group comprising of three or more members.

**Table 2** Arrested migrant smugglers in Greece from January to August 2000 & January to August 2001, by country of origin

Country of origin	January–August 2000	January–August 2001
Albania	116	220
Armenia	5	5
Bangladesh	0	5
Belgium	0	3
Bulgaria	26	33
Czech Republic	2	1
Egypt	0	2
F.Y.R.O. Macedonia	7	5
Germany	1	2
Georgia	3	13
Greece	420	463
Netherlands	4	1
India	3	0
Iraq	21	21
Iran	2	4
Israel	1	0
Italy	1	0
Kazakhstan	1	0
Lebanon	5	0
Lithuania	1	0
Morocco	1	0
Moldova	1	0
Pakistan	4	4
Poland	1	0
Romania	14	9
Russia	12	3
Slovenia	0	1
Sudan	0	1
Sweden	0	2
Syria	4	7
Turkey	53	60
UK	2	0
Ukraine	8	4
Serbia & Montenegro	0	1
Total	719	870

Source: unpublished data obtained from the Greek police in summer 2003

prism of *threat* similarly to other contexts (see, for instance, [52]). Trigazis [49], a high rank police officer, argued in his report on the organisation of the Greek police against ‘organised crime’ that the phenomenon of ‘organised crime’ features high on the list of new dangers after the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the end of Cold War,



and that ‘organised crime’ threatens to corrode political institutions and disorganise economic order and societal cohesion. Simultaneously, however, the lack of adequate, sound, empirical data on ‘organised crime’, has provided for an obstacle to a *reliable* and *quality* assessment of ‘organised crime’ in the country (see [61]).

I will now turn to the social organisation of three illegal markets in Greece, namely the *migrant smuggling business* [6], the *cigarette black market* [5] and the *market of stolen cars and car parts* [4] all of which are based on the available evidence, in order to examine whether the ‘Alien Conspiracy’ tenets/propositions suggested directly or indirectly by politicians, the media, the public, and law enforcement agencies in Greece are present in these markets.

### Case study 1–migrant smuggling business

According to unpublished statistics obtained from the Greek police, the majority of the arrested migrant smugglers in Greece are Greeks. Specifically, they constituted 58.4% of the arrestees in the first 8 months of 2000, and 53.2% in the first 8 months of 2001. Albanian nationals are also heavily involved in smuggling of migrants primarily from Albania. In particular they accounted for 16.1% in the first 8 months of 2000, and 25.2% of the arrestees in the first 8 months of 2001. The third nationality in terms of arrested migrant smugglers is the Turks since they accounted for 7.4% and 6.9% of the total arrested human smugglers in the first 8 months of 2000 and 2001, respectively. The Bulgarians, Iraqi, Romanians, and Russians are also involved, and the rest of the nationalities constitute a small number of cases of involvement into migrant smuggling (see Table 2).

Due to their significant limitations, the aforementioned statistics should be treated cautiously. These official statistics omit accounting for a large number of persons operating in countries other than Greece, something that completely distorts the image we have for the migrant smuggling networks. Kurdish migrants in Greece as well as the Kurdish migrant smugglers interviewed, for instance, suggested that in the groups they were participating there were Pakistani, Syrian and Turkish (as well as Greek) smugglers involved in a well-coordinated effort. Thus, the fact that most of the individuals arrested for smuggling of migrants in Greece are Greek nationals, may in fact be the result of availability/accessibility of these individuals to the Greek authorities.

There is a ‘division of duties’ in migrant smuggling. These include: ‘*leader*’ (primarily for the Albanian groups), the *recruiters*, the *transporters/guides*, and the *scouters*, who have the responsibility to provide specific information about the checks of the police, the borderguards, and the army. The scouts, according to the police and the interviewed smugglers, are either Greeks, and specifically people with knowledge of the localities or documented and undocumented migrants, who have lived in Greece for a lengthy period, so as to enable them to know the localities and feel comfortable when moving around. Legal entrepreneurs, that is owners of legal businesses or workers in legal businesses, are also involved in the smuggling business. These are primarily *hotel/house/apartment owners*, who provide accommodation to migrants while they wait to be smuggled to either another location within a country or to another country. Legal entrepreneurs may also involve taxi drivers. The majority of the legal entrepreneurs involved in the migrant smuggling

business are Greeks. We only came across only a couple of cases in which a foreign worker in a legal business facilitated the smuggling of migrants.

The recruitment phase is an important part of the smuggling process. It could be safely argued that rather than the recruiter approaching 'clients' most of the times it is the other way around; the client approaches the smuggler either him/herself or through his/her social network in the source country. In the transit countries, the recruitment of migrants to be smuggled involves both the migrants approaching the smuggler(s) and the smuggler(s) approaching migrants in areas where migrants gather (e.g. port areas). Prospective smuggled migrants, whether in the source or a transit country, are instructed as to the place they should gather and are given a specific date and time of departure. A large part (at least half) or whole of the payment is usually received by the smuggler before the journey something which does not guarantee that the 'client' will reach his/her destination or, if so, alive and safe. Prospective smuggled individuals sell property or borrow money from relatives and friends in the country of origin, transit or destination countries in order to find cash for the journey. If cash is not available then property is handed over to the smuggler. There is no standard price for smuggling someone into or out of Greece. This largely depends on the distance, the means of transportation, the difficulties faced by the smugglers, the time of the year and the weather phenomena, and the presence of the army, the coast guard and/or the border police, and generally the complexities of the journey or the nationality of the smuggled individuals. For instance, Kurdish migrants pay less than migrants of other nationalities such as Indians.

In many instances violence is part of the migrants smuggling process. Smuggling groups, particularly the Albanian ones, have individuals, who are responsible for safeguarding the smuggling business through the use of violence or the threat of use of violence. However, violence is not an indispensable feature of the smuggling business. Moreover, corruption seems to be an integral part of the smuggling process when the smuggling involves crossing *many* transit countries or involves a *large* number of individuals. There is evidence of corrupt public officials not only facilitating the smuggling process or being bribed by primarily Greek smugglers simply to turn a blind eye but also being *actively* involved in the process. The corrupt public officials in Greece are exclusively Greek nationals since foreign nationals are barred from becoming public servants.

### Case study 2—cigarette black market

In 2004 there were 415 cases of cigarette smuggling known to the authorities, and 310,961,785 cigarettes were seized, which amounted for € 31,736,151.34 in evaded taxes. In 2005 there were 338 known cases of cigarette smuggling, and 258,444,000 cigarettes were seized, which amounted for € 23,895,039.35 in evaded taxes (Customs Authority [15]). The figures presented above do not provide a picture of the actual cigarette smuggling in the country, but only those cases that the Greek authorities come across. There is certainly a dark figure of cigarette smuggling in the country, and despite the fact that the European Confederation of Cigarette Retailers (cited in [58]: 12) argues that the illicit market share in Greece in the mid-1990s was 8%, it is impossible, given the quantity and the quality of the current statistical data and the lack of sophisticated efforts, to validate or disprove such a claim.

There seems to be a range of ‘entities’ involved in cigarette smuggling that can be placed on a continuum. The smuggling of cigarettes can be conducted by individuals or by networks that capitalise on price differentials or need for social enhancement. There is also a number of ‘actors’ in the cigarette smuggling business in Greece. The presentation of the division of labour/‘actors’ does not necessarily mean that these appear in every smuggling network. These ‘actors’ are: the *Wholesaler*, who buys and assembles quantities of the merchandise, and distributes them in smaller parts to the ‘pushers’. The wholesalers are Greeks and there is evidence of some foreign nationals. For instance in Antonopoulos’ [5] research a Russian and a Polish wholesaler were identified. There are also the *Procurers*, who are primarily Greek businessmen, and who buy large quantities of cigarettes from Greek tobacco companies with the intention to export them to Balkan countries. Middle-level smugglers include the *Pushers*, individuals who introduce the smuggled cigarettes into the street-level market. We came across pushers from the republics of the former Soviet Union, Kurdistan, and Greece. The *Street-sellers* are primarily drawn from the migrant community of the country and specifically from the community of migrants (including migrant ethnic Greeks) from the former Soviet and Kurdistan, and there is a small number of Albanian, Romanian, and Bulgarian migrants. There is also a small number of Greek Roma involved in the street selling of contraband cigarettes. The *Scouters/Look-Outs* warn street-sellers about the presence of the police in the area, and specifically known to them non-uniformed officers who exert money from street-sellers, and the *Warehouse Guards* are responsible for ‘guarding’ the storing places. Scouters/Look-Outs and Warehouse Guards are members of the migrant community in the country with very few exceptions. *Legitimate shop and kiosk owners* are Greeks, who own a shop or a kiosk in or around the street-selling area and ‘operate’ as a quick ‘refuelling’ point for street sellers, a place of quickly ‘hiding’ the smuggled cigarettes or a distribution point for contraband (as well as legal) cigarettes. An interesting set of actors in the business are the *Thieves/Burglars/Robbers*, ‘professionals’ who steal from warehouses of cigarettes destined for the legal market or from kiosks and other retail outlets. They are not an *integral* part of the cigarette smuggling network and they do not continuously feed the market with merchandise. We have come across thieves/burglars/robbers from countries of the former Soviet Union, Albania and Greece. The transportation of the merchandise is the responsibility of the *Drivers/Captains*. The majority of truck drivers are Greeks, and there are a number of Bulgarian, FYROM, Italian, Romanian, Turkish, Polish and Irish drivers. Captains, according to the available evidence, tend to be Greeks, Russians, Ukrainians, and Bulgarians. A node of the cigarette smuggling networks are the ‘*Protectors*’, who engage in the protection of the interests of cigarette smuggling business from extortion gangs, primarily of Albanian and Russian origin. They are also not an integral part of the smuggling and distribution of contraband cigarettes business. In the current research we came across ‘protectors’ from the former Soviet Union. In addition, there are a number of Greek ‘protectors’ also selling protection to establishments of the nocturnal economy. Finally, there are the corrupt public officials, who they are either actively involved in the cigarette smuggling business or turn a blind eye to the business. Corrupt public officials associated with the cigarette smuggling business in Greece include primarily police officers, customs officers, and coast guards. All corrupt public officials are Greek.

**Table 3** Greeks and foreign nationals arrested by the Hellenic Coast Guard for cigarette smuggling, 2000–2004

	Greeks	Foreign nationals
2000	54	101
2001	7	17
2002	4	37
2003	7	28
2004	12	20
2000–2004	84	203

Source: Hellenic Coast Guard [22]

There are big differences between the socio-economic characteristics of these actors in the three separate levels of cigarette smuggling (upper, middle and street-level, see [56]). Upper level smugglers include a wide range of individuals who lead respectable lives, and have a quite diverse employment and socio-economic background, whereas the common characteristic of the participants in the street-level is their socio-economic marginalisation.

The street-level market is largely ignored by law enforcement. However, this is not the case with the transportation (and warehousing) of contraband cigarettes. According to data obtained from the Hellenic Coast Guard [22], the majority of cigarette smugglers arrested by the Coast Guard from 2000 to 2004 are foreign nationals (70.7%, see Table 3).

It should be noted however, that these figures do not present the actual representation of foreigners in the cigarette black market in Greece, but simply the over-representation of foreigners in the transportation of the merchandise, a part of the business that is vulnerable to apprehension.

The legal sector is heavily involved in the cigarette black market. Similarly to other contexts (see, for example, [7, 58]) tobacco manufacturers in Greece in essence support or ‘turn a blind eye’ to cigarette smuggling for their own reasons. Legitimate businesses such as warehouses, logistics companies and importation/exportations companies are (knowingly or unknowingly) involved along with retail shops that sell contraband cigarettes. The contraband cigarettes are distributed in the open and a closed market. The open market exists in public space in Athens, Thessaloniki and Piraeus and the closed markets in many cities, towns and resorts throughout the country.

Violence is an extremely rare feature of the cigarette black market in Greece, and this is one of the reasons the market is largely tolerated by the public and the police. Violence jeopardises the market by attracting unnecessary attention on the part of law enforcement agencies, and is therefore “bad for business” ([41]: 42).

### Case study 3—stolen car and car parts market

The number of cars that are *trafficked* is basically the number of cars that are not *recovered*. However, the available evidence from the Greek Ministry of Public Order (MPO) relates to *cleared* car thefts, which does not automatically mean that the cars

are *recovered*. Nevertheless, according to the police interviewed, the number of cleared thefts and the recovered cars are about the same. Due to the small differences, the available official statistics on cleared thefts can offer a valid representation of the volume of cars stolen *in* Greece and traded illegally.

From 1998 to 2006, 56,390 cars were stolen. The majority of these thefts were committed in urban centres and particularly the Greater Athens area. 27,542 car thefts were not cleared (48.8%). Having the aforementioned data-related issue in mind, we can consider that *about* 27,542 cars were not recovered and were thus illegally traded. It should be noted however, that the number of non-recovered vehicles as an indication of the volume of illegally traded vehicles *in* Greece possesses more limitations:

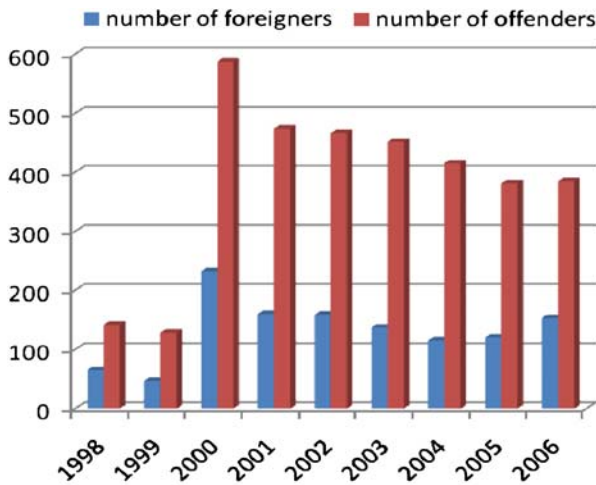
- Statistics on car thefts in Greece include cars that were stolen within Greece whereas car trafficking involves cars being stolen in Greece *and* other countries or stolen in other countries and traded in Greece.
- A number of cars are stolen in Greece however, there are being traded illegally in other contexts, as it will be shown.
- There are some cases in which a stolen car is recovered with some parts missing. These parts have been illegally traded but the vehicle is recovered and there is no official recording of the parts' theft.
- Non-recovered cars may be stolen for joyriding or the facilitation of another criminal activity and be hidden, destroyed or thrown into the sea. Although, as the police argued, this is rare, their non-recovery does not mean they have been traded.

There are generally three phases in the car trafficking business. The first phase involves stealing a car. The second phase involves 'recycling' a car by altering the stolen car's VIN (Vehicle Identification Number), the 17-digit number, which is unique for every car, with the VIN of a crashed vehicle of same type and model. The 'recycling' of a stolen car can also be achieved by the *production of fraudulent car documents*. The final phase involves selling the stolen and 'recycled' car. Moreover, it would be appropriate to add another phase, transportation of stolen cars, for those cases in which cars are imported/exported into/out of Greece. The theft of a car is performed primarily by professional thieves. The 'recycling' of the stolen cars is usually performed in garages in various Greek cities and towns many times by individuals who work legally in the field of car repairs.

Greece is a source, transit and destination country for traded stolen cars. Cars stolen from Greece are driven to Albania, FYROM, Bulgaria, and Turkey or transported in containers to countries of the Middle-East. Cars are also stolen from countries of Western Europe such as Germany, Italy, France, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain and sold to Greece or in (other) Balkan and Eastern European countries and Turkey, Middle-East and Asia via Greece. Cars or cars parts are sold in legal used car and/or car part dealerships cheaper than their original prices or their real price in the market.

From 1998 to 2006, out of the 3,429 offenders known to the police, 1,187 (34.6%) were foreign nationals ([35]; Fig. 1).

This suggests that there is an over-representation of foreigners in the known offenders in Greece given that, according to the latest census, registered *foreigners*



Source: Data obtained from MPO (2007)

**Fig. 1** Number of total offenders and number of foreign offenders for car theft in Greece, 1998-2006  
Source: Data obtained from [35??]

constitute 7.3% of the total population of the country [17]. These figures however, suffer from a major drawback, namely they refer to known offenders for car *thefts*. In consequence, we cannot be certain about whether the foreign nationals are responsible for stolen cars that are *non-recovered*, and are, therefore, introduced in the market of stolen cars. The pre-trial reports obtained by the Greek police suggest that when foreign nationals steal a car, they abandon it shortly after the theft having stolen several articles or after having escaped. In addition, according to evidence from the pre-trial reports, in all cases in which foreign nationals were arrested for car theft, the cars were found and returned to their legal owners *immediately*, which suggests that the VIN was not altered. According to the Greek legislation when the VIN of a car is altered, the car is forwarded not to its legal owner but to the *Public Property Management Organisation (ODDY in Greek)* for auction. Other evidence such as this provided by interviews with car thieves, however, suggests the participation of foreign nationals in the *theft, recycling and transportation* phases of the business. For example, Russians and Italians are involved in the theft of a car, whereas Hungarians, Armenians and Georgians—among other—are involved in the transportation of stolen cars. We have not come across any evidence of the involvement of foreigners in the sale of stolen cars and car parts *in Greece*.

Corruption in the car trafficking business *in Greece* is not a major theme because instrumental parts of the illegal trade in stolen cars such as the change of VIN, do not need the contribution of public officials to materialise. In addition, the fact that the ‘recycling’ and the sale of stolen cars (and car parts) usually take place within legal businesses explains further why public officials do not come into frequent adversarial contact with people involved in the trade. Finally, violence is not an integral part of the car trafficking business. There is no monopoly in the illegal trade in stolen cars, and stolen cars or stolen car parts are distributed through numerous

legal outlets. There is, therefore, no particular need to control large parts of (stolen) merchandise or segments of the market.

## Discussion

It is evident that the official and ‘unofficial’ discourse on ‘organised crime’ in Greece has fallen into what Albanese [1] calls “the ethnicity trap”. The perception that there is an ‘alien conspiracy’ against Greece embodied in ‘organised crime’ and the establishment of detrimental illegal markets based on specific groups of foreigners is consolidated in the country. This perception must be seen within the general context of immigration as well as the immigration—and-crime nexus. Several variables have been instrumental with the legal framework in Greece (and the rest of ‘Fortress Europe’) being extremely important. This legal framework greatly influenced “the opportunity structures of undocumented migrants” (Engbersen and van der Leun, 1998: 217), and led to the marginalisation and exclusion of immigrants that were ‘allowed’ to remain in the country. By allowing for very few legal channels for migration into the country, this legal framework also led to a large number of migrants resorting to the services of smugglers. The media have played an important role in this criminalisation process. A ‘moral panic’ about (the ‘organised criminality’ of) migrants has been prevalent in Greece, and the ‘organized criminal Other’ has been an image prevalent in the media representations on the national and local level (see, for example, [26, 28]). Unfavourable stereotypical *public* views about foreigners can also be observed in Greece (see [2]) some of which are based on deep historical and social variables, and which have further distanced Greeks and immigrants socially, and reinforced the exclusionary attitudes and practices towards migrants.

There are however, issues for discussion in relation to the participation of foreigners in ‘organised crime’ and illegal markets in particular. As was shown earlier, there has been a wider official, media and public perception in Greece that illegal markets are the context of operation of rigid, hierarchical, Mafia-type organisations. Unlike some other countries *this is a mainstream approach to ‘organised crime’*, perhaps due to the Greek discourse and policy not placing a focus on the issue of ‘organise crime’ until recently, as well as the inadequate empirical research on the topic. However, as it was shown by the presentation of the social organisation of three illegal markets, this is largely a mistaken perception. No evidence for mafia-type structures could be found. The important entity in all three markets is this of the *network* (see, for example, [44]). The dynamics of the markets and the context within which these markets take place do not allow for the establishment of rigid, pyramidal structures. There is no ‘organisation’ or ‘authority’, which enforces or directs policy and practice to supposedly ‘members’ of such an ‘organisation’. Instead what does exist in the described illegal markets are networks of action-oriented individuals, who in most instances act for their personal interests and often on improvisation. Networks are the best vehicle for these illegal businesses since “...the most reliable flow of supply comes from myriad of small scale, uncoordinated firms. Having diverse source for the illicit commodities means that if the regulators knock off one or a few, the market continues uninterrupted” ([8]: 17).



Similarly, there is no 'transnational' authority coordinating each of the illegal markets presented in the current article something that detracts from the representation of 'organised crime' as an *imported* feature that is offered by the MPO's annual reports on 'organised crime'. According to van Duyne [52], given that "...since time immemorial the traffic of most... commodities implies the crossing of border, it is difficult to understand the added value of the adjective 'transnational'". We can pose the same reservation if one considers, for instance, that evidence of tobacco smuggling involving Greeks has been present long before the presence of migrant/foreign nationals' communities in the country. Gardikas [19] argues that in the 1950s the Greek police had a *modus operandi* file for smugglers, which included tobacco and cigarette paper smugglers. This was long before the transformation of Greece into an immigration country, and the tobacco black market was certainly not a business controlled by the 'Other'.

The ethnic make-up of the networks involved in the illegal markets presented in this article is also a very interesting issue and instrumental for the argument posed. These networks are ethnically *heterogeneous* as they involve individuals of various nationalities, and by no means confine themselves to specific ethnic groups or 'exclude' specific ethnic groups (although one may observe the absence of specific nationalities from *specific parts* of an illegal market). Such a practice would provide for an impediment for the business since a number of individuals having the capital, social relations, and the access to merchandise as well as the abilities to be involved in the business would be displaced at the expense of the (illegal) market. Foreigners are involved in the three illegal markets presented here (and indeed other illegal markets in the country) and many of those serve as important nodes in the networks; however, by no means foreigners control the three markets presented. At best they may have some control over individuals who belong to the same ethnic group forming clusters that are important to the business; or they may control specific parts of the market. Because of stereotypes, discrimination and other reasons, it is extremely difficult for foreigners, particularly non-EU nationals, to be involved in important parts of the illegal businesses. For example, foreigners cannot be involved in the selling of stolen cars through a used car dealership primarily because migrants do not own (at least as yet) used car dealerships. Moreover, it is very likely that even if they owned such a business this would have been either scrutinised by the law enforcement or looked unfavourably by the Greek buyers. In addition, no foreigners have ever been accused of corruption in Greece simply because no foreigner can be a public official.

Greek nationals are heavily involved in different phases and different levels of the illegal markets presented. For instance, Greek tobacco manufacturers in essence support the black market in cigarettes for their own objectives, which are—to an extent—similar to these of the illegal entrepreneurs involved in the cigarette black market. In addition, Greek used car dealers many times *knowingly* sell stolen cars, and Greek hotel/house/apartment owners provide lodging for undocumented migrants in the smuggling process.

The heavy involvement of Greeks in illegal markets not only signifies that these illegal markets are not exclusively the business of the 'Other' but also offers a very clear indication of the ways in which the *legal* and the *illegal* are increasingly blurred. There is a wider perception that there is a clear boundary between the *legal*



and the *illegal* market, the *upperworld* and the *underworld* [53]. This is not surprising since, as Edwards and Gill [16] suggest, “this perception of illicit entrepreneurs operating beyond and outside of the legitimate economy can be understood as a logical consequence of the perception of criminal organisations as external interlopers”. In other words the distinction between the upperworld and the underworld is well placed in the conceptualisation of ‘organised crime’ as a *negative, imported* feature associated with the ‘Other’. However, illegal marketers are there not to subvert the legal system but only to exploit opportunities for profit and in the same way illegal marketers are benefited by the legal sector, legal businesses are also benefited by ‘organised crime’ in various ways. The illegal markets presented in the current article are not always antagonistic or injurious [39] to their legitimate counterparts or the legal sector as a whole. Criminality is not completely unknown to legitimate businesses and neither do criminals live off legitimate business in a parasitic way.

It is questionable whether ‘organised crime’ engages in a campaign to corrupt public officials, as proposed by ‘Alien Conspiracy Theory’. Firstly, Greek public officials are not essentially ethical. Over the years, for example, there have been many cases of police corruption publicized in the Greek media that revealed the accepting of bribes, erasing fines for traffic offences given to friends and relatives, as well as getting actively involved in ‘organized criminal activities’ such as drug trafficking, extortion, trafficking and smuggling of migrants into Greece, and the sex industry. The examples of police corruption, which mostly have the veil of financial gain, are precipitated by the low pay of police officer and indeed other law enforcement agents. Secondly, as was mentioned earlier, corruption of public officials is *not essential* for illegal business. It only becomes essential when there is an adversarial confrontation between illegal marketers and law enforcement agents [30].

Finally, a variable that influences the presence of some (illegal) markets in Greece is not produced by ‘outsiders’ but by forces that are *exclusively* Greek. These are, for instance, the forces of demand for a specific commodity in a market culture (see [48]). Potter has suggested that “organised crime is an ongoing and continually developing social process” ([42]: 40), and indeed forms of ‘organised crime’ and/or illegal markets have to be seen as an integral part of the general social, historical, legal and economic contexts in the country. For instance, the smuggling of migrants is a business facilitated by the strict legal framework of immigration in Greece (and the rest of the western world) that does not leave many options to migrants but to seek for the services of smugglers. Additionally, the very nature of economic activity in Greece, involving small-scale family businesses, agriculture, the traditional existence of the (large) informal economy as well as the reluctance of young Greek people to be employed in unglamorous and underpaid jobs, create a fertile ground for the demand of cheap labour [43] supported by the smuggling of migrants. Similarly, cigarettes constitute a commodity for which there is a very large, receptive market, which involves “voluntary transfers” and “an implicit notion of fair market value” ([36]: 85), and is, therefore, received well by large parts of the population. It is also useful to note that the illegal marketers attempt at exploiting opportunities and gaining profit by counterbalancing the interventions and restrictions imposed to a market by the state and authorities themselves, who act as the ultimate “market determiners” ([54]: 46).

## Conclusion

As the presentation of the three case studies shows, the three particular illegal markets in Greece are not 'controlled' or 'owned' by foreigners, and ethnicity as a social variable in these markets is over-estimated. The current article does not of course suggest that foreigners are not involved in 'organised criminal activities' in Greece neither completely precludes the possibility that ethnically homogeneous, hierarchical structures may be present in, 'control' or own' other illegal markets. In addition, it is not my intention in this paper to discuss the 'alien conspiracy' in those sectors considered as 'organised crime' that do not possess entrepreneurial characteristics. Additional research is needed and recommended not only in the three particular markets presented in this article but also on other markets such as, for instance, the drugs and arms markets in Greece as well as 'organised criminal activities' that do not display entrepreneurial characteristics such as extortion and violence. Within such a research nexus, the role of foreigners and the patterns of cooperation among groups of foreigners, and between foreigners and Greeks in these markets and activities must emerge as one of the primary objectives. Understanding the conditions under which illegal market associational and organizational structures, which are more complex than the two extremes (Mafia–Networks), emerge is also an interesting and important issue to be researched.<sup>5</sup> The 'conspiring criminal alien' is an image well integrated in the Greek social consciousness, and one that has led to the further criminalisation and victimisation of foreigners in the country (see, for example, [3]) particularly the non-EU nationals or nationals from 'non-respectable countries'. We can only agree with Paoli and Reuter [38] in that "the relationship between ethnic minorities and crime...is too important to be left solely to moral entrepreneurs".

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<sup>5</sup> I owe this point to Klaus von Lampe.

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