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### Contesting national belonging: An established-outsider figuration on the margins of Thessaloniki, Greece

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Based on an ethnography of the relationship between Greek immigrants from the former Soviet Union and native Greeks in a neighbourhood in Thessaloniki, Greece, this book enquires into the practical deployment of ideologies of national belonging in immigrant-native figurations. Breaking with those theoretical perspectives that either assume the nationalistic standpoint or ignore it as if it did not matter, it aims to uncover, analyse and problematize the hegemonic power of ideologies of national belonging in structuring immigrant-native relations.



Manolis Pratsinakis

# Contesting National Belonging

An established–outsider  
figuration on the margins  
of Thessaloniki, Greece



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# Introduction

According to the nationalist image of normal life, cross-border migration and settlement is an anomaly, a problematic exception to the rule that people should stay in the places where they belong – that is, in ‘their’ nation states (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002, p.311). Sociological research on the settlement of immigrants has largely mirrored and reproduced such an image; no sooner does a category of immigrants arrive in the ‘host’ society than they are turned into ‘ethnics’ and scrutinized for ‘their’ cultural and social difference (Waldinger, 2003)<sup>1</sup>. ‘Ethnic difference’ is what is at stake, and, from the nationalist perspective, what should be abolished. Here comes mainstream sociology to measure ‘the level of integration of ethnic groups’ and inform policy makers and native society whether they are doing well and whether social policy is succeeding in integrating them.

The dominance of the nation-centric viewpoint in the sociology of migration is also reflected in the selection of cases. Much of the literature is preoccupied with the migrations which are framed as problems in national public and political discourses. Adopting the commonsensical framing of those cases, migration researchers aim to provide answers to policy concerns rather than to sociological questions (Banton, 2008). Without underplaying the contribution that social science research can make in tackling practical social problems, its more important role is to ask questions and assess what really does constitute a problem; and in what terms, to whom, and why. For this reason, Becker (1998) proposes that it is necessary to select cases which make us question our assumptions. Following Becker’s proposal, this study focuses on an exceptional case of migration, one which is commonly cherished by the ‘receiving’ national society, at

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<sup>1</sup> In welfare states, moreover, their economic trajectories are followed obsessively.

least formally: this is the immigration of people who have always lived outside the borders of the nation but who are nonetheless regarded as co-nationals.

My study is an ethnography of the relationship between two categories of residents in a neighbourhood in Thessaloniki, Greece – one comprising Greeks born and raised in the country, the other also being of Greek descent, but having immigrated from countries formerly belonging to the Soviet Union and lacking any roots within the borders of the Greek state. In looking at this special case, I aim to explore the practical deployment of ideologies of national belonging in immigrant-native figurations. As will be described in what follows, this is an area which is surprisingly under-researched in the sociology of migration.

Traditionally a source country for emigration, Greece became a destination for immigration in the early 1970s (Nikolinakos, 1975). The influx gathered momentum during the 1990s, when the immigrant population more than quadrupled in size (Baldwin-Edwards, 2005). The steep increase in immigration to Greece during that decade was closely connected to the disintegration of the former communist bloc, and was caused by two distinct population movements: mass undocumented immigration from the Balkans, and immigration of people of Greek descent. In relation to ideologies of Greekness that define national belonging as a privilege deriving from descent, the perception and regulation of those two population movements has been markedly asymmetric.

On the one hand, the inflow and settlement of a significant non-Greek immigrant population has been treated as an undesired development. Immigration policies enforced non-Greek immigrants' exclusion from a multitude of social, political, and economic domains by way of institutional obstacles. On the other hand, in line with the Greek state's perceived responsibility towards co-ethnics, the migration of people of Greek descent was treated more positively. The settlement of ethnic Greeks from the former Soviet Union (whom I will for simplicity refer to as FSU Greeks)<sup>2</sup> was encouraged and facilitated by state

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'FSU Greek' is neither (a translation of) a term of self-identification nor an ascribed categorical label. Greeks from the FSU are categorized by politicians, media, state officials, and lay people via a multiplicity of labels such as: repatriates (παλλιννοστούντες), 'people of same descent' (ομογενείς), new-refugees (Νεο-πρόσφυγες), Pontics (Πόντιοι), Russian-Pontics (Ρωσοπόντιοι), Greek-Pontics (ελληνοπόντιοι), and even Russians (Ρώσοι). I decided not to adopt any of these terms for the purpose of identifying this immigrant group, since the analysis of the meanings of such terms is at the core of my enquiry. Having said that, I should clarify that the term 'FSU Greeks' is not neutral either. My term of choice overstresses the common experience of those so labelled as subjects of the Soviet regime, as well their Greek descent, in comparison to other aspects of their identity which might be more important for them. The term 'FSU Greeks' was preferred over the more commonly used term 'Soviet Greeks' because the latter might be taken to indicate that

policies. Those state policies were legitimated by the official view that these are fellow nationals who are finally coming ‘home’.

Officially, FSU Greeks are not categorized as immigrants nor counted among the immigrant population in Greece. The term ‘immigration’ (μετανάστευση), being rather negatively loaded in the political discourse, was considered by state officials as inappropriate to frame their movement. Instead, the vocabulary of repatriation was adopted. Although neither they nor their ancestors have ever lived in Greece, FSU Greek immigrants were termed ‘repatriates’ (παλιννοστούντες). Politicians and the national media portrayed them as rejoining their homeland driven by innate national feelings, and ‘their return’ was conceptualized as a resource for the country. Their settlement was also expected to be smooth, or at least much smoother than that of foreign immigrants who were arriving at the same time (Kokkinos, 1991).

My personal interest in the interrelationship between FSU and native Greeks was triggered while I was in the army in 2005. Military service is obligatory for all male Greeks, including those who have immigrated from the former Soviet Union. During my first day as a conscript in the training army camp, rumours spread that in the company where the majority of FSU Greeks were assigned there were clashes between them and native conscripts. The few FSU Greeks in our company disparagingly refused to follow the rules, ridiculing the authority of the officials, and on limited occasions also provoking other conscripts.

The response of the officials was ambivalent. They generally avoided confrontation and decided to grant to several FSU Greek conscripts long leaves to de-escalate tensions. Their reaction probably reflected a reluctance to push things right to the edge, since most of the FSU Greeks only served for a limited time.<sup>3</sup> It might also have reflected an understanding of the financial difficulties faced by several FSU Greeks whose conscription further reduced their limited

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Greeks from the former Soviet Union collectively identify with the former Soviet Union, which is not the case.

Equally problematic to the term FSU Greeks is the term ‘native Greeks’, which I use to identify people of Greek descent born in Greece. As a matter of fact, many of those I call native Greeks are descendants of refugees who fled Asia Minor after the Greek-Turkish War in the 1920s (see chapters 2, 4, and 7). The validity of both terms is limited to their analytical treatment in relation to the subject matter of the present research, namely to differentiate people of Greek descent who immigrated from the former Soviet Union from the Greeks already living in Greece. That is also the reason why I did not adopt self identifications; these did not help differentiate between the two categories in the presentation of the material (on the issue of self identification, see chapter 7).

<sup>3</sup> Those FSU Greeks who had fulfilled their military obligations in the former Soviet Union or in a successor state served in the Greek army for a reduced period of 3 months. The standard conscription period at that time was 12 months.

family income. Nonetheless, several native conscripts were indignant at what they perceived as preferential treatment for the FSU Greeks, whom they thought aggressive and uncivilized.

The collective unruliness of the FSU Greek conscripts in their very first days in the camp seemed to indicate that the expectations of policy makers regarding friendly coexistence between FSU and native Greeks might not have been fulfilled in practice. The FSU Greek conscripts' confrontational attitude possibly hinted at pre-existing tensions between them and native Greeks outside the army, and expressed their willingness to challenge the authority of native Greek society. The symbolism of this experience was all the stronger due to the emblematic position of army as the national institution representing national cohesion and discipline. It directly questioned the ideologies of Greekness that underlay the official state policy.

At that time, in the context of her work on policy making and the FSU Greek migration, Voutira (2004) was making reference to the existence of a cultural collision between native and FSU Greeks, aggravated by the incongruent expectations each held of each other. She pointed to the development of prejudiced ideas about the FSU Greeks, and the devaluation of their Greekness by the dominant society. My study set out to look in detail at how FSU and native Greeks think about and associate with each other, while restricting attention to one neighbourhood where they cohabit: specifically, Nikopoli in Thessaloniki.

Nikopoli is a working-class neighbourhood on the north-western outskirts of the city of Thessaloniki, Greece. It developed in the early 1960s through processes of unauthorized construction by internal immigrants that came to the city from neighbouring villages, and expanded rapidly after 1995 largely by and for immigrants of Greek descent from the former Soviet Union. At the time of my ethnographic research (2007-2009), it housed approximately 10,000 people, the majority being FSU Greeks, followed by native Greeks, and a small number of non-Greek immigrants. FSU Greeks and native Greeks are spatially segregated within the neighbourhood, to a large extent as an outcome of Nikopoli's history of expansion.

From the first days of my stay in Nikopoli it became apparent to me that native and FSU Greeks do not intermingle in the public space or in the few taverns and cafeterias of the neighbourhood. At the same time, most native Greeks living in Nikopoli talked in a derogatory way about their FSU Greek neighbours. Negative attitudes were inferred from the stories people heard from others, usually concerning FSU Greek's alleged aggressiveness and delinquent behaviour, or were supported with reference to how they saw them use the neighbourhood's public

space. Neither their common nationality and religion, nor their shared working-class background, seemed to provide the conditions for friendly coexistence and mutual understanding between the members of the two communities in Nikopoli. Neither did the origin in Pontos, an area on the south-eastern coast of the Black Sea, that many immigrants and natives shared. Most native residents held a prejudiced image about FSU Greeks, and denied their Greekness.

Such ideas are in sharp contrast with the presentation of FSU Greek migration, by politicians and the media, as fellow nationals coming home – a contrast that points to the apparent complexity of the role played by ideologies of national belonging in everyday life. My study enquires into this issue through the exploration of the following research questions: *How do FSU and native Greeks perceive and experience national belonging in everyday life?* And: *How do ideologies of national belonging influence the figuration in which their mutual relationship is cast in Nikopoli?*

## 1.1 From assimilation to established-outsider figurations

For reasons that I hope will soon become apparent, during my fieldwork in Nikopoli I was reminded of Elias and Scotson's book *The Established and the Outsiders* (1994/1965). Their study of Winston Parva, a community comprising a core neighbourhood and two settlements that had formed around it at later phases, manifested a sharp division between the older and the newer group of residents. The older residents closed ranks against the newcomers and stigmatized them as people of lesser worth. Similarly to the figuration in Nikopoli, the two groups did not differ in terms of nationality, religion, ethnic descent, or class background.

In Winston Parva the only difference between the two groups related to their length of residency. The detailed enquiry into their relations led Elias and Scotson to the development of the *established-outsider figuration*; a theoretical model of group relations and stigmatization which, they claimed, could be applied to a wide range of unequal group relations. This model, derived from a figuration that bears intriguing similarities to that studied in Nikopoli, seemed to provide a relevant analytical frame for the exploration of my field material. I do assign it a central position within my theoretical framework, but not only because of the empirical affinities between Winston Parva and Nikopoli. My most important motivation for giving Elias and Scotson's model this central place is my conviction that it provides a more insightful heuristic metaphor to explore

immigrant–native relations than that offered by the literature on immigrant integration.

In that literature the relation between immigrants and natives has been traditionally conceptualized as a matter of cultural adaptation. This conceptualization has been commonly informed by normative ideas about whether immigrant populations, described as conglomerates of ethnic groups, should retain their supposed cultural distinctiveness. On the one hand, classical assimilation theory has favoured and predicted the ceasing of ‘ethnic difference’, perceived not as a relational phenomenon but as an attribute of immigrant groups. On the other hand cultural pluralism has challenged the assimilationist expectations for the dissolution of ‘ethnic difference’ and has called for the equal recognition of the cultural expressions of immigrant groups. Both theories have been rightfully critiqued for essentializing culture as a property of ethnic groups (Faist, 2000; Turner, 1999).

Scholars working within the paradigm of transnationalism have partly succeeded in transcending the problem. They have emphasized migrants’ durable ties across countries<sup>4</sup> and have highlighted the fact that immigrants develop their sense of identity and community through a syncretism of cultural elements from both the homeland and the receiving nation. Claiming that many immigrants are able to live to a certain degree in two worlds at once, scholars of transnationalism have argued for the need to move beyond the nation state as the basic unit of analysis. In so doing they have shifted research attention away from the adaptation of sharply differentiated and bounded ethnic groups in the national mainstream. Deploying a constructionist perspective, they have emphasized individual and collective choice (Basch, et al., 1994; Faist, 2000; Portes, 1996; Schiller, et al., 1995; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998).

Yet transnationalism scholars, in their attempt to go beyond nation-centred thinking, downplayed the continuing potency of nationalism in forging identities, groupings and – most crucially for the subject matter here – perceptions of belonging (Favell, 2003; Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). Overcoming the fallacy of groupism (Brubaker, 2002; Cohen, 1978)<sup>5</sup> and conceiving culture in more processual and relational terms is not sufficient to fully grasp the dynamics which characterize immigrant–native relations. This is because immigrant–native

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<sup>4</sup> Transnationalism is a concept used widely also outside migration studies to refer to economic political and social formations that span across nation states and to their border crossing activities.

<sup>5</sup> Building on the work of Barth (1969) this literature holds that ethnicity should not be conceived as a matter of relations between fixed groups but rather as a process of producing and re-configuring groups by defining the boundaries between them.

relations are *not only* cultural relations. They are also power configurations unfolding through a (symbolic) contestation over defining the nation and who belongs to it.

Elias and Scotson's model provides an appropriate analytical framework with which to address this largely ignored dynamic. It allows us to situate the cultural, ethnic, and class dimension of immigrant-native figurations within the unequal power figuration in which their relation is cast. In the remainder of this subchapter, I present the established-outsiders model<sup>6</sup> while identifying three underdeveloped points of the theory that can, I argue, be further improved. I then explain how the model may be adapted to account for migrant-native figurations resulting from international migration rather than internal migration.

### **The established-outsiders model**

The established-outsiders model explains social closure and stigmatization, together with its reverse process, that of collective self-praise, as outcomes of an uneven balance of power and the tensions inherent in it. It illustrates how power differences between groups permit the creation of polarized status distinctions between the group charisma claimed by the 'established', and the complementary communal disgrace that they attribute to the 'outsiders'. A number of key questions may be posed as regards this basic formulation of the model. Do imbalances in power between groups always lead to processes of stigmatization and collective self-praise? If yes, why and how? If not, what are the particular types of power differentials that translate into this phenomenon? Speaking about power in the abstract is insufficient. Elias (1978) rightly argued that power is not a thing which individuals or collectivities possess. Power is by definition relational; it needs to be conceptualized as a fluctuating yet structural characteristic embedded in all human relations. The question in established-outsider figurations is how to determine the particular positions of power that the established attempt to monopolize, and through which they are able to denigrate the outsiders and secure a positive image of themselves.

Elias and Scotson argued that in Winston Parva, the conditions of the power imbalance were rooted in the established group's social cohesion, which in turn

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<sup>6</sup> The theoretical elaboration of the model is primarily outlined in an introduction that Elias dictated ten years after the publication of the book for its Dutch translation published in English in the second edition of the book and secondarily in a conference paper (Elias, et al., 1998) presented at the Fifteenth German Sociological Congress, Heidelberg in 1964 and a brief appendix in the German translation of Harper Lee's 'To kill a Mocking Bird' (1990). Reference to the model is made to Elias except from when I refer to the original book written by Elias and Scotson (1965)

resulted from its age. The older residents had developed a stock of common memories, attachments, and dislikes through interaction, and were bound by a cohesive network of kinship ties. Although the newcomers had hardly any intention of attacking the old residents, their arrival was experienced by them as a threat to their established way of life. Differences in behavioural patterns, especially in their self-perceived standards of self-restraint, were seen as threatening to their group norms, their belief in their group charisma, and to their monopolized local resources. Their defensiveness in the face of what they perceived as an attack set in motion the mechanism of established and outsider relations.

The ability of the established to control flows of communication permitted them to construct and maintain a positive community identity in opposition to the newcomers. Through the workings of 'praise and blame gossip' they built their collective self-image by reference to their 'best' members, and attributed to the outsider group as a whole the 'bad' characteristics of that group's anomic minority (1994, p. xix). Wholesale rejection of the newcomers and taboos against closer contact with them made outsiders emotionally experience their lack of power as a sign of human inferiority. This had a paralyzing effect, undermining their potential to react against and reverse, or at least adjust, the local power ratio. The figuration derived from Winston Parva may be summarized in the following way: processes of group collective self praise and stigmatization were *initiated* by the established in response to subjective feelings of threat from the outsiders; they *became possible* due to the established group's social cohesion; and they *functioned* to perpetuate the local dynamics of power. Yet there are three underdeveloped points in Elias and Scotson's theorizing. The first concerns their lack of attention to the strategies of outsider groups. The second concerns their partial explanation of the reasons why the established perceived the settlement of newcomers as a threat. The third concerns their limited attention to the overarching figuration within which Winston Parva is embedded.

### **Strategies of outsiders, proprietary claims, and the overarching figuration**

In the conclusion of their book, Elias and Scotson write that 'the outsiders are bent on improving their position and the established are bent on maintaining theirs' (1994, p.158). In contrast to the opposing pairs dominant/dominated, superordinary/subordinary, and majority/minority, which imply a static condition of domination, the very idea of 'established and outsiders' indicates a tension - a contestation over certain positions of power. Nevertheless, in the presentation of his model Elias included no information on what action outsider groups might engage in order to better their position, apart from a reference to

counter-stigmatization, and provided no indication on how change may become possible.

Although he did not exclude the possibility of the gradual diminishing of power imbalances,<sup>7</sup> his research with Scotson in Winston Parva led Elias to stress the paralyzing effect of stigma. Refraining from elaborating on alternative modes of established-outsider coexistence, he reduced the potential of outsider groups to react to their situation and presented the figuration as exclusively dependent on the actions of the established group.

Established-outsider figurations are indeed imposed by the actions of the powerful group. Since the established are more powerful in symbolic and material terms, they are able to give a strong backing to their beliefs in defending themselves against what is felt as an intrusion. The outsiders have to *react* to an order imposed by the powerful group. Within this framework, the potential for outsiders to alter the collective representations and ultimately redress the power differences are reduced, especially in the short run. The paralyzing effect of stigma is theoretically significant and empirically recorded in many settings (see also Fanon, 1952/2008; Lewin, 1941; Wacquant, 1993). However, although certainly not a marginal scenario, it is one among others. Not all outsider groups in all social circumstances react in the same way. There are a number of theoretically possible ways groups might react to their subordinate status and so attempt to change the power balance.

Focusing on different cases of hierarchical group relations, several scholars have attempted to categorize the strategies of outsider groups. In relation to immigrant-native relations, Berry (2005) discerned four so-called acculturation practices: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. However, his theory, which is not grounded in empirical research, is characterized by confusion between outcomes and practices.<sup>8</sup> Much more elaborate, although not exclusively focused on outsider groups, is the proposal of Bauböck (1994), which was later expanded by Zolberg and Woon (1999). Building on work by Barth (1969), the authors distinguish between three distinct patterns of negotiation between native society and immigrants: boundary crossing, boundary blurring, and boundary shifting. Also inspired by the work of Barth is the more recent work of Lamont and Bail on destigmatization strategies (2007). Wider in scope is Horowitz's (1975) discussion of amalgamation, incorporation, division, and proliferation as strategies of categorical fusion and fission. The five scenarios regarding the

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<sup>7</sup> And viewed the engagement in counter-stigmatization by outsider groups as an indicator of this development (xxi).

<sup>8</sup> It is very difficult to imagine how marginalization may be a group strategy, for instance.

internalization of external categories proposed by Jenkins (2008), and the synthetic attempt by Wimmer (2008), are likewise wider in scope. The most comprehensive of such attempts was made by the social psychologists Tajfel and Turner (1986) in the context of Tajfel's social identity theory. Their account brings together many of the insights of the above-mentioned authors in a concise and systematic way.

Tajfel and Turner describe three possible reactions to negative or threatened identity on the part of outsider groups: individual mobility, social creativity, and social competition. The first reaction, individual mobility, refers to processes through which individuals attempt to abandon or dissociate themselves from their erstwhile group. This attempt usually involves individual strategies to achieve upward social mobility and so pass from a lower to a higher-status group. This is somewhat analogous to the process of boundary crossing described by Zolberg and Woon (1999). In cases of social creativity the group members may seek positive distinctiveness for the in-group by redefining or changing the elements of the comparative situation. They may (a) engage in comparing the in-group to the out-group on some new dimension, (b) change the values assigned to the attributes of the group so that comparisons which were previously negative are now perceived as positive, and finally (c) change the out-group with which the in-group is compared. Finally, the third option, that of social competition, refers to cases in which group members seek positive distinctiveness through direct competition with the out-group. This strategy may imply efforts to reverse the relative positions of the in-group and the out-group on salient dimensions (Tajfel & Turner 1986: 19-20). These three scenarios provide a constructive addition to Elias's theory. They help map the strategies of outsider groups and individuals and assess the channels through which change takes place, if it does.

The second underdeveloped point in Elias's account concerns his explanation of why the settlement of newcomers was treated by the established as a threat. Elias argued that the older residents, like many other established groups, experienced the settlement of the newcomers as 'a three-pronged attack - against their monopolised power resources, against their group charisma and against their group norms' (1994: li). Not all aspects of what he identified as 'a three-pronged attack' are equally theorized in his model or supported by empirical evidence from the field research he conducted with Scotson. Much more emphasis was placed on the two last issues. The established group's fear of endangerment of their monopolized resources is theoretically and empirically unsubstantiated. Except from a reference to the exclusion of newcomers from key positions in local institutions (1994, p.152), there is no indication of which resources are referred to and no explanation offered as regards their role in the development of perceptions of threat. Restricting his attention to racial distinctions, Blumer

(1958) had developed a theoretical approach on prejudice, bearing similarities to the established-outsider model, which provides useful insights in this respect.<sup>9</sup>

Critiquing psychological explanations that focus on the individual and treat prejudice as outcome of either noxious child socialization (Adorno, et al., 1950) (Adorno et al. 1950) or a distorted reading of social information (views which are in fact still extant in the literature; (see Hoffman & Hurst, 1990), Blumer explained prejudice as a matter of group relations in a stratified social world. He called for a shift of scholarly attention away from individual lines of experience to collective processes by which a 'racial group' comes to define and redefine another 'racial group'. His central thesis is that race prejudice exists in a sense of group position and exhibits four features on the part of dominant group members. The first feature is a feeling of superiority. The second feature is a belief that the subordinate group is intrinsically different and alien. The third feature involves a sense of proprietary claim over certain areas of privilege and advantage. And the fourth feature involves a perception and suspicion that members of a subordinate group harbour designs on the dominant group's prerogatives.

Blumer argued that '[t]he dominant group is not concerned with the subordinate group as such but it is deeply concerned with its position vis-à-vis the subordinate group' (1958, p.4). His explanation of perceptions of superiority and alienation as means of the established to place out-groups *below* and *beyond* are also integral to Elias's theorizing. Yet his emphasis on the dominant group's proprietary claims highlights a dimension of established-outsider figurations neglected by Elias. In Blumer's view, prejudice is an emotional recoiling by the established group in the face of threats to their perceived entitlement to either exclusive or prior rights in many important areas of life.

Uncovering the proprietary claims made by established groups is crucial in fully grasping their felt endangerment from outsiders. Claims of entitlement should not be conceptualized as pertaining only to material resources. They concern tangible things such as access to or control of land, property, jobs and businesses, political decision making, educational institutions, and recreational resources, as well as relatively intangible things. The latter may include positions of prestige

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<sup>9</sup> Overall, Blumer's theory is more restricted in scope than Elias's, which makes the incorporation of the former in the latter more fruitful than the other way round. Besides Blumer's reluctance to generalize beyond the case of race prejudice, he further confines his analysis to the dominant group. In addition, his explanandum, prejudice, is not adequately defined, while his framing of race relations in terms of dominant-subordinate groups is more static than Elias's account in terms of established and outsiders.

and the display of the symbols and accoutrements of these positions, as well as access to areas of intimacy and privacy (Blumer 1958).

Incorporating this element in Elias and Scotson's study, one may re-read the reaction of the established as not only pertaining to concerns over the relative position of the two group in the abstract (perceptions that the 'morally superior group' should not intermingle with inferiors) but also to the positioning of the two groups in relation to the neighbourhood space, which the established residents felt belongs to them. The 'oldness' of the older residents may in their view have entitled them to assume a managerial role in relation to the neighbourhood space; the right to decide 'how things work there' and 'who should get what'. The arrival of the newcomers was not only ruining their neighbourhood-level intimacy but also challenging their exclusive control over 'their' place. Newcomers were entering what was conceived by older residents as their collective private space and they felt they had to discipline them according to the 'rules of the house'. Disciplining or excluding new residents was necessary to keeping their status as the masters of the neighbourhood.

There is another underdeveloped point in Elias and Scotson's analysis,<sup>10</sup> undermining their explanation of the perceived threat that the settlement of the newcomers induces among the established. It concerns their lack of recognition of the wider social context of their local figuration. As mentioned elsewhere, there is a need to recognize the multiple levels at which the established-outsider figuration operates (Loyal, 2011; May, 2004). This is a point missed by Elias and Scotson. Their presentation seems to suggest that the relation between the older residents and the newcomers was bound to the local dynamics in Winston Parva and that the structure of the figuration could be sufficiently studied within the confines of the neighbourhood. They fail to note that the Winston Parva figuration is part of an overarching figuration, and thus their explanation of the perceived threat that newcomers posed to 'the group charisma and the group norms of the established' is partial.

Elias and Scotson describe how the older residents behaved in accordance with a code they had developed over the years. This code was transmitted intergenerationally and was highly valued. It was closely associated with self-respect and the respect they felt was due to them from others. Adherence to the norms it prescribed strengthened group feelings and allowed collective pride for the social advancement of any individual member of their community. At the same time it also implied higher levels of social restraint. In this function, the group norms were both a source of frustration, by repressing the spontaneity of

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<sup>10</sup> Also reflected in Elias's theoretical account of the model.

individual members, and a source of collective narcissism by underlying their group charismatic beliefs. Self-restraint was taken to signify a higher degree of orderliness, circumspection, and foresight, and offered status rewards in relation to 'inferiors' who showed less restraint in situations where they felt it was demanded.

In this context, the different behavioural patterns of the newcomers offended the established group's sensibilities and were taken as a mark of a lower order. Older residents felt that any close contact with them would lower their standing, in their own estimation as well as in that of others in the neighbourhood. Moreover, the lack of compliance of newcomers to the neighbourhood code was feared by them as apt to gradually weaken their defence against their own wish to break the prescribed norms.

Their explanation serves well to illustrate why certain differences in behaviour acquired such symbolic significance at the neighbourhood level. They were used by the established to exclude the newcomers, and as a consequence functioned to increase the cohesion of their group. Moreover, their analysis of self restraint, drawing from Elias's theory of the civilizing process (2000/1939), shows how the established were able to provide a strong backing to their group charismatic claims and the communal disgrace they attributed to the outsiders. They presented certain behaviour as characteristic of people of lesser human worth and projected this status to the newcomers as a whole. Given the extended and cohesive ties within the established community, association with the newcomers became particularly risky for the social status of longstanding residents in the neighbourhood.

However, outsiders were also thought of as dangerous for the established group as a whole. As Elias and Scotson remark, the established feared that the supposed collective deviant behaviour of the newcomers would eventually 'impair the prestige of their neighbourhood with all the chances of pride and satisfaction that went with it' (1994, p.149). From this point it is only a small step to recognize that Winston Parva's established also held a place in an overarching hierarchy and were subordinated to other groups/categories/classes.

In all likelihood, their cultivated 'group-charisma' was not only developed in opposition to the newcomers, but also as a defensive mechanism against potential or existing social categorization by other, powerful and superior groups outside the neighbourhood space. It was also a way to protect 'their' neighbourhood, and as an extension their collective self, from negative categorizations stemming from outside their neighbourhood. In relation to higher-status groups outside the

neighbourhood, Winston Parva's established should be conceptualized as outsiders.

Recognizing the established residents' interdependence with people outside Winston Parva, and taking into account the proprietary claims made by them, we are then able to better explain why outsiders were seen as threatening in the first place. Further, we may also better assess the reasons why the established were determined 'to hit back so sharply' (1994, p.li). Their acute reaction possibly relates to the fact that differences between them and the newcomers were insignificant. As Blok argues in his article on the narcissism of minor differences: 'identity - who you are, what you represent or stand for, whence you derive self-esteem - is based on subtle distinctions that are emphasized, defended, and reinforced against what is closest because that is what poses the greatest threat' (1998, p.48).

Perhaps if the established were really of a superior class in relation to the newcomers they would not have engaged in such severe stigmatization. This is supported by the fact that people in the nearby middle-class neighbourhood were not bothered by the presence of the newcomers; for them there was no need to be concerned since the social distance was great enough for them not to feel threatened (see Blok, 1998).

This relational character of the established-outsider model is its most significant analytical strength. Elias and Scotson seem to have missed an important element of the figuration by excluding the subordination of Winston Parva's established to superior groups outside the neighbourhood. They seemed to have looked at Winston Parva too microscopically. The need to look beyond the local setting and to place local figurations within broader social contexts becomes particularly evident when researching established-outsider figurations resulting from international migration, such as that of Nikopoli. The latter are not crafted from scratch at the local interactional level but unfold around pre-existing perceptions of social categories and officially imposed classifications that confer rights and statuses and shape people's perceptions of their selves and others.

Moreover, not all immigrant groups are equally outsiders in this status hierarchy. Elias and Scotson not only neglected the wider social milieu but they convey too homogenous an idea of the outsiders; one that does not allow us to assess the internal power dynamics within them. Does their lack of attention to the internal divisions within the outsider group also account for why they do not give any indication of the strategies to counter stigmatization?

Overall, there is a risk of a reification if the concepts of established and outsiders are thought of in absolutist ways. Groups and categories defined as such by the analyst should not be seen in a bipolar relation, isolated from the wider social context in which they are embedded. Nor should they be seen as fixed categories to such an extent that internal differences are made invisible. The challenge is to consider all those relations and variations within, and surrounding, the figurations defined as established and outsiders, so that we can understand the power configurations that structure them.

Taking into account the particularities of immigrant-native figurations resulting from international migration, in my research I follow a different analytical path to that followed by Elias and Scotson. I start from the analysis of the wider context of the figuration, and then I zoom in on the local level to assess the configuration of the power relations between native and FSU Greeks in the neighbourhood. In the final section of this theoretical introduction I illustrate how we may analyse immigrant-native relations as established-outsider figurations. I use the notion of practical nationality developed by Hage in order to identify differences existing among immigrant groups (differences which we may empirically link to different strategies adopted by people and collectivities), and also to define the central division between what is the topic of this thesis, namely the established and outsider nationals.

### **Established and outsider nationals**

Immigrants are turned into outsiders as soon as they cross national borders and start building their life abroad, away from their previous 'national home'. In most cases they lack citizenship, which formally attests their outsider position and deprives them of equal participation in native society. Besides their exclusion by the state, their outsider status is also experienced in their everyday interactions with members of the native society. Even if citizenship rights are acquired, this does not necessarily bring about their acknowledgment as equal members of the national community by the established – i.e. those citizens who consider themselves as representing the national core group.

Hage (2000) argues that there are two limitations to the ability of the concept of citizenship to investigate questions of national belonging in everyday life. Firstly, its either/or logic does not allow us to capture all the subtleties of the differential modalities of national belonging as they are experienced within society. The exclusion/inclusion conception of national belonging is less present in everyday life, especially among outsider categories. In their attempt to acquire national recognition, outsiders think of themselves as more national than some people

and less national than others. They are also recognized by others in similar fashion. Secondly, citizenship does not explain what allows certain people to assume a dominant position within the nation (Hage, 2000). While citizenship is a prerequisite for established nationals, it is certainly not a sufficient condition for them to acquire such a position.

To compensate for the first limitation, Hage proposed the concept of *practical nationality* (or national capital) as a sort of cultural capital that is valued within the national field. According to Hage, (2000, pp. 53) practical nationality can be analytically understood as the sum of nationally sanctified and valued social and physical cultural styles and dispositions adopted by individuals and groups, as well as valued characteristics within a national field: looks, accent, demeanours, taste, nationally valued social and cultural preferences and behaviour, length of residency, etc. The recognition and legitimacy given to a person or a group for the practical nationality they possess is translated to different degrees of national belonging/acceptance (Hage 2000, pp. 53).

Hage's conceptualization implies that there is a tendency for a national subject to be perceived as just as much of a national as the amount of practical nationality she or he possesses (2000, pp. 53), while her/his claims for national belonging are constrained by the practical nationality she or he possesses. The amount of practical nationality that one possesses is not given. In a Bourdieusian vocabulary, one may speak about the accumulation of national capital, a process that can be best illustrated through the case of first-generation immigrants. Migrants arriving in a new nation gradually and to varying degrees acquire language skills, a native accent, and master a number of national-specific cultural practices, behaviours, and tastes. This process is directly related to their gradual recognition as members of the nation to which they had immigrated.

According to Hage (2000), the extent to which immigrants are successful in the process of practical nationality accumulation depends on their habitus, the cultural dispositions and embodied social knowledge that they bring with them. Yet one must remark that it is also heavily determined by the positioning of their ethnic and religious background in relation to a historically constructed self-image of 'the nation' to which they aspire to belong. Moreover, not all practical nationality is acquirable. For instance, a Muslim Asian immigrant with a long residency in West European country who has accumulated practical nationality in the form of the dominant linguistic and cultural dispositions may yield less national belonging in relation to a newcomer Christian immigrant of a neighbouring European state, even if the later is less acquainted with the native language. Both immigrants, however, would be in a much more marginal situation when confronted with those who claim to represent the nation by their

very being. The incentive which impels national outsiders to try to become acknowledged members of the nation reaches its limits when faced with established nationals.

The established nationals do not achieve their dominant position vis-à-vis the national outsiders through processes of practical nationality accumulation. Their position stems from their ability to present themselves as standing for what the others have to become in order to gain national recognition. Rather than attesting their practical nationality to valorize their nationhood, they present it as the manifestation of 'the national essence' they embody. Claiming legitimacy via national ideologies that conceive of a 'national people' with common origins and a distinct culture and history, they present their national belongingness as something that is rightfully conferred to them by birth. It is also in relation to this idea of 'the national people' and the concomitant significance attributed to a certain 'race', 'ethnicity', and 'culture' that immigrants are constructed as outsiders, alien, and potentially threatening.

The established nationals reproduce their dominant position not least through the mechanisms detected by Elias in his microsociological research in *Winston Parva*. One may highlight the reproduction of collective national fantasies that sustain stereotypes about the character of the national self through a multiplicity of national institutions. This process goes hand in hand with the spread of images and flows of information about 'others' in a continuous sort of 'national gossiping' that takes place through popular national media and in everyday public discourse. Ideologies of national belonging grant the established nationals the potential to construct a positive image of their collective national self as well as to authoritatively categorize others who enter their intimate national space.

With respect to this theoretical framework, the case of Nikopoli appears intriguing. *How do FSU and native Greeks, both considered to be groups that belong to the nation, experience national belonging in everyday life in Nikopoli? How can we explain the fact that native Greeks doubt the Greekness of the FSU Greeks, and what would one expect the reaction of the latter to be?*

## 1.2 Research design and practice

### Where, when, how

I was drawn to Nikopoli for three reasons. The first reason related to the fact that a considerable segment of the local population, especially the early settlers, are of Pontic descent. This neighbourhood characteristic entailed that a subcategory of the group I have conventionally named as ‘native Greeks’ (see footnote 1, pp.2) are bound together in a common ancestry with the majority of local FSU Greeks who also originate in Pontos. The population structure of Nikopoli permitted an enquiry into how narratives on ‘Ponticness’ influence processes of identification and interaction between native and the FSU Greeks.

The second reason related to my lack of awareness about this neighbourhood prior to the research. Nikopoli is a relatively new neighbourhood, rather secluded from the rest of the city of Thessaloniki. Despite having grown up in the city, my own image of the neighbourhood before I started my research was practically non-existent. This lack of predispositions allowed me to have a ‘blank slate’ approach to Nikopoli.

The third reason concerned the exceptionally large concentration of FSU Greeks in this neighbourhood and its characterization as a ghetto. I developed an interest in recording what I then thought of as ‘the emergence of a new phenomenon in Greek urban history’. I was also interested in assessing what it is that different actors are implying by characterizing the neighbourhood as a ghetto and how the use of this word connects with what is happening there.

My ethnographic research was carried out in two periods, from September 2007 to March 2008, and from March 2009 to September 2009. I lived in Nikopoli for both periods. It further included a number of short field trips which I undertook in between and after those two periods, until 2011. I decided to split the fieldwork in two parts, aiming to pursue in a structured way Blumer’s (1969) proposal to treat ethnographic research as consisting of two relatively distinct phases, the exploratory phase and the phase of inspection. According to Blumer, the exploratory phase provides the researcher with first-hand knowledge of her/his subject and serves as the empirical grounding to develop and fine-tune her/his concepts and theoretical approach. In the phase of inspection the researcher put the analytical concepts to work in the process of examination. Following this approach, I planned for a time interval between the two phases of my fieldwork to analyse the field material gathered up to that point. This process

helped me reflect on my findings, identify gaps and puzzles, revise my theoretical approach, and plan the next steps of data collection in a more focused way.

I collected the data primarily through participant observation in a variety of neighbourhood spaces and local institutions. In particular, I kept a detailed fieldwork diary with the observations I made and the discussions I had with people on the streets, the small parks, and the open market of Nikopoli, but also in local internet cafes, *tavérnas*, *kafenía*, sports clubs, cafeterias, and the local schools and churches. In addition to my chats with people in Nikopoli, I also conducted interviews with approximately fifty residents and organized ten focus groups, one of which was in the church and the remaining nine with students, teachers, and parents in the local schools. In all cases but one, the focus groups were tape recorded. During personal interviews, often of a spontaneous set-up not favouring any kind of recording, I kept notes and I always transcribed the discussions the same day, in most cases immediately after the interview.

The gender division of my interviews was approximately 30%-70% with the majority being men, while the representation of different age categories was more or less balanced, with the exception of people between 25 and 35 years old who were largely absent from the neighbourhood space. Regarding the native/FSU Greek ratio in my data, there is a tendency to favour the latter. This largely relates to my disposition towards understanding the habits of FSU Greeks, whose cultural traits were more unfamiliar to me.

When I was asked by people what I was doing in Nikopoli, I responded by presenting myself as a social scientist doing research on the neighbourhood with a particular interest in the relationship between local residents. I did not specify upfront that I wanted to focus on immigrant-native relations. I wanted to avoid guiding them in my research topic in order to be able to assess the significance they attributed to the issue as part of their broader neighbourhood life. As will be described in the empirical chapters, the FSU Greeks barely ever spoke about their native neighbours. The opposite was not true.

I developed frequent contact and friendly relations with some of Nikopoli's residents, especially with Yuri, my FSU Greek roommate during the second fieldwork period, Maria and Aggelos, my native Greek neighbours during my first fieldwork, and Stefanos, a FSU Greek middle-aged man I also met during my first fieldwork<sup>11</sup>. I also became good friends with several people at the church, which the native residents call the 'Russian church'. I followed the liturgy every Sunday and joined the tea gatherings that usually followed. I also took part in the

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<sup>11</sup> No real names are used in the book.

organized excursions and I met several people in other occasions outside the church. Here it should be mentioned that being a native Greek myself, the relations I developed with my FSU Greek informants became an object of my study, including my own behaviour and ideas and how those developed through those relationships.

Concerning my research in schools, I was granted one month's access by the Secondary Education Division to conduct research in the upper and lower secondary schools where students of Nikopoli go. My research included conducting interviews and focus groups with teachers and school staff, and carrying out participant observation outside the classroom.<sup>12</sup> I also conducted two focus groups in the primary school of Nikopoli, one with members of the parents' association and one with school teachers.

I also carried out twenty interviews with people living outside the neighbourhood, five of which with residents of the seaside suburban neighbourhood of Peraia. This neighbourhood also has a sizeable FSU Greek population but is substantially different in terms of its physical space, its location, and its history.<sup>13</sup> During my second field trip I paid several daily visits to Peraia. Through those field trips I aimed to better understand the processes I observed in Nikopoli and assess whether they are exclusive to the neighbourhood or point to more general patterns within native-FSU Greek relations; I did not compare the two neighbourhoods in the conventional sense but rather used Peraia as a reference point with respect to Nikopoli.

With a similar goal in mind, I also conducted interviews with state officials and people working in the municipalities to which Nikopoli belonged administratively at the time of my research, and to board members of FSU Greek cultural associations outside Nikopoli. In addition to this, I followed people of Nikopoli

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<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately permission to conduct participant observation in the classroom is only granted by the Ministry of Education for people wishing to conduct pedagogical research.

<sup>13</sup> The seaside area of Peraia is situated at the southern part of Thessaloniki's Gulf, 20 km from the city centre. It was formed during the 1920 by Asia Minor refugees and developed in the post-war period as a close-to-the-city summer resort with inner-city residents buying second homes and with mushrooming seaside restaurants. Currently, the structure of its population is largely determined by processes of suburbanization and immigration, and is substantially more diverse than Nikopoli in ethnic, educational, and occupational terms. Between 1991 and 2001 Peraia has emerged as a rapidly growing suburb. Its appeal combines its coast, with views of city across the Gulf, and its relatively cheap land values, while its 'traditional' tourism- and entertainment-centred economy has been recently expanded by intense construction activity and the rise of various types of services to cope with its growing population. The total population of FSU Greeks in Peraia is estimated at around 2,500 people forming substantial concentrations at the south and central part of the neighbourhood, behind the coastal facade.

in their activities outside the neighbourhood. I visited entertainment spaces outside Nikopoli, such as clubs and cafeterias frequented by residents of Nikopoli, and I joined social and political events that were important to the neighbourhood such as the commemoration of the Pontic genocide and the Virgin Mary Soumela Pontic gathering.

It is important to note that I did not restrict myself only to the FSU and native Greeks residents of Nikopoli. I also met and talked to non-Greek FSU and Albanian immigrants living in the neighbourhood. As will be shown, those encounters proved extremely valuable for assessing my findings. The stories of those immigrants and what I observed of their interrelation with native Greeks provided me with a relational perspective through which to assess the FSU-native Greek figuration in Nikopoli. Finally, Nikopoli also contains a small number of people of Greek descent who had migrated from the former Soviet Union in earlier phases, in particular during the late 1960s. My discussions with those people, and the discourse of long-time residents of Nikopoli about them, proved to be useful in assessing the significance of the changing context of reception.

Besides my ethnographic material, I also made use of the survey data of the GEITONIES project, on which I was working as a researcher. GEITONIES was a 7th Framework project on the development of relationships between immigrants and natives at the neighbourhood level, which ran from May 2008 to May 2011. The survey was conducted in 18 neighbourhoods in 6 European cities among a randomly selected sample of 200 respondents (100 immigrants and 100 natives) in each neighbourhood. Nikopoli was one of the 18 neighbourhoods. The questionnaire had a longitudinal format covering different domains of the life course. It further included data on identification, attitudes and (egocentric) networks and data on experiences in and views about the neighbourhood.<sup>14</sup>

The data generated by the GEITONIES project were helpful to assess the socio-economic status of people in the neighbourhood and the structure of their personal networks. In addition they allowed me to inquire into how common certain phenomena I observed through my ethnographic research were. More helpful, however, were the qualitative data that I managed to collect in the context of the survey. Since the survey took place when I was in the field for the second time, I had the opportunity to work closely with the interviewers in Nikopoli. A small number of open questions (see appendix I.1, pp. 243) were asked to a subsample of the GEITONIES respondents in Nikopoli (47 natives and 36 immigrants). Moreover, the experiences of the interviewers in the data

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<sup>14</sup> The full Questionnaire can be accessed at: <http://geitonies.fl.ul.pt/Publication/Questionnaire%20-%20GEITONIES.pdf>.

collection helped me to gain additional insight into certain aspects of the life in the neighbourhood, such as the residents' perceptions of safety and the relations of residents in their housing blocks.

### **Access to the field**

Talking to people and building networks in the neighbourhood proved very difficult in my first days in the field. Often I wondered what I was exactly doing there, spending long hours walking alone up and down the neighbourhood, sitting alone in cafeterias, taking the bus back and forth waiting for any possible opportunity to meet and speak to people. It was from the third month onwards when things started looking up. That development related partly to the fact that people I eventually met introduced me to other people, and partly because I was becoming more experienced in approaching people and less concerned of the risk that 'something might go wrong'. This feeling is particularly constraining in the beginning when one feels that a negative first impression could seriously impede access, especially in a neighbourhood community where entry points appear to be limited.

I tried to avoid starting my research from a cultural or neighbourhood association. I wanted to avoid turning to a social circle engaged in identity politics before I had first-hand experience of how people interact and think of each other in everyday life in the neighbourhood. Commonly, people who are involved in such associations have a specific vision which they want to present as the vision of 'their group', 'their neighbourhood', etc. Such visions need to be assessed in the face of what people actually think and do in their everyday lives.

I also kept up the habit of hanging around the neighbourhood to observe the street life until my last weeks in the field. Observing the street life turned out to be very important in understanding interactions between FSU and native Greeks in Nikopoli, and how they saw each other. That said, I found it rather difficult to enter the street gatherings which were very common among FSU Greeks. My experience made me realise that although such socializing takes place in public spaces it is very private and closed in its essence. My very limited knowledge of Russian has certainly contributed to my hesitation to join to those meetings.

In the course of time and for the reasons explained earlier in the introduction, I eventually decided to centre my study on the relationship between native and FSU Greeks. Knowing Russian, which is the first language of most FSU Greeks, would be useful in the field. For that reason, during the break between my two fieldwork periods, I followed a language course. Although my limited knowledge

of the language did not allow me to enter into conversation in Russian, it proved helpful in some cases to follow discussions and most importantly to make contacts. Most of the FSU Greek people I met valued the fact that I could speak some Russian. In terms of communicating, language was not a problem except from some cases of old Turkophone FSU Greeks who could not speak Greek. To approach those people I used the help of my roommate Yuri who acted as a translator.

There is one last point I should note here: I deliberately chose to report on my data using the past tense rather than the ethnographic present. I did so to avoid presenting the figuration I recorded in Nikopoli as a fixed one, especially since at the moment these lines are being written the financial crisis in Greece is attaining dramatic dimensions and its impact is being felt in all domains of social life. Moreover, concerning the issue of Greekness, so central to my research, the rise of the neo-fascist party Golden Dawn, which builds its xenophobic, reactionary, and misanthropic rhetoric on a certain conception of Greekness, has possibly made ideologies of national belonging in Greece more controversial and views on them more polarized.

Moreover, immigrant-native relations are in any case context-bound and dynamic. To a certain extent I was able to witness this myself, during my second period in the field – which took place after a murder had happened in Nikopoli. This incident had a considerable impact on residents' perceptions of safety in the neighbourhood. As will be described later (chapter 6.3), it also mediated the relations between native and FSU Greeks. Finally, immigrant-native relations are subject to change from one day to the next as a result of the events and developments that acquire symbolic significance in public discourses and in media presentations (Banton, 2009). At this moment, while the economic crisis is deepening in Greece, Russia is being characterized by steady growth, and so the old view that 'people from Russia' are poor people is becoming less dominant. Since I conducted my fieldwork, Ivan Savvidis, a businessman and politician in Russia of Greek origin,<sup>15</sup> bought PAOK, the biggest athletic and football club in Thessaloniki. In this, and the other investments he has made in the city, Savvidis has emerged as a prominent figure in the local and national media. I expect that his public appearance will also have had an impact upon the stereotypes of FSU Greeks as being poor – stereotypes which were still dominant at the time I did my fieldwork.

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<sup>15</sup> He originates from the district of Tsalka, in present-day Georgia.

## The structure of the book

The book comprises six empirical chapters and the conclusion. The empirical chapters may be grouped into two thematic clusters serving the aim of comparing processes at different analytical levels. The first three chapters concern the national and the transnational level and the other three the experience at the local level, presenting the ethnographic material.

Chapter 2 reviews the construction of the Greek state as the focal point of a trans-territorial nation which came to be defined by descent and common origin. The analysis presented aims to illustrate how ideologies of Greekness determine the belonging of FSU Greeks to a country neither they themselves nor their ancestors have ever lived in. It also serves to explain the historical production from a more open to a very closed conception of what it entails to be Greek in cultural terms. In chapter 3 I outline the history of the Soviet Greeks. The origins of the Greek populations in the former Soviet Union are presented, as well as their experiences within the Soviet Union. Emphasis is placed on internal differences as well as on processes of boundary maintenance, shifts, and blurrings over time. Finally, the characteristics of the post-1989 immigration are outlined, as well as the reasons for the outflow from the perspective of the migrants themselves. Chapter 4 contextualizes the FSU Greek migration as part of the extended co-ethnic migrations from the former Soviet Union that followed the collapse of the Soviet regime. The Greek case is compared to that of Israel, Germany, and Finland, each of which has engaged with comparable populations of co-ethnics abroad. The Greek policy context is then given further elaboration, and the migration flow is presented from the viewpoint of policy makers. Finally, the socio-economic situation of FSU Greeks is outlined.

Chapter 5 redirects the focus to the local level, zooming in on Nikopoli. In this first ethnographic chapter I describe the collective representation of the neighbourhood as well as its history and the ways in which different groups have settled and accessed housing there in different points in time. Having set the scene, in chapter 6 I go on to draw the contours of the relationship between FSU and native Greeks as observed and recorded in the neighbourhood. The relationship is described in different neighbourhood locations, including schools, entertainment places, local shops, and open spaces. The description includes information regarding experiences of actual interaction as well as collective views, stereotypes, thoughts, and feelings which each group holds regarding the other. Chapter 7, while retaining the focus on Nikopoli, synthesizes the two thematic clusters of the study by outlining FSU and native Greeks' contestation in defining what is the nation and who belongs to it. It further describes the ways in which official categorizations are appropriated at the local level, the ways identities are

produced and categorizations are adopted or negated. Emphasis is placed on the native stigmatizing label 'Russo-Pontic', the FSU Greeks' reaction to it, as well as the significance of narratives of Ponticness or processes of identification. In the concluding chapter I summarize and explicate the structure of the figuration studied in Nikopoli and I respond to the research questions advanced in the theoretical introduction.



# Ideologies of Greekness

As already mentioned, the ideological perception and regulation of the two population movements that comprised the 1990s immigration flow to Greece has been markedly asymmetric. On the one hand, the inflow and settlement of a significant non-Greek immigrant population has been treated as an undesired development. On the other hand, the settlement of immigrants of Greek descent, especially FSU Greeks, was encouraged and facilitated by state policies. The difference in the Greek state's policies was closely linked to the nation's self-perception as a community defined by descent. According to this perception, only immigrants of Greek descent are an important permanent resource for the country, in contrast to non-Greek immigrants whose entry and prolonged stay is viewed as a threat to both the social cohesion and the cultural homogeneity of the nation. Nationality law has served as the main tool to secure this ideal (Pratsinakis, 2008).

Citizenship (υπηκοότητα, ιθαγένεια) is distinguished from nationality (εθνικότητα); citizenship grants formal membership in the state with the set of legal rights and duties that are attached to it, while nationality denotes inclusion in the community of Greek descent, *the Hellenic world* (Ελληνισμός). The term *génos* (γένος),<sup>16</sup> lineage, is a key element of Greekness. It is used to legally differentiate between those who are of Greek descent, the *homogenís* (ομογενείς), and those who are not, the *allogenís* (αλλογενείς) (Tsitselikis, 2006). Opposed to the normative category of Greek citizens of Greek decent, the category of *allogenís*

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<sup>16</sup> In modern Greek the word for nation is *éthnos* (έθνος). It may be argued that there is a subtle difference between *génos* and *ethnos* congruent with Herodotus' usage of the words; the former denotes genealogical ties while the latter refers to the cultural or political bonds of a people (Jones, 1996). Yet the term *ellinikó génos* is used interchangeably with *ellinikó éthnos* to describe the Greek nation, or people, in terms of common descent. Similarly, *homoethnis* and *alloethnis* are synonyms for the terms *homogenís* and *allogenís*.

citizens, which refers to naturalized Greeks or Greek citizens belonging to ethnic or religious minorities in Greece, appears anomalous.

However, the term *homogenís* does not in practice cover all people of Greek descent; it is reserved for the Greeks outside the state who retain their ties with the ‘fatherland’ through a preferential status as people with Greek descent even where they do not possess Greek citizenship (Christopoulos, 2006; Triandafyllidou & Veikou, 2002). It is through this preferential status that FSU Greeks were given access to citizenship rights for their ‘repatriation’ to the fatherland while strict requirements were aimed at limiting the naturalization of non-Greek immigrants.

	Of Greek descent	Of non-Greek descent
<b>Residing in Greece</b>		
Greek born citizens	Autochthonous <sup>17</sup> Greeks	Allogenis Greek citizens
Foreign born citizens	Heterochthonous Greeks	Allogenis Greek citizens
<b>Residing outside Greece</b>		
Greek citizens	Homogenis	Allogenis
Non-Greek citizens		

Table 2.1 Statuses related to Greekness and Greek citizenship

Globally, diverse historical paths of nation-building have shaped different citizenship traditions and particular conceptions of nationhood which channel immigration in distinct ways (Brubaker, 1990; Joppke, 1999). To understand how in the Greek case the notion of *génos* and its derivatives *allogenis* and *homogenís* have crystallized, one must look into the history of Greek nation-building starting from the origins of the Greek national movement.<sup>18</sup> Looking back in history permits us to view the construction of the Greek state as the focal point of a perceived wider trans-territorial Greek World. The identification of this wider Greek world, however, appears to be a complex matter. It forces us to explore what is implied by the term ‘Greekness’. How has Greekness been defined historically? Who was to be included in the national community? In posing these questions, my aim is to illustrate how ideologies of Greekness determine the

<sup>17</sup> The autochthonous/heterochthonous distinction (*αυτόχθων-ετερόχθων*) is employed to indicate the place of birth.

<sup>18</sup> The term ‘national movement’ here is used in line with Hroch (1993 p. 15) referring to the organized endeavours to achieve all the attributes of a fully-fledged nation.

belonging of this group of people, in their own eyes as well as in those of others, to a country neither they themselves nor their ancestors have ever lived in.

## 2.1 Greeks by descent

### Conceiving the nation, making the state: religion and the classical past

The collective identities in the predominantly Greek-speaking eastern Roman Empire were shaped by the prevalence of Orthodox Christianity (Livanios, 2006). The vast majority of (Greek-speaking) Byzantines called themselves ‘Romans’ or ‘Christians’, on the rare occasion they had to identify themselves.<sup>19</sup> This changed very little during the period of Ottoman domination due to the administrative practices of the Ottomans (ibid. 37-40). The population in the Ottoman Empire was politically organized around self-governed religious communities, the *millets* (literally, nations). All the Orthodox Christians of the Ottoman Empire formed the *Rum* (i.e. Roman) *millet*. This structure facilitated the political survival of the Byzantine identities.

The *Rum millet* was a multilingual community but Greek language enjoyed a hegemonic position; it was the language of the liturgy and the Orthodox patriarchate as well as the principal language of trade and of cultural distinction in the Balkan zones (Mazower, 2000). This hegemonic position of the Greek language among the Balkan Christians made Greekness a form of cultural capital offering access to circles of wealth and prestige (Roudometof, 1998; Stoianovich, 1960; Vermeulen, 1984). The Phanariotes, the influential Greek-speaking political elite in Constantinople, held high positions in various capacities in the service of the Ottoman Porte. At the same time, a dynamic Greek<sup>20</sup> merchant diaspora came to stretch from the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea to Western Europe (Lekas, 2005). From those two groups a Greek Orthodox intelligentsia emerged which gradually adopted the values and ideas of the

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<sup>19</sup> In the late Eastern Roman Empire, the literary environment played a role in the adoption by a small number of Greek-speaking intellectuals of the label ‘Hellene’ (Ελληνος). With this identification they expressed an admiration of the language and the cultural output of the ancient Greeks, and sometimes their perceived ancestral connection with them (Livanios, 2006). Until that time, the term ‘Hellene’ meant ‘pagan’.

<sup>20</sup> Hellenization, i.e. the adoption of the Greek language and classical culture, was very widespread among the upper social strata of the non-Greek Balkan Orthodox peoples, with the exception of the Serbs. Being regarded as Greek implied a higher social status. As a result, a relatively united inter-Balkan merchant class emerged, which called itself and was known to others as Greek. (Stoianovich, 1960).

European enlightenment. The discourses which developed in the course of that process introduced for the first time the concepts of ethno-national identities in Balkan society (Kitromilides, 1990, p. 25).

The Greek intellectuals re-conceptualized the Orthodox *Rum millet* in national terms. To that aim they 'invented' their national past (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) by appropriating the learned and written tradition of the Enlightenment as regards classical Greece (Liakos, 2008). In so doing they attached political significance to Greek culture. In 1805, Adamantios Korais (as cited in Augoustinos, 2008), the leading figure of the Neo-Hellenic, i.e. Modern Greek, enlightenment, declared to the Societe des observateurs de l'homme in Paris, that

The nation, 'awakening from its lethargy', contemplates for the first time the hideous spectacle of its ignorance, and shudders when it sets its eyes on the immense space that separates it from its ancestors' glories. Painful though this discovery was for the Greeks, it was a call to action, not a cry of despair. 'We descend from the ancients', they said to themselves, 'and we must try to regain the dignity of this name or no longer bear it'.

By presenting the Greek-speaking Rum as the lawful heirs of a culture highly respected outside the Greek-speaking world, the national project of the revival of the ancient in the modern nation became favourably received in Europe. At the same time, it effectively created a Greek imagined community (Anderson, 1983 #86) which was mobilized in revolt against the Ottoman Empire. Following the Greek war of Independence against the Ottoman Empire, and with the political and military help of the West, the Greek nation state was officially established in 1830.

Initially, for Greeks to feel as national subjects meant internalizing their relationship with ancient Greece (Liakos, 2008). The relation of religion to the nation was contested in the writings of the Greek intellectuals. Korais was a fierce enemy of the clergy and excluded the Orthodox Church from his view of the nation state (Veremis, 1990). Rigas Fereos, the second emblematic personality of the Greek Enlightenment, embraced the idea of a radical liberal Hellenic State as the secular version of the *Rum millet* (Kitromilides, 2003). Yet in practice the ideas of a secular republic never met with widespread support. It was a deeply religious Christian Orthodox population that revolted against the Muslim Ottoman Empire, and religion was the major element that bound the peasantry together against the 'Muslim oppressors'.<sup>21</sup> Already during the war of

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<sup>21</sup> The Patriarchate, an official political structure of the Ottoman Empire, was expected to guarantee the loyalty of the Orthodox community towards the Ottoman state. The Patriarchate has

independence, all three constitutional texts that were adopted by the National Assemblies set religion as the major criterion for the attribution of Greek citizenship. Although the criteria changed in time, membership in the Greek nation has always been confined to the people who traced their origins to the 'Greek community of the Orthodox Millet'; being an Orthodox Christian thus became a precondition of being (seen as) Greek.<sup>22</sup>

While religion became the defining feature of Greekness, the criterion of language was used more flexibly. The linguistic plurality of the Balkan Orthodoxy was perceived as a challenge and an opportunity by the Greek nationalists; the eventual Hellenization of non-Greek-speaking Orthodox populations could widen its demographic basis (Kitromilides, 1990, pp. 30). It is important to mention that the Greek national movement did not only inspire and mobilize Greek-speaking populations; the war of independence was led by Arvanites and Vlachs as well.<sup>23</sup> Those groups claimed a Greek identity and were seen by others as Greeks. Although language gradually started gaining political significance, the Greek national movement initially claimed to include a large segment of the Balkan Orthodoxy.

The conceptualization of the nation-state by the Greek intelligentsia was inclusive in other terms as well. Rigas Fereos envisioned a new federation where equality and peaceful coexistence would be provided by a common citizenship to all Balkan cultural and also religious groups under the dominance of Greek culture. Korais, following the example of the French revolution, adopted a civic conception of the nation where all residents of a free Greece would become Greeks irrespectively of language and religion (Vogli, 2007, pp. 67-69). In accordance with early-nineteenth-century nationalism, which held that humanity is naturally divided into nations (Kedourie, 1993), the Greek national idea traced its distinctiveness to its 'classical roots'. However, this in itself does not explain current perceptions of national belonging as a privilege derived by descent (Pratsinakis, 2008). Such conceptions were shaped at later phases by the irredentist Modern Greek state in the context of competing national movements in the Balkans.

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continuously embraced the supranational character of its religious community and has never adopted a secessionist role. Since Orthodoxy was such a central element of the Greek national identity, the establishment of a national Church was essential for the legitimation of the new state's authority. The Greek national church was proclaimed independent of the Patriarchate in 1833. This independence was only accepted by the Patriarchate in 1850 (Mavrogordatos, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> During the nineteenth century, non-Orthodox populations had to convert if they wished to be naturalized. On the marginal case of the Catholic Greeks see (Vogli, 2007, pp. 71-80; 191-194).

<sup>23</sup> Arvanites are speakers of an Albanian dialect and Vlachs of a Romanesque language close to Romanian. Both groups adhere to the Christian Orthodox religion.

## Expanding the nation-state: the Byzantine legacy

The territorial settlement of the first Greek state was seen as a temporary arrangement and successive territorial gains were expected to keep pace with Ottoman decline (Koliopoulos, 1990, p. 78). Yet claims over territories could not be historically legitimized on the basis of the presence of Greek populations in classical times. The theory of the uninterrupted unity of the Greek nation, the continuous presence of the Greek *génos* in ancient, medieval, and modern periods, came to fill the gaps in time and space (Liakos, 2008, p. 204-208).<sup>24</sup> The territories of the Ottoman Empire were claimed as integral parts of the historical patrimony of the Hellenic World, since 'they have always been habituated by Greeks'. The 'Great Idea' (Μεγάλη ιδέα) was a dominant cultural, political, and ultimately military project aiming to unite within the borders of a single state all the areas of 'Greek settlement' in Asia Minor. This nationalist doctrine implied the goal of reviving the Byzantine Empire and aimed to establish its capital in Constantinople. Although the legacy of the classical past gave birth to the Greek national idea, Orthodoxy and the Byzantine past became the guiding light of Greek national aspirations after the birth of the Greek state.

In the context of irredentism,<sup>25</sup> the state assumed the role of the 'national centre', (εθνικό κέντρο) the political and cultural focal point of an extensive national community transcending contemporary state borders (Kitromilides, 1983; Prevelakis, 2000; Skopetea, 1988). Kolletis, prime minister of Greece in 1844, addressing the constituent assembly, described the contours of the Greek nation (as cited in Clogg, 1992, p. 48).

The Greek kingdom is not the whole of Greece, but only a part, the smallest and poorest part. A native is not only someone who lives within the Kingdom, but also one who lives in Ioannina, in Thessaly, in Serres, in Adrianople, in Constantinople, in Trebizond, in Crete, in Samos and in any land associated with Greek history or the Greek race.

The Greek nation was seen as being comprised by three distinct entities: the Greeks of the kingdom, the widespread merchant diaspora, and the unredeemed brethren in the Ottoman Empire (Hasiotis, 1993; Vogli, 2007). The ambitious

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<sup>24</sup> In practice that meant incorporating the Byzantine past as part of the Greek history. Filling the gap in history and officially including religion as a crucial component of Greekness was the intellectual project of Papanikolaou, the so-called Greek national historian.

<sup>25</sup> Irredentism is a political movement aiming to annex foreign-ruled territories on the grounds of historical claims, actual or alleged, and the perceived ethnic affiliation of populations living in these territories.

Greek national programme, embracing the complete population of these three entities, entailed a national policy within and outside the state.

The new-born state of Greece attracted a number of Greeks from the merchant diaspora whose political and economic involvement in the Greek war of Independence had been of critical importance. Refugee inflows from the Ottoman territory – which had started during the War of Independence and continued after the establishment of the Greek state – came to strengthen the relationship of the Greek state with Greeks abroad. People who came from different parts of the Ottoman Empire settled in the existing urban centres or created new settlements signalling a substantial demographic increase for the Greek Kingdom. Yet they represented only a small segment of the ‘brethren’ that the state aspired to ‘liberate’.

The Greek-speaking communities in the Ottoman Empire were not compactly settled but widely dispersed, primarily over large coastal areas and the Aegean islands, as well as in several big urban centres. Although this proved to be an unsurpassable obstacle for Greek irredentist aspirations, in the eyes of the proponents of the Great Idea it legitimized their claims on an extended territory: ‘Greece combined the appetite of Russia with the dimensions of Switzerland’ (Miller, 1905). Given that territorial expansion was justified on the basis of the presence of Greek populations in the *irredenta*, a constant feature of Greek policy in the nineteenth century was the pigeonholing of populations depending on the regions to which Greece laid claim. At the same time the Greek leadership continued to consider the Greek diaspora, the Greek communities in the West, as a significant source of cultural, political, and economic capital for the kingdom and tried to strengthen the ties between them and the Greek state. The newly established Greek consular network followed several practices to facilitate the prescription of citizenship to *homogénis* populations both in the West and in the Ottoman Empire. In fact the notion of *homogénis* first appeared in the political vocabulary when the consulate attempted to expand the political nation, i.e. the body of Greek citizens, abroad.

Who were considered as *homogénis* by the Greek state? A linguistic definition of what it meant to be a member of the Greek nation would have significantly reduced the potentials for national expansion. In practice, national consciousness (Εθνικό φρόνημα)<sup>26</sup> prevailed as the criterion of national inclusion of the foreign-born, while descent was the official rhetoric.<sup>27</sup> Descent could be used flexibly for

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<sup>26</sup> Φρόνημα (frónima) means consciousness in the moral sense of creed, or conviction. Συνείδηση (sinídisi) more precisely carries the general, more neutral meaning of ‘consciousness’.

<sup>27</sup> In 1855, descent, as encapsulated in the *ius sanguinis* principle, became the major criterion for

the inclusion of non-Greek-speaking Orthodox populations in the *génos*, provided that they identified with the Greek nation. Yet national consciousness could be assumed neither for Greek-speaking nor for non-Greek-speaking populations. To that end, educational projects were assiduously carried out in an attempt to cultivate the national identification of target populations, and thus to be able to incorporate as many populations as possible in the imagined Greek community.

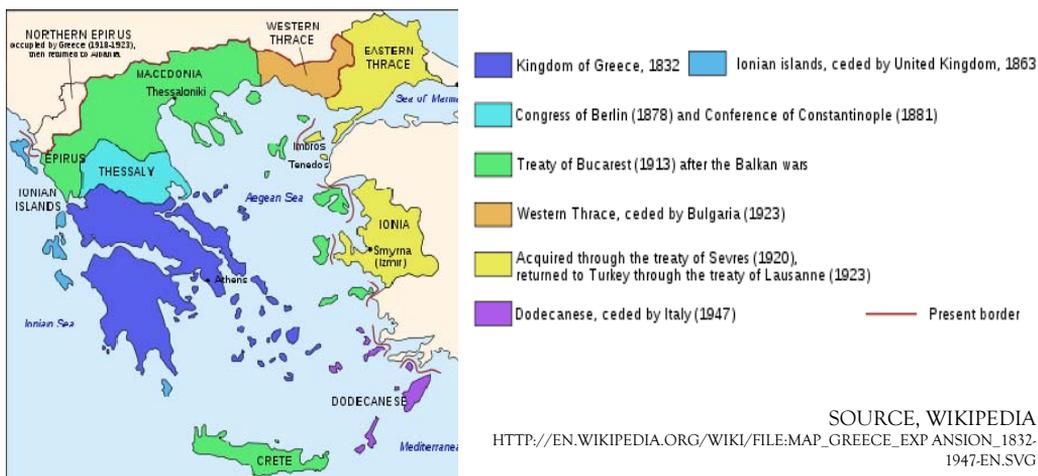
The process of national recruitment was less complicated in Asia Minor than across the northern borders of the kingdom. That was not because Greeks in Anatolia had a more overt national consciousness. Before the penetration of nationalist ideologies the Orthodox Christian populations had identified as Romii (Romans), a name echoing the Byzantine past. The degree to which Romii identified with the Greek state varied substantially (Clark, 2006; Kitromilides, 1990). The reason for this is that in Anatolia Greece's mission of 'national awakening' was not challenged by competing nationalisms. Romii could only become Greeks or remain Ottoman Christians, and the national recruitment implemented by the Greek state proved to be impressively successful (Kitromilides, 1983; 1990).

The situation on the northern borders of the kingdom was substantially different, especially after Greece had successfully annexed Thessaly and its borders had moved upwards to Macedonia and Epirus (see map 2.1). At this frontier, four conflicting national programmes confronted each other: the Greek, the Bulgarian, the Serbian, and the Albanian. The wide definition of Greekness that served the expansion of the Greek nation across the eastern border of the kingdom was challenged in the north by rival national movements and competing Balkan 'Great Ideas'. The cultural diversity of Balkan Orthodoxy could no longer be seen exclusively as an opportunity, but now seemed a potential threat to national aspirations.<sup>28</sup>

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the attribution of nationality (Vogli & Mylonas, 2009). *Ius sanguinis* is the determination of a person's nationality on the basis of the nationality of his/her parents.

<sup>28</sup> The main challenge for the Greek expansion was Bulgarian irredentism. Greeks and Bulgarians tried to achieve national affiliation of populations in Macedonia by exploiting popular dissatisfaction with living conditions under their Muslim landlords. Not language but acceptance of religious authority became the identification marker. In 1870, under increasing Bulgarian pressure for the appointment of Bulgarian bishops and the use of Bulgarian language in churches, the sultan established the Bulgarian Orthodox church, the Exarchate. Those who opted for the jurisdiction of the Bulgarian Exarchate became Bulgarians and those who opted for the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate in Constantinople became Greeks. Struggles between the two nationalisms were waged through competing educational and religious proselytization programmes. These targeted the sizeable populations that identified with their region rather a nation. In the beginning of the



Map 2.1 Territorial expansion of Greece 1832-1947

In 1912, despite conflicting interests, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece combined forces to confront the Ottoman Empire. After gaining rapid victories over the common enemy, the three states immediately confronted each other in order to annex as many territories as possible in the European space vacated by the defeated Ottoman army. Greece and Serbia, making substantial territorial gains, were the winners in this so-called Second Balkan War. With the Treaty of Bucharest, Greece's territory increased by approximately 70% and its population from 2,800,000 to 4,800,000 people (Dakin, 1972, p. 202). The new population represented the ethno-cultural complexities of the Balkan world. Besides the linguistic diversity of the Orthodox population and its divisions after years of offensive nationalist propaganda, one must take into account the presence of Muslim and Jewish minorities in the area. Thessaloniki, which is the locus of the present research, was a multiethnic city composed of three religious communities, Christians, Muslims, and Jews, the latter being the numerical majority.

The territorial gains of the Balkan Wars convinced the proponents of Greek irredentism that the 'Great Idea' was within reach. In 1917, Greece entered World War I on the side of Allies. The conclusion of the war found Greece on the side of the winners. In 1920, more than a year after the landing of the Greek army in Smyrna, the treaty of Sèvres created 'a Greece of the two continents and the five seas' (see map 2.1). Yet the treaty was never to be ratified by the Ottomans and the whole grandiose irredentist edifice in Asia Minor was soon to

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twentieth century, cultural and religious rivalries were accompanied by open militant confrontations between guerrilla bands.

collapse (Clogg, 1992). An ill-conceived Greek offensive in the interior of Asia Minor resulted in August 1922 in the defeat of the Greek army by Turkish forces reorganized by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk). The Greek army retreated and the Turkish army entered 'infidel Izmir', which was set on fire. The Christian inhabitants who managed to survive vacated the city en masse. In a couple of weeks, 750,000 Greeks from Asia Minor, Eastern Thrace, and the Pontos regions arrived in the Greek ports, desperate and clamouring for immediate assistance in order to survive (Pentzopoulos, 2002).

### **The homogenization of the Greek nation-state**

The defeat of the Greek Army in Asia Minor put an abrupt and tragic end to a long-standing Hellenic presence in Anatolia; Greeks lament this event as the 'Asia Minor catastrophe'. The Lausanne Convention of January 1923 specified the conditions of what it euphemistically characterized as a forced 'population exchange'.<sup>29</sup> This exchange, whose criterion was religion, concerned the permanent exodus of approximately 1.5 million people; 1.2 million Orthodox Christians were permanently expelled from Turkey and 350,000 Muslims from Greece. Exempted from the mutual expulsion were, on Turkish territory, most of the Orthodox population of Istanbul and the islands of Imvros and Tenedos; and on Greek territory, an equivalent number of Muslims in Western Thrace.

The Lausanne Convention was the legal framework for and the culmination of 'the un-mixing of peoples', a process which was already well underway in the previous decades (Hirschon, 2003, p. 4). The vast majority of the approximately 1.2 million people who were obliged to permanently settle in Greece by the Lausanne 'population exchange' had fled Turkey before the signing of the convention. In 1919, Greece and Bulgaria had agreed on the voluntary reciprocal emigration of their minorities. Many more Greeks, Turks, Bulgarians, Serbs, and Albanians<sup>30</sup> had been forced to flee, heading to their 'alien fatherlands' in circumstances caused by the violent nationalist conflicts and war from 1906 until 1923.

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the violent confrontations between existing and emerging nation states led to a complete redistribution of

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<sup>29</sup> With the treaty of Lausanne the Turkish Republic was established and the boundaries were redrawn in favour of Turkey (see map 2.1)

<sup>30</sup> A detailed account of the population movements between 1912 and 1924 is provided by A. A. Palis (1925). The author estimates that population transfers in the Balkans during that period concerned 2.3 to 2.5 million people, including those of the Lausanne convention.

populations. Displacement of civilians fleeing hostilities shaped the ethnically homogenous polities that came to replace the multicultural status quo of the old world. The Greek kingdom was most affected by this reshuffling of populations. The influx of the Asia Minor refugees represented a massive increase of its population, which swelled by a quarter. The impact on the ethnic map of the country was immense. In 1913, when Greece annexed Southern Macedonia, 'Greeks' formed 42% of the population. After the population exchange, 'Greeks' constituted 88% of the inhabitants of Macedonia (Andreades, 1929). The 'Hellenization of Macedonia' permitted Greece to view itself as an ethnically homogenous country.

According to the 1928 census only 6% of the total population belonged to linguistic and religious minorities (see appendix II, table I, pp. 248).<sup>31</sup> Concerning the linguistic minorities, a highly centralized administrative and educational system imposed the dominance of Greek language and promoted a uniform national culture.<sup>32</sup> To a large extent, this policy was implemented through fear of potential territorial claims by neighbouring Balkan states, which they might seek to legitimize by reference to those minority populations. After years of irredentist politics, disputed borders, and wars culminating in mutual atrocities, linguistic difference became highly politicized. At the same time, homogeneity became a political obsession of the Greek state.

Concerning the religious minorities, during and immediately after World War II Greece experienced a further stark reduction in its religious plurality. The long history of the Jews of Thessaloniki, a city that had retained a Jewish majority for centuries, took an horrific course (Mazower, 2005). The Jewish community of the city was nearly exterminated along with the 86% of the total Jewish Greek population murdered by the Nazis when they conquered Greece. After the war, the Chams, an Albanian-speaking and primarily Muslim community living in Western Greece close to the border with Albania, was accused of collaboration with the occupation forces. In punishment, they were violently driven across the border into Albania. Moreover, in the period 1946-1949, upon official invitation,

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<sup>31</sup> It should be noted that the Greek state avoided the inclusion of the Arvanites and the Turkish-speaking Asia Minor refugees in the minorities category; they were subsumed in the category 'Greek Orthodox'. Yet it did count the Vlachs and the then-called Slavo-Macedonians or Bulgarian-speakers. Despite their distinction in the census, these two groups were not given minority rights but were subject to policies of assimilation. Vlachs were incorporated under this name as a group with an identity compatible with Greekness (Winnifrieth, 2002). Slavo-Macedonians were re-labeled as Greeks speaking Slavic dialects and became target of an increasingly aggressive assimilation policy (Karakasidou, 1993).

<sup>32</sup> The Muslim minority, protected by legal obligations imposed by the Lausanne treaty, was not the target of such assimilation measures. However, it faced several exclusionary and discriminatory policies enforced by the Greek State, especially after 1967 (Troupmeta, 2001).

a large segment of the Armenian minority moved to the Soviet republic of Armenia (Hasiotis, 2005). Finally, 60,000 members of the Muslim minority were deprived of Greek citizenship and excluded from the Greek state.<sup>33</sup>

These population outflows were counterbalanced by influxes of Greek populations. The 1955 pogrom and the 1964 expulsion forced the emigration of the Greek minority of Istanbul.<sup>34</sup> The Greeks of Imvros and Tenedos also deserted their homeland. The Egyptian revolution of 1952 led to the exodus of 100,000 Greeks from Egypt (Gorman, 2009). Those forced inflows fostered the idea among Greek people of the Greek state as a refuge for the Hellenic world.

At the same time, the drastic minimization of religious plurality and the linguistic assimilation of non-Greek speaking groups in Greece were leading to more rigid and normative understandings of Greekness. By a policy of re-labelling, all traces of the ethnic diversity that had characterized the country's past were erased from public memory. Until 1961 most of the places that had borne non-Greek names were Hellenized (Kyramariou, 2010); the physical and build environment was then re-named in ways that formed a reminder of the official Greek history (Mackridge, 2008). In addition, from 1951 the state stopped recording data on religion and language. The presence of the remaining non-Greek minorities within the Greek nation-state was ignored and the view of the unbroken history of the Greek nation was imposed by a rigidly centralized education system.<sup>35</sup>

Local cultural practices of Greek populations – whose immense diversity reflected the coexistence of Greek communities with populations with diverse backgrounds as regards origin, language, and religion – were re-interpreted by national folklorists as quintessential Greek. They became symbols of nationhood, reflecting 'a rich Greek heritage', while their roots were traced to ancient Greece (Danforth, 1984; Herzfeld, 1986; Kyriakidou-Nestoros, 1983). Through a process of 'institutional forgetting' (see Douglas, 1986), the commonalities between those traditions and the traditions of *allogenis* communities with which Greek populations had coexisted for centuries were erased.

Today, the Greek nation state declares itself – and is also perceived by the vast majority of its citizens – as the homeland of all citizens of Greek descent who

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<sup>33</sup> That happened by an arbitrary implementation of a discriminatory article of the Greek nationality code which prescribed the loss of Greek nationality by *allogenis* 'who had fled Greece without the intention to return' (Christopoulos, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> By the end of the 1970s the Greek minority of Istanbul, which before the pogrom numbered approximately 135,000 people, stood at under 10,000 (Alexandris, 1983 #149).

<sup>35</sup> In the primary and secondary education curricula there is hardly any reference to linguistic and religious groups diverging from the Greek national prototype.

adhere to the Christian Orthodox faith, speak the Greek language, and share in Greek culture (Mackridge, 2008). Such a rigid understanding of Greekness poses severe obstacles for the inclusion of *allogenis* immigrants, and even appears to be problematic for the acceptance of immigrants of Greek descent, such as the FSU Greeks.

## 2.2 The Greek State and the 'Greek World'

### The concept of diaspora

In reference to the relocation of populations, the Greek word 'diaspora' (διασπορά; literally, dispersion) was first used to characterize the exile of the Athenian population after the Peloponnesian War. It also was used in the Greek translation of the bible (Septuagint) to indicate the dispersion of the Jews beyond Israel. As such it was an equivalent to the Hebrew term *galut*, referring to the exile of the Jews in Babylonian times. In the course of time the word became closely linked to Jewish history in a more general sense; it epitomized the fate of Jews living in exile, outside the 'homeland' (Ohliger & Münz, 2003). Beyond its linkage with Jewish history, the term also came to refer to the dispersion of any people from their original homeland, or of people who have been dispersed from their homeland.

Until recently, the Greek state used the word *homogénia* to describe the Greek world outside its borders, while *diaspora* was reserved mostly for Greek emigrants and their descendants. *Homogénia* served as a broader term also including ethnically Greek minorities in foreign countries who had never lived on Greek territory. However, since at least 1989, government officials, politicians, journalists, and academics have used the two terms as synonymous (Venturas, 2009, p. 125).

In recent decades, literature on diaspora has been burgeoning in different social scientific disciplines. The scholarly interest largely reflects the concept's growing importance in policy and public debates; diaspora has become a politicized concept (Koinova, 2010; Shain, 2007; Sheffer, 2003) widely used in public discourse (Bruneau, 2010, p. 35). The popularity of the term in and outside academia has made it a particularly elastic notion (see Cohen, 2008). This has led to obscurity about its content and has weakened its analytical value.

Although diaspora studies have grown as an autonomous academic field of inquiry, it is still difficult to discern which processes and populations are covered by the term and its derivatives, and which are not. Following Brubaker (2005) and Faist (2010, p. 35) three core elements may be singled out as constitutive of diasporas: dispersion, homeland orientation, and boundary maintenance.<sup>36</sup> However, in reviewing the literature one realizes that there is no general consensus even on these basic criteria: each of these three elements has been challenged as regards its claimed status as a necessary condition. Over-utilization of the concept and lack of comparative research has meant that any hope now of finding a common denominator is essentially chimerical.

Despite the differences there is an element binds together all different approaches presented above: the assumption that diasporas are ‘real communities’ to which people belong, even if they are not aware they do. This assumption has led scholars to try to define the limits of those communities. In contrast to the prevailing academic orthodoxy, Brubaker proposes treating diaspora as a category of practice (a notion playing a role in the social processes under observation), and from there assessing whether and how it can be fruitfully used as an analytical category (a concept of use for the researcher) (2005). In his words:

rather than speak of ‘a diaspora’ or ‘the diaspora’ as an entity, a bounded group, an ethnodemographic or ethnocultural fact, it may be more fruitful, and certainly more precise, to speak of diasporic stances, projects, claims, idioms, practices, and so on. We can then study empirically the degree and form of support for a diasporic project among members of its putative constituency, just as we can do when studying a nationalist project. And we can explore to what extent, and in what circumstances, those claimed as members of putative diasporas actively adopt or at least passively sympathize with the diasporic stance, just as we can do with respect to those who are claimed as members of putative nations, or of any other putative collectivity. (Brubaker, 2005, p. 13).

Adopting this perspective, in what follows I will give a rough sketch of how Greek state officials have attempted to define the *homogénia* as part of their attempt to mobilize it for the benefit of the homeland. I do not place emphasis on the effectiveness of this construction nor on the internalization of diasporic identities by the populations claimed to be part of the Greek diaspora; rather, I am interested in the shifting goals set by the Greek governments.

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<sup>36</sup> For an earlier alternative proposal of defining criteria see (Sheffer, 1986).

## The Modern Greek diaspora as a category of practice

As described in the previous section, Modern Greece was constructed by and for a perceived trans-territorial national community defined by descent. Significant changes took place in the conceptualization of Greekness after its establishment. However, descent remained the unchallenged defining criterion of national belonging. This ensured the sustaining of the trans-territorial character of the nation. People who had never lived in Greece, nor their ancestors, may claim to be and be recognized by others as equal Greeks by virtue of descent within the imagined category of 'the Greek people'.

Such identifications have been supported and at periods induced by state policies. Successive Greek governments have treated Greeks abroad, the *homogénia*, as a resource with which to pursue the goals of the 'national centre'. Greece and the *homogénia* are bound together in a mutually recognized solidaristic relationship. The *homogenís* are expected to act for the benefit the 'national centre', while the Greek state is perceived as having a moral obligation towards them.

The history of the establishment of the contemporary Greek nation state is intertwined with that of the emergence of the Modern Greek diaspora. Actually, the formation of a national diaspora preceded the creation of the Greek state and significantly influenced its establishment. The wealthy merchant communities had provided the material underpinnings of the pre-independence intellectual revival which took place primarily in the West. At the same time, the *Phiiliki Etairia* (society of Friends), the secret revolutionary society that laid the groundwork of the Greek revolt, was founded in 1814 by three young Greeks in Odessa (Clogg, 1999, p. 11).

The situation changed drastically after the establishment of the Greek nation state. After its institution, the Greek state came to monopolize the definition of Greekness and became the main actor and regulator influencing the formulation of the Greek diasporic identities. Three phases can be identified in relation to the goals set by Greek governments towards the Greeks outside Greece. The period of irredentism marks the first phase. In that period the aim was to include what was perceived as the Ottoman periphery of the Hellenic World into an expanding Greek state. As already described, the Greek world was initially perceived to consist of three distinct entities: the residents of the Greek Kingdom, the unredeemed Greeks, and the Greek merchant communities. According to the irredentist project of the Greek state, only the Greek merchant communities were claimed to be diaspora Greeks. Greek governments attempted to influence the

ideological, political, and economic processes within those communities, mainly by way of seeking support for its irredentist policy (Konstantinova, 2007; Tsoukalas, 1979, pp. 368-370; Venturas, 2009, p. 126).

The year 1922 signifies the demise of irredentism but did not entail a shift in the function and the self-perception of the Greek state as the focal point of a wider Greek world. It simply marked a new phase in its relations with the Greeks abroad. Expansion to include Greek populations was no longer the goal. After a period during which Greek policy focused exclusively on internal affairs due to the massive 1920s Asia Minor refugees inflow, state authorities took on the role of maintaining ties with a more widespread and diversifying population claimed as belonging to the Greek diaspora. The aim was to sustain and develop the 'Greek' character of this population.

In the nineteenth century the influential – albeit numerically restricted – Greek mercantile communities in Western Europe had experienced a decline. Worsening socio-economic conditions in the regions where they lived, in contrast with the opportunities in the Ottoman lands, motivated people of these communities to move to the Ottoman Empire. At the same time, assimilation further reduced the Greek presence in the old trading centres of the West and the Balkans. Odessa, and other Russian, Bulgarian, and Romanian ports, became the new hubs of the Greek merchant diaspora (Hasiotis, 1993).

Extensive emigration away from the Greek state took place at the end of the nineteenth century. Following the 1890s economic crisis, and again in the aftermath of Asia Minor catastrophe, great waves of emigration headed for transoceanic destinations, predominantly the United States. After World War II Greeks emigrated in large numbers to Western Europe, primarily Germany, but also Australia and Canada; from 1945 to 1974 almost one in six Greeks departed (Fakiolas & King, 1996, p. 172). Government rhetoric shifted from the celebration of the wealth and intellectual radiance of the merchant diaspora to pointing out the risks of the nation 'bleeding out' and of its emigrants being assimilated abroad (Venturas 2009, p.134).

In economic terms the new diaspora populations were of great interest to the Greek state; the inflow of remittances sent back to the homeland presented a valuable and stable source of capital.<sup>37</sup> Government policy strengthened the ties between the Greek 'national centre' and its diasporic communities. Various

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<sup>37</sup> In contrast, the efforts of the Greek state had not been as successful in attracting capital from the old merchant diaspora, whose economic interests were closer to the international markets than to those of the weak Greek kingdom (Dakin, 1972).

initiatives were launched to prevent assimilation, including sending labour attachés to consulates abroad, setting up ‘Greek houses’, funding cultural events, and appointing teachers to teach Greek to the children of Greek emigrants living and working in cities in Western Europe (Venturas, 2009, p. 126). The establishment of the General Secretariat for Greeks Abroad (GSGA) in 1982 signalled the institutionalization of a more coherent and all-embracing policy. The GSGA organized the emigrants and created representative organs for them. To this end the First World Congress for Greeks abroad was organized in 1985.

Facilitating the return of repatriates was a chief objective of this policy. At the discursive level, the use of terminology is very telling. Rather than speaking of repatriation (επαναπατρισμός), reference is made to *palinnóstisi* (παλιννόστηση), a classical Greek word echoing Ulysses’ return to Ithaca. Partly as a result of government measures, Greek immigrants express a strong orientation towards Greece and commonly embrace an ethos of return<sup>38</sup>. Moreover, Greek communities abroad have been characterized by a high degree of social cohesion and strong ethno-national identity (Vermeulen, 2008).

In the late 1980s, the Greek government gradually took a different stance towards what it considers its diaspora, entering the third and present phase. The pursuit of ‘repatriation’ in order to revitalize the homeland was reconsidered; the new aim became to retain Greeks abroad so that they could serve Greek interests from afar. The prevention of assimilation of Greeks abroad was not seen as a sufficient means to achieve the new goals; the World Council for the Hellenic World Abroad was set up as an organ for promoting Greek interests, with respect to ‘national issues’ and with a concern for economic expansion (Venturas, 2009).

In the course of implementing this new policy, the government rediscovered a largely forgotten twig of the Greek family tree: the Greeks of the former Soviet Union. The case of the Greeks in the Soviet Union is an intriguing and rather exceptional case. In the turbulent 1920s, the Greek governments were diffident about those Greeks in the Soviet Union who attempted to immigrate to Greece. Greece was still struggling to accommodate the 1.2 million refugees from the forced ‘population exchange’ with Turkey, and in governmental circles there was also a fear that Greeks from the Soviet Union would spread the ‘virus of Bolshevism’. For these reasons, the Greek governments were not willing to accept a large migration inflow from the then newly formed Soviet Union. Thereafter,

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<sup>38</sup> As Peek (2008, p. 68) vividly describes for the first generation Greeks in Utrecht, the Netherlands, ‘they believe that returning to the home country is the right thing to do [...] They do not want to return yet they feel they should or at least should want to’.

Soviet Greeks remained enclosed within the sealed borders of the Soviet Union,<sup>39</sup> with very limited contact with ‘the historic homeland’ and largely forgotten by it. The East–West divide thus separated Greece from this segment of the *homogénia*.

The situation changed drastically in the late 1980s when Greeks started migrating to Greece from the disintegrating Soviet Union. In that period, voices were raised concerning the moral duty of ‘the fatherland’ towards these forgotten and much-afflicted members of the Greek family. Governmental officials initially expressed worries about the scale and suddenness of the inflow. However, they soon re-conceptualized it as an asset for the state. In contrast with the then new policy of keeping diaspora Greeks abroad, but in line with the well-rooted self-image of Greece as a refuge for Greek people, the Greek government proclaimed an official invitation to Soviet Greeks to move permanently to Greece. This plan aimed to settle them in the rural areas of the north-eastern Department of Thrace, home to the Greek Muslim minority. Before going into greater detail regarding Greek state policy on FSU migration in chapter 4, I first outline the origins and the history of the Greek populations in the Soviet Union.

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<sup>39</sup> With the exception of the small-scale migrations in the 1930s and 1960s; (see chapter 3.2)

# The Greek diaspora in the Soviet Union

## 3.1 Pontos and the origins of the Greek diaspora in the Soviet Union

The Crimean peninsula, an area that presently falls within the borders of Ukraine, hosted the earliest Greek settlement in the territories of what once formed the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union. Most likely descendants of Byzantine colonists, 'Crimean Greeks' formed a sizeable Christian Orthodox community within a Muslim hinterland. According to the Ottoman census in 1545, this community numbered approximately 18,000 people. This is almost identical to its size in 1778 when the 'Crimean Greeks' were granted privileges by Catherine II to relocate in the Azov Sea region (Hasiotis, 1997). There they founded the city of Marioupol and twenty-one villages around it (Kaurinkoski, 2008). In the same period, more Greek populations from Anatolia and the Greek peninsula migrated to different places of the then newly annexed Russian lands in the north-west Black Sea region (see map I in appendix II, pp. 248).

More extended migrations targeting the Caucasus took place in the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century (see table 3.1). The history of these population movements is intertwined with the history of the Greeks of Pontos and of the Greeks of the Erzurum Vilayet. The Greeks in Erzurum Vilayet were scattered in several villages around the cities of Erzurum, Baypur, and Kars (see map 3.1), at the eastern fringes of the Pontic land. They spoke a Turkic dialect and comprised a much smaller community compared to the Greek community in Pontos. Three hypotheses may be proposed for their presence there. The first is that they were indigenous Greek speaking Orthodox Christian populations who assimilated linguistically. The second hypothesis is that their communities were

formed by migration of Greek Christian Orthodox populations from the interior of Asia Minor where the Turkish language was very widespread among Greek Orthodox populations. The third hypothesis is that they were formed by immigration of Greek people from Pontos who assimilated linguistically.<sup>40</sup>

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From Easter Anatolia (Erzerum), after the 1828 Russo-Turkish War	42,000 people
From Pontocs after the Crimean War (1856-82)	53,000 people
From Pontos during World War I (1914-1918)	85,800 people

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Table 3.1 The three major migration waves to Caucasus from Eastern Anatolia and Pontos. Source Hassiotis 1997

At the end of the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-29, the Greeks of Erzurum Vilayet deserted their land, together with local Armenian populations. They followed the withdrawal of the advance guard of the Tsarist troops that had pushed forward into Ottoman territory. Having welcomed the Russian army, they now fled in fear of reprisals by the Ottomans (Artemis Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1991) and resettled in central Georgia (see map 3.1).

The largest segment of the Greek migrations to the Caucasus concerned the Pontic Greeks, however. Literally meaning ‘sea’, Pontos derives from Ἐφξινος Πόντος (Εύξεινος Πόντος) the (ancient) Greek name for the Black Sea. Pontos denotes a geographical area across the eastern half of the southern coast regions of the Black Sea, defined to a large extent by its Alps (see map 3.1). It is also a meaningful historical category within Greek historiography. The history of Pontos is treated as an integral part of the history of the Greek nation and is cited as an example of its unbroken continuity (Sideri, 2006, p. 234).

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<sup>40</sup> I did not find evidence in the literature supporting any of those hypotheses. According to Jennings, Erzurum did experience extensive Christian immigration during the sixteenth century (1976). He postulates, however, that those migrations concerned Armenian populations (Jennings 1976: 56). Finally, although it is recorded that after the seventeenth century there was significant migration of Pontic Greeks to Chaldia to work in the local mines, no such reference is made for the Erzurum area.



Map 3.1 Pontos and the migrations from Erzerum Vilayet

According to Kitromilides (1990), Pontos was the single region of Asia Minor where a compact Greek society had survived at the time of the Ottoman conquest. Pontos stayed protected from the nomadic raids which dislocated the Greek populations in the rest of Asia Minor during the four centuries of Byzantine-Turkish confrontation, shielded by its physical geography as well as by the Empire of Trebizond (1204-1461 AD)<sup>41</sup>. However, radical changes took place in the empire during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At that time, as the Ottoman Empire was becoming more decentralized, a new Ottoman aristocracy, the *derebey*, emerged. Acting to a certain extent autonomously from the Sublime Porte, the *derebey* aspired to be the absolute rulers of Pontos. In order to do so they had to annihilate the pre-existing elite families and to build a system of personal relationships and loyalties. In this context, pressure was exerted on local populations to convert to Islam. The religious balance gradually shifted in favour of the Muslims and new Christian Orthodox communities were founded in the mountains of Pontos by populations that tried to escape these religious pressures. Thereafter the Christian Orthodox community remained a minority in Pontos.

Concerning language, although several communities in the western and the south-eastern borders of the Pontic land assimilated to Turkic dialects, the

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<sup>41</sup> The Empire of Trebizond was one of the three empires established by Byzantine nobility after the fall of Constantinople to the Fourth Crusade.

majority spoke Pontic-Greek, which continued to be the mother tongue of several Muslim Pontics too. Pontic-Greek is a Greek dialect characterized by the retention of features of earlier forms of the Greek language which have disappeared from other modern Greek dialects, as well as the integration of several Turkic elements, primarily in the realm of vocabulary. Being the most distant dialect of the modern Greek languages, it is almost unintelligible to speakers of modern Greek (Mackridge, 1991).

In the nineteenth century, favourable economic circumstances in the Ottoman Empire reinforced the Pontic-Orthodox economy and fostered substantial cultural and political development. During that century, Pontic Greeks, especially the affluent ones and those educated in the urban centres, became increasingly estranged from the Ottoman government at the Porte and from the patriarchate in the Phanar, which was loyal to the sultan. From 1829 'they were exposed to two new and external distractions, neither of which could endear what was now described as a millet to the Ottoman state, and neither of which were in a position to help Pontic Orthodoxy when the time came' (Bryer, 1991, p. 327).

Those two external factors were the establishment of the Greek state and the expansion of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus area. Although rather insignificant at the political level and situated far from Pontos itself, the small Greek Kingdom proved to be very influential at the ideological level. The Greek state's export of new ideas such as national identification and historical determinism, and their internalization by Pontic Orthodox populations, gradually drew them into the larger community of the Greek nation. Their new collective identity bound their destiny with a distant and vaguely known state (Kitromilides, 1983). As Bryer argues, a Pontic Orthodox Christian in the beginning of the nineteenth century might describe himself or herself by reference to his village, and then as a Rum (Roman), an Orthodox subject of the sultan. By the end of the century he was calling himself a Greek and, after the population exchange when he met other Greeks in the Greek state, a Pontic-Greek (Bryer, 1991).

The influence of Russia on Christian Orthodox populations in Pontos preceded the penetration of the national ideologies of the Greek state. After the empire's expansion to the south, its presence on the eastern borders of the Ottoman Empire induced liberation fervour among segments of Pontic Orthodoxy, and Russians were welcomed with enthusiasm during the Russo-Turkish Wars.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, the colonization strategy of Tsarist Russia aimed to attract

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<sup>42</sup> Even in the Greek peninsula as early as the sixteenth century, belief in prophesies about a fair-haired race from the north that would liberate the Orthodoxy from the Muslim oppressor was widespread among orthodox populations (Clogg, 1992).

Christian populations to the newly acquired areas in north and east Black Sea; the aim was to alter the religious demography of the newly occupied dominions.

The Russians became the rulers in an area with which Pontic Orthodox populations had historic ties. Contact between Pontos and the Caucasus had existed since time immemorial (Sideri, 2006). Immigration gradually increased in these new circumstances, due to the fact that the Russians established Orthodoxy as the dominant religion in the area and provided economic privileges in exchange for colonization, as well as the fact that the Russians were already hosts to Greek colonies in Crimea. Already in the late eighteenth century, in periods of unfavourable economic conditions, several Pontic-Greeks had left for Crimea (Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1997b) and throughout the following century the Russian consul-general in Trebizond invited Pontic Orthodox emigrants to build the infrastructure of Tsarist rule in the Caucasus (Bryer, 1991). Besides continuous small-scale emigration, mass flights from Pontos took place in two phases.



Migrations after the Crimean War



Migrations in the period of WW I

Map 3.2 The two major migration outflows from Pontos

The first emigration wave took place after the Crimean War (1856). During that period, the Russian army violently pushed the Circassians and other Muslim ethnic groups that had resisted the Russian expansion in the Caucasus into the Ottoman Empire. Their settlement in Pontos influenced negatively the living conditions of the local Pontic Greeks.<sup>43</sup> In this context, the benefits offered to prospective colonizers by Tsarist Russia appeared attractive to a large number of Pontic Greeks; migration acquired large dimensions from late 1850 until 1882.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Land was confiscated to cover the needs of the refugees, taxes were increased, while the order in the area was threaten by brigand bands (Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1991).

<sup>44</sup> The migration flows resulted in a de-facto population exchange which was later regulated by the Berlin Convention in 1879 (A. Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1997a).

The second and largest migration outflow took place during the turbulent period during and after World War I. In this period Pontic Greeks completely deserted their ancestral home, fleeing to Russia or being permanently expelled to Greece as part of the 'population exchange' envisaged by the Lausanne convention (for historical details see appendix I.2, pp. 244). Tens of thousands Pontic Greeks perished as victims of labour battalions, deportation, massacres, diseases, and hardships on their way to Russia and Greece, or were killed in guerrilla conflicts (Samouilidis, 2002).<sup>45</sup> Of the remaining populations, more than 200,000 fled to Greece and approximately 85,000, primarily from East Pontos, went to Russia. The decimated Pontic Orthodoxy was thus divided between two new homelands.

### 3.2 Greeks in the Soviet Union

For analytical purposes, we may group the Greek communities in the late Russian Empire into three clusters, which were established under different historical circumstances and hosted populations with different characteristics. As already described, the oldest concentration was founded on the north coast of the Black Sea, the Azov coast, and Crimea. There, settlers were granted substantial economic privileges and the population was more urbanized than in the Caucasus. It also included a significant number of affluent families, primarily in Odessa as well as in other port cities. From this economically dynamic population an ethnic elite had emerged which took on the political and educational leadership of the Greek diaspora. In terms of language the Greek communities of Ukraine were characterized by great linguistic diversity. Sizeable segments of the populations spoke Tatar and Greek dialects, a minority spoke Modern Greek while assimilation to the Russian language was widespread, especially among more wealthy families (Hasiotis & Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1997).

A second concentration of Greeks was located in central Georgia, west and south of Tbilisi, and was composed of the Turkic-speaking Greeks of Erzurum Vilayet (from here onwards referred to as Turkophone Greeks). Settlement in that area had started from the beginning of the nineteenth century but the majority of villages were formed by refugees who fled the eastern and northern border areas of the Ottoman Empire after the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-29 (Aggelidis, 1999). The refugees were provided land to settle on, but not the economic and other privileges offered to the Greek colonizers in northern Black Sea region (Karpozilos, 2002). Tsalka, a mountainous region which had been deserted by its

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<sup>45</sup> In this turbulent period approximately 25% of the total Ottoman populations perished (Clark, 2006; Marantzidis, 2001).

local populations after the Persian and Ottoman invasions, hosted most of the Greek settlers and other villages were founded in an area extending from Tsalka to Dnamisi to the south and Marneouli to the east.

The third cluster was the Pontic-Greek communities which as described were formed as a corollary of the colonization policy of Tsarist Russia, primarily after the mid nineteenth century, in different areas in the Caucasus. Communities were founded in a huge area stretching from Kuban and Stavroupol to the east coast of the Black Sea and the Kars region.<sup>46</sup> The settlers were provided with more privileges than the Greeks in Central Georgia but less than those on the north coast of the Black Sea (Hasiotis & Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1997). They were Pontic-Greek speaking and originated from various parts of the Pontic land. Similar to the Greeks in central Georgia, the majority was concentrated in rural areas. Yet Sokhumi and Batumi, in Ankhazia and Adzharia respectively, hosted sizeable affluent Greek communities (Hasiotis & Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1997).

During World War I and after the October Revolution, substantial demographic changes took place. As already noted, 85,000 Pontic Greeks from Eastern Pontos took refuge in the Caucasus area, primarily in the Russian ports of the eastern Black Sea and Tbilisi. Moreover, in 1919 the recapture of Kars and Ardahan by the Ottomans was followed by a mass flight of Greek populations to the Russian territory to escape persecution. The same year a delegation from the Greek Welfare Ministry went to Batumi to administer relief to the Greek populations. In the period 1919-1921, 52,878 Greeks were transferred via the port of Batumi to Thessaloniki in Greece. Three quarters of them were refugees from Kars and Ardahan (Vergeti, 1991). Another delegation which was sent to Odessa in Crimea, organized the transfer of approximately 10,000-12,000 Greek residents from the city.

The unsuccessful participation of the Greek army in the Allied Anti-Bolshevik campaign in Ukraine and southern Russia had put the Greek populations in the area in a precarious situation. Despite the assurances of the Bolsheviks, many Greeks, including the majority of the affluent families, decided to leave for Greece. In the Caucasus the desire for emigration to Greece remained strong, especially among the refugees who had escaped Pontus after World War I. However, due to diplomatic obstacles and the unwillingness of Greek governments to receive the refugees,<sup>47</sup> the number of 'repatriations' was kept

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<sup>46</sup> A small number of villages, such as Tetrtskaro and Bortzumi, were also founded in Central Georgia. A considerable number of Pontics also concentrated in Tbilisi, which had been already hosting Greek populations from the early nineteenth century (Socratis Aggelidis, 2003).

<sup>47</sup> As already mentioned, the unwillingness of the Greek governments was related to the difficulty

relatively low; in the period from 1922 until 1929, approximately 20,000 persons moved to Greece.

## **After the Revolution**

The population movements after the Revolution resulted in a change in the composition of the Greek population in the newly formed Soviet Union. People of Pontic origin became the numerical majority: more than half of the Greek population, which at the end of 1920 was estimated at around 250,000 persons (Maos, 1992), was now formed by Pontic-Greek communities. Of the remaining population, one third comprised the communities in Azof and Crimea, and the Turkic-speaking communities in Central Georgia formed a smaller segment.

The migration outflows also signalled the decline of the Greek urban populations (Agtzidis, 1997; Hasiotis, 1997). Since the urban population had a leading position in its educational and ideological organization, the Greek diaspora became deprived of its traditional elite. This gap was filled in the 1920s by a new elite that emerged from communist intellectuals and Party members (Agtzidis, 1997). In contrast to the pre-revolution leadership, which was completely oriented towards the 'national centre', that is the Greek nation-state, the mission of the new elite was to integrate the Greek minority into the Soviet Union. Aiming to infuse the Greek communities with Communist ideals, separate divisions of the regional Party organizations were formed, as well as professional and cultural associations. However, these initially met with limited participation (Hasiotes, 1997).<sup>48</sup>

Cultural activities were organized and a substantial number of newspapers and academic books as well as general literature were published in Greek in order to disseminate and propagate the Communist world-view. In addition, a network of 'Greek Soviet schools' was founded (Agtzidis, 1997). In the context of the Soviet national policy of the 1920s, minority languages were used as a means to promote the socialist cultivation of minority populations. For the Greek Communists, the

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they faced in accommodating the massive inflow of 1920s refugees, but also to their fear that Greeks from the Soviet republics would spread the 'virus of Bolshevism'.

<sup>48</sup> The October Revolution had found the Greek communities divided and their leadership ambivalent. In the Pannhellenic congress in Taganrog, held in the summer of 1917, the majority of representatives voiced caution and adopted a 'wait and see attitude' (Karpozilos, 2002, p.142). Most Greeks were rather negative or maintained a neutral position. A minority collaborated with the Bolsheviks and a smaller group in Georgia joined the Mensheviks. According to Agtzidis (1991), the reluctant attitude of Greeks towards the Bolsheviks related to their well-rooted traditions of free enterprise and their strong religiousness.

issue was whether to strive for the socialist cultivation of the diaspora in Modern (demotic) Greek or in Pontic Greek. Eventually, it was decided that demotic Greek should become the official language.<sup>49</sup>

According to Karpozilos (1991), although propagandistic in essence, the activities of the Communist leadership fostered the ethnic identity of the Greek minority. Artistic expressions in the Greek language were supported as long as they aligned with Soviet principles,<sup>50</sup> and in some cases even the study and practice of folk practices was encouraged (Karpozilos, 1991). At same time, the expansion of the Soviet Greek school network reduced levels of illiteracy (Hasiotis, 1997; Karpozilos, 2002).<sup>51</sup> At the beginning of the 1930s, Greek, together with Russian and Abkhaz, was the official language in those areas of Abkhazia with sizeable Greek populations. Moreover, three Greek ‘National Soviets’ were formed in the Azov area, and a small Greek region was instituted in the northern Caucasus with its ‘capital’ in the town of Krymsk (Hasiotis, 1997).

However, the small demographic size of the Greek minority and its geographical dispersion made impossible the establishment of an autonomous Greek administrative unit within the Soviet Union. At the ideological-symbolical level, the fact that Greeks did not form an indigenous population made their position weaker. As will be described in what follows, the Greek community was particularly vulnerable to the change of nationalities policy when Stalin became general secretary of the Communist Party in 1929.

### **The change of ‘nationalities policy’**

The Russian Revolution took place in a multiethnic empire at a period when national feelings by indigenous populations and colonial subjects were strong. Lenin reconsidered his views on the centralization of the Soviet state (Sideri, 2006, p.77). Fearing that the Revolution might be endangered by ethnically motivated opposition, adopted a liberal national policy, allowing for the self-determination of the ‘nations’ as long as they endorsed the Soviet ideals. The policy of *Korenizatsiya*, literally the process of rooting, was designed in contrast to the repressive practices of the Tsarist colonial power. Promoting the interests of

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<sup>49</sup> In addition, the simplification of orthography and the introduction of phonetic spelling were decided upon.

<sup>50</sup> Besides the development in Greek literature, the Greek State Theatre in the city of Sokhoun is a notable example of the cultural development within the Greek community.

<sup>51</sup> Before the Revolution, Greek schools existed only in cities where there were organized communities (Karpozilos, 2002). Those schools continued to exist for a short period after the revolution, when they were substituted by the more extended network of Soviet Schools.

the ethnic groups in the Soviet Union, it aimed to harmonize their relationship with the Soviet regime. The main beneficiaries were the big indigenous nationalities of the empire which formed the autonomous or independent republics of the Soviet Union. However, as in the case of the Greeks, even the so-called 'small nations' were given space for self determination and cultural development.

During the same period, economic reform was also enforced in a less radical way. The so-called New Economic Policy (NEP) allowed a certain co-existence between a market economy and a centralized state (Nove, 1992). The NEP was, however, considered a deviation from the revolutionary agenda. Collectivization, which was imminently implemented by Stalin, was supposed to progress the actual economic and political aims of the revolution. This policy was implemented in two main ways: by creating *kolkhoz* (collective farms) and *sovkhos* (state farms), and depriving wealthier farmers, the kulaks, of their privileges (Nove, 1992). A radical anti-religious policy was also implemented (Hasiotis, 1997).

Concerning the nationalities policy, Stalin considered *Korenizatsiya* as having been successfully and sufficiently implemented. Thus, the ultimate aim of national and linguistic unification and the creation of the *Sovetskii chelovek*, the Soviet person, was pursued. In practice, this shift gradually led to overt Russification and the victimization of certain ethnicities. These were largely the non-indigenous nations, especially the ones that were affiliated with 'enemy states'. Party rhetoric and practice became strongly against the expression of national affiliation, and a large segment of the Greek population was persecuted through the common accusation of being *enemies of the people*.

## The persecutions

In the Soviet Union the ethnic origin of people, *natsional'nost'*, was mentioned in most official documents including their passport on top of their Republican citizenship (Ginsburgs, 1983). Offspring of mixed marriages had to choose one of their parents' nationalities. However, not all Greeks had Soviet citizenship. The non-holders of Soviet passports, belonged into two categories: those who had acquired Greek citizenship from the Greek consulates,<sup>52</sup> and stateless people who had declared themselves Greeks to the Soviet authorities. The latter were registered as Greeks in the registers of the Greek consulate in Moscow yet remained people without official documentation. During the early period, the

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<sup>52</sup> As described in chapter two, the expansion of the Greek consular network initiated the ungrudging distribution of citizenship to members of the Greek Diaspora.

Soviet authorities did not support the acquisition of Soviet citizenship by the Greek population. Aiming to reduce their numbers, pressure was exerted on Greeks to emigrate; this was especially the case in Abkhazia, an area that had received a large number of refugees from the Ottoman Empire in the period 1917-1918.

As far as the populations were concerned, declaring themselves Greek was initially to their benefit. As foreign citizens, they were exempted from participation in the Kolkhoz and allowed to keep their property (Hassiotis, 1997). Moreover, they were exempted from conscription into the army. In the following decades, however, the situation changed drastically. Greek citizenship became a major constraint not only because it evoked suspicion about loyalties, but also because it meant exclusion from participation in several fields of social political and economic life.

Tensions between the Greek communities and the authorities started with the enforcement of collectivization. In several areas the process was met with opposition and the authorities reacted with forced resettlement and persecution. Emigration to Greece became highly desired and applications for repatriation escalated, especially after the great famine of 1931-33, which resulted in millions of deaths. However, the Greek governments firmly maintained their position of discouraging 'repatriation'.<sup>53</sup>

Persecution of the Greek populations became worse in the period that followed. The failure of collectivization and the primarily intra-party conflicts led to the Stalinist purges of 1936-1938. In a climate of growing suspicion, any contact with foreigners was potentially espionage and could result in immediate arrest (Sideri, 2006). Tens of thousands of people were displaced, sent to concentration camps in Siberia, or executed. Moreover, faced with accusations of anti-Soviet and anti-socialist propaganda, most of the Greek schools were closed, the press was suppressed, all kinds of publications in Pontic and demotic Greek were banned, and every form of artistic or other cultural activity was stopped. Nearly all the Greek intelligentsia, including Party members, were executed (Agtzidis, 1991). For a short period the Greek government changed its attitude towards 'repatriation' from the Soviet Union and emigration was allowed, primarily for the victims of persecutions and their families (Hasiotis, 1997).

Persecutions continued before, during, and particularly on the eve of World War II, when a number of Greeks from Crimea, Kuban, and the Caucasus were deported to Siberia and North Kazakhstan. Although Greeks participated in the

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<sup>53</sup> In the period 1929-1933, approximately 7,000 people emigrated.

Great Patriotic War and the anti-Nazi resistance in areas occupied by the Germans, this was not considered sufficient to prove their loyalty to the Soviet Union (Sideri, 2006; Agtzidis, 1991; Hasiotis, 1997). The Cold War was about to begin, and their actual and imagined homelands would be located in opposing camps. The largest-scale and most systematic deportations took place in June 1949. State security special forces encircled Greek villages, herded populations to various locations, and conducted them to railway stations (Karpozilos 2002; Agtzidis 1991). The majority of Greeks on the eastern Black Sea coast, including the whole Greek population of Abkhazia and half of the population of Adzharia, were deported to Central Asia.



Map 3.3 The Stalinist deportations to Central Asia

The reasons for this systematic deportation remain controversial. Various interpretations have been suggested, such as the end of the civil war in Greece and the defeat of the communist forces, the need for manpower in Central Asia to support the new five-year plan, the Georgianization of Abkhazia, and the attempt by the Soviet authorities to clear the border areas of 'non-reliable populations' (Hasiotis, 1997; Sideri, 2006; Agtzidis, 1991). Interestingly, not all Greek populations were affected to the same degree. For instance, the Turkophone Greeks and other Greek communities around Tbilisi as well as the Greeks in Marioupol were excluded from deportation, whereas in Abkhazia and Adzharia the deportations even swept up party members, men who had fought in

the Great Patriotic War, and families that had lost members in the war (Hasiotis, 1997). Providing a single clear explanation for this is difficult.

As a result of the deportations, a new cluster of Greek communities was formed in the steppes of Central Asia. The uprooted were forced to disembark in various train stations where they initially accommodated themselves in tents or underground houses. Later they were resettled in already existing *kolkhozes* or remained in their newly built settlements (Vergeti, 2000). The majority were concentrated in Kazakhstan, in particular in the Chimkent region and in Kentau, a new city built by the exiles. In the early years they had to report to the authorities every week and their movement was restricted to within a radius of 5 km from where they lived and worked (Karpozilos, 2002). The majority worked in exhausting conditions in mines, construction, industry, and agriculture. After Stalin's death in 1953, restrictions gradually lifted and life conditions ameliorated.<sup>54</sup> In 1956, they were officially allowed to return to southern Russia and the Caucasus. Although the state authorities claimed they could not restore their property, in practice a minority did manage to reclaim what was theirs (Vergeti, 2000).

### **Greekness and assimilation**

Meanwhile, Khrushchev, who succeeded Stalin as First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, implemented a policy of liberalization of the social sphere. This included the loosening of restrictions on ethnic self-definition and cultural expression for Greeks. Theatres were recreated in the Caucasus and Central Asia and a small movement towards the restoration of the Greek language and education took place in Tbilisi (Agtzidis, 1991; Hasiotis, 1997). At the same time, a restricted number of Greek publications were printed and a newspaper was published by the Greek partisans of the Greek Civil War who had fled to the Soviet Union after their defeat in 1949. These Greek political refugees were accommodated by the Soviet authorities in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, where they formed a new Greek community.<sup>55</sup>

Fifteen years later, de jure of a bilateral agreement between Greece and the Soviet Union, 13,500 members of the Greek diaspora in central Asia took the opposite route (Karpozilos, 1991). The agreement allowed for a limited number of people of Greek descent (henceforth 1960s Soviet Greeks) to settle in Greece annually,

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<sup>54</sup> Regarding those from Abkhazia, for whom data is available, less than half of the deportees returned (Ioannidis 1991 as cited in Hasiotis 1997).

<sup>55</sup> At the end of the military dictatorship in 1974, the political refugees were allowed to repatriate. By the beginning of the 1990s the vast majority had returned to Greece.

although migration was halted by the imposition of dictatorship in Greece in the late 1960s. It should be noted that in this period the economic conditions in the Soviet Union had greatly ameliorated and social life had stabilized. As a result, the desire to ‘repatriate’, with the exception of the Greek communities in Central Asia, was not as intense as in the mid-war period.

During the Brezhnev period, the liberalization of cultural expression of Greeks was gradually scaled down. In any case, the earlier modest ethnic revival should not be overstressed. After the Stalinist Purges, the Greek diaspora in the Soviet Union lacked both ethnic leadership and the institutional organization which could directly or indirectly have worked in favour of the ethnic fortification of the Soviet Greeks. Initiatives were sporadic and their impact was restricted to the local level. However, nationality remained a formal state categorization. The Russian ethnonym, Greki, written in the internal passport of Soviet citizens of Greek descent, was an identification marker. This continued to have a constraining impact in several domains of social life, especially for the minority who still retained their Greek passports. According to Agtzidis (1991), secret orders forbade the promotion of Greeks to high positions in the political, national, military, and trade-union hierarchy.

Besides exclusion from top positions in ‘sensitive sectors’, achieving upward socio-economic mobility was also harder for Greeks. ‘Nationality’ played a key role in the networks of personal relations (Sideri, 2006). Being members of a minority that was dispersed and persecuted due to ethnic descent, Greeks largely lacked access to privileged networks. They were not only disfavoured in relation to Russians but also in comparison to the ‘nationals’ of the Soviet Republics. After Khrushchev’s reforms, many central powers were transferred to the periphery, and ‘local party elites’ local parties and elites extended their powers as mediators between the centre and the republics. Following the legacy of Korenizatsiya, the titular<sup>56</sup> nationality of each republic dominated the administration of the republic’s representation within the Party; access for other nationalities was difficult (Sideri, 2006).

The lack of social capital had to be compensated for by education. Since native-language schooling was not provided for the Greeks, education had to be pursued either in Russian or in the language of the titular nation. In 1938, the Russian language had already become a required subject of study in every Soviet school. Its use as the main medium of instruction accelerated further after Khrushchev, who substituted a number of schools of small nationalities with Russian schools.

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<sup>56</sup> The term ‘titular nationality’ was used in the former Soviet Union to denote the dominant ethnic group in a Republic, which typically gave its name to the Republic itself.

Greeks, like other non-indigenous minorities, were likely to choose education in the language which guaranteed communication skills that cut across the ethnic mosaic, so enhancing their prospects of a professional career. Russian was not only the lingua franca of the Soviet Union, but was the most prestigious language as well. Being the state language it was presented as an international language closely related to the achievements of Russian science. Russian universities enjoyed a prestigious position within the Soviet educational landscape; its symbolic capital meant opportunities and social mobility (Sideri, 2006, pp. 161-165).

Concerning the mother tongue of the diverse Greek linguistic communities, it was transmitted through family and in areas with a substantial Greek population, and sustained through interaction within the ethnic borders. Pontic-Greek was widely spoken in various villages in Central Asia, Georgia, and the south Caucasus, while the Turkic idiom remained the dominant language in the Greek communities in central Georgia, and a small number of communities in Ukraine still spoke Rumeika and Tatar dialects.<sup>57</sup> However, Russian, being the lingua franca and the dominant language in education, became the first language of the majority of Greeks born after World War II, and gradually prevailed as the dominant language of the Greek diaspora. In the Soviet census of 1970, only 39.3% of the Greeks declared Greek as their first language (Hassiotis, 1997). Apart from the political refugees who spoke Modern Greek, the rest spoke the aforementioned dialects. Probably, the Turkic and Tatar dialects were counted as Greek languages, too. Excluding those, one may estimate that the different Greek dialects were the first language for less than one third of the diaspora, and the numbers of Greek-speakers must have declined further during the following decades.<sup>58</sup> After the reshuffling of populations that resulted from the Stalinist deportations, many Greeks found themselves living in new linguistic settings, or else their place of residence became increasingly multiethnic. As a result the linguistic plurality of the Greek diaspora became yet more diverse.

Endogamy had been the norm within Greek communities, but intermarriage with other nationalities of the same religion increased and in the late Soviet period became rather widespread. This development was despite the fact that family resistance against 'marrying out' continued to be strong, and arranged marriages were common. In fact, social control remained prominent and effective in rural

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<sup>57</sup> The Tatar dialects and Rumeika were still spoken in the Marioupol area.

<sup>58</sup> Greeks, like other dispersed populations, were much more prone to linguistic Russification. The vast majority (more than 90%) of the non-Russian peoples in the 1970 Soviet census declared their 'national' language as their first language.

areas, while mixed marriages were a concomitant of the growing urbanization of the Greek communities (Sideri, 2006).

Migration to the city for educational or professional reasons meant moving to a social environment with very few Greeks, if any, and endogamy was improbable if an arranged marriage did not take place or was rejected (Hassiotis, 1997). As Sideri (2006) argues, in some cases those mixed marriages could create the conditions for Greeks to participate in networks that transcended the borders of their nationality, thus providing them with wider access to resources. At the same time, they made a reality of the Soviet ideology of the 'rapprochement of the Soviet peoples': the intermingling of different nationalities (Sideri, 2006).

Greekness, besides being a formal and imposed state category in the context of Soviet nationalities, was also a self-ascribed identification. Its significance varied between individuals, depending on personal and family histories. Furthermore, its content differed between the various Greek communities that were scattered across the Soviet Union in small cultural enclaves. Greekness in several communities was practised and experienced through traditional dances and music, as well as several customs linked to the religious rites of wedding, baptism and funeral, and other religious feasts.

In areas without compact Greek populations and in urban centres, Greekness was largely stripped of its cultural element and became what Gans (1979) terms in relation to third-generation immigrants in the United States 'a symbolic identity'. As such, it was mediated by state education which placed emphasis on the teaching of classical period (Vergeti 1998). Being heirs of a glorious past, which was celebrated by Soviet education, was a source of pride for Greeks and comprised symbolic capital in their interaction with other Soviet 'nationals'. At the same time, 'the Soviet people' (*sovetskii narod*) ideology gradually became a reality through their growing identification with the entire population of the Soviet Union (Popov, 2010). Greeks gradually developed a sense of 'membership in a multi-national community', partaking in the most inclusive and superordinary category, that of the Soviet person, and incorporating the Russian culture which was the dominant and most strongly promoted state culture - the one that supposedly best embodied the communist world view. Their incorporation of the Russian culture had long been underway, while the adoption of Soviet identity became possible after the ceasing of persecution of the Greek community, the stabilization of social life, and the gradual restoration of trust towards the Soviet regime.

### 3.3 The post-1989 migration

#### Perestroika and ethnic mobilization

The trajectory of the Greek population in the Soviet Union towards acculturation and assimilation was reversed during the period of *perestroika* (1986-1991), when a Greek 'ethnic revival' took place. The developments during the presidency of Shevardnadze in Georgia in the early 1980s were forerunners of this process. Greek language started being taught in a number of Georgian schools, training seminars for Greeks teachers were organized by the state, and a Greek youth club engaging in cultural activities was set up in the context of Komsomol in Tbilisi (Hasiotis, 1997).<sup>59</sup> Those isolated developments were followed by much more radical and ubiquitous changes that took place in the late years of *Perestroika* and *Glasnot*, when the economic liberation and political openness implemented by Gorbachev was also reflected in culture (Voutira, 1991).

In a period of cultural liberalization and emerging ethnonationalist movements, associations aimed at preserving Greek cultural life in the Soviet Union, including music, dance, and theatrical groups, were founded in most places of Greek settlement. According to Voutira (2006) who conducted fieldwork in the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, elements of an Soviet Greek 'cultural revival' were evident at different levels of daily life and Greekness was also promoted institutionally. The Greek mayor of Marioupol inaugurated a museum of Greek traditional life in the city and instituted the *Méga Yiortí* in 1990, as an annual dancing celebration in the first week of September (Voutira 2006). Moreover, a festival was introduced at Anapa, among the ruins of Goripya, 'whose Hellenistic legacy provided the background for new memorabilia among the youth clubs that competed in the amphitheatre among themselves for prizes in Greek dancing and singing' (Voutira 2006, p.393).

Freedom to move to Greece was officially restored and the Greek consulate in Moscow announced that from 1984 onwards, Soviet Greeks wishing to emigrate could initiate the procedures of 'repatriation' (Agtzidis, 1997).<sup>60</sup> In practice, however, bureaucratic hurdles constrained emigration, which remained limited

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<sup>59</sup> Such developments were restricted to the Georgian Soviet Republic. Before *perestroika*, similar initiatives in other areas of the Soviet Union were met with opposition.

<sup>60</sup> Until 1983 repatriation was only allowed for political refugees and permission was granted after the individual examination of each case. A new law in 1983 implemented so-called free repatriation, paving the way for the mass 'return' of the political refugees and later on the FSU Greek diaspora (Vergeti, 2000).

until 1989. Soviet Greeks took political action and an organization with the proclaimed aim 'to strive for the legal recognition of the human right of free movement to the homeland' was set up in the mid 1980s in Sokhumi. Emigration to Greece was once more highly desired by a considerable segment of the Greek populations in the Soviet Union; in its prime, the 'Return' (Vozvrashenie), as the organization was named, numbered 5,000 members in different areas in the Soviet Union.

The economic stagnation of the Soviet economy began to have a negative impact on people's lives from the beginning of the 1980s,<sup>61</sup> and in its twilight years 'economies of shortage' permeated the Soviet Union. In such conditions, the system of redistributing the restricted economic resources depended on networks of kinship and friendship and thus was largely channelled within ethnic borders (Verdery, 1993). In the Soviet national republics, the domination of the titular nationalities provided their elites with easier access and control over economic resources and everyday survival in the economic crisis became increasingly difficult for non-titular nationalities (Popov, 2010). At the same time, growing nationalism in the Soviet republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia led to the political and social marginalization of Russophone and other pro-Russian minorities, with whom the majority of Soviet Greeks had identified (Kessidis 1996). However, Greekness was no longer solely a constraint. As Voutira aptly describes it, similar 'to other non-indigenous and "less privileged nationalities"' under the Soviet regime [Greekness] was becoming a "competitive resource" in light of the prospects of emigration it entailed for its members' (2006, p.393).

It was in this period that voices began to be raised in Greece concerning the moral duty of the fatherland towards the forgotten Soviet Greeks. The interest was not expressed from governmental ranks but from native Pontic Greek cultural associations, which had been formed primarily by the descendants of the 1920s population exchange. Ever since union with Greece had come true, albeit via the bitter path of forced migration, the native Pontic Greeks had changed their cultural and political orientations. They were no longer nationalists fighting to rejoin their fortunes with the homeland, but rather ethnicists struggling to maintain their identity within the wider contexts of Greekness (Fann, 1991).

The 1980s was a period of growing mobilization by Pontic Greeks in Greece and abroad. The First International Pontic Congress was held in Thessaloniki in 1985 and Soviet Pontics were officially invited. Although they did not manage to acquire permission from the Soviet authorities, they were able to send

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<sup>61</sup> Although the Soviet economy was already in decline from the mid 1970s, the living conditions continued ameliorating throughout the decade.

representation to the Second Congress held in 1988 (Hassiotis, 1997; Voutira, 2006). The encounter between Soviet and native Pontics began with euphoria about the mutual rediscovery of their 'long lost brothers'. For the Soviet Pontics it was also the first time they had been confronted with their Pontic identity (Voutira, 2006). Soviet Pontics had been brought up to think of themselves as Greeks within the Soviet nationalities model. They never though of themselves as a separate subgroup of the wider Greek nation, as the native Pontics had had to after they met other Greeks and were categorized as such after their settlement in Greece.

Before the unforeseen developments that brought about the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the local Greek associations that mushroomed in the late 1980s took a series of initiatives and organized joint meetings aimed at solving the 'national problem of Greeks' in the Soviet Union. The claims of their representatives in the International Pontic Congress were for support of the cultural activities of the diaspora in the Soviet Union as well as recognition of academic degrees for those who were contemplating return (Voutira, 2006).

Their requests mirrored the lack of consensus among the Greek leadership on the strategy that should be followed. Two tendencies had prevailed: one considering that any action should take place in the existing homelands, and another supporting that Greeks should only stay in the Soviet Union conditional on the creation of an autonomous Greek region. According to Voutira, (2006) the two different positions reflected regional priorities in the changing social contexts within Soviet space and evolved around the ambiguities surrounding the concept of 'autonomy'.

The position of *territorial autonomy* was adopted by the Central Asian and Transcaucasian Greeks who opted for mass 'repatriation' to Greece and/or for resettlement within Russian territory.<sup>62</sup> Their reasoning was based on the realization that life for the Greeks was becoming increasingly difficult given the rise in titular-nationality nationalisms. A solution was sought in the establishment of a concrete 'territorial base' for the Soviet Greek diaspora and the consolidation of their dispersed presence. The Krimskayia *rayon*, where a Greek region had had a short-lived existence in the 1930s, together with the region of Anapa, were the proposed candidates for the creation of the Greek region (Voutira, 2006).

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<sup>62</sup> The position of territorial autonomy was also supported by the Greek erstwhile mayor of Moscow and the President of the All-Union Greek Association (1990-1993) Gavriil Popov (Hasiotis 1997).

The second position, that of *cultural autonomy*, was supported by Ukrainian and Russian associations. Ukrainian Greeks reported having good relations with people of the titular nationality and claimed that they had no substantial reasons to leave their homeland. Their favourable economic situation was also mentioned; in the words of the president of the Greek association of Crimea 'there are no poor Greeks in our region [Symferopol], we have no reason to go to Greece' (as cited in Voutira, 2006, p.395). At the same time, the Russian Greeks, especially those living in the Krasnodar area highlighted the risk of evoking violent reactions from the local populations by claiming a Greek region in south Russia (Hasiotis, 1997). In the first All-Union Greek Congress, held in April 1991, the final vote of the representatives was 71–65 in favour of promoting the 'cultural autonomy' position rather than pursuing the political path of establishing a politically recognized 'territorial autonomy' (Voutira, 2006).

### **The emigration flow**

Emigration had already begun to acquire substantial dimensions before the All-Union Congress. When the representatives of the Central Asian Greeks spoke in favour of a mass exodus to Greece, they were describing a reality which was already taking place in their area. The urge to 'repatriate' was most pronounced and widespread among the Greek communities in Central Asia who shared the collective trauma of deportation in a far away land. The unfamiliarity of the landscape as well as religious and phenotypical differences with the natives sustained feelings of cultural isolation among Greek populations (Voutira 1991). At the same time, the Greek communities in Central Asia had remained rather segregated from the titular nationalities of their republics and were generally lacking the skills and resources (linguistic and cultural aptitudes) needed to re-adapt in the new situation that the natives were claiming for their republic. The deportees would have to renegotiate their positions and build their lives anew even if they stayed in their country of residence.

In a period of rising nationalism, Greeks felt they did not fit in, and fear of a Muslim ethnic revival was crucial in shaping their decision to uproot themselves once more. In emigrating to the historic homeland they hoped that at least they would be safer living among their own people. The pattern of migration was sudden and massive. Rather than being an individual calculated decision, migration was gradually becoming a collective reaction, since departures reinforced feelings of alienation and insecurity within the remaining population and in turn influenced their decision to leave. Large-scale family migration soon resulted in the complete relocation of kinship- or locality-based networks.

Migrants quit their jobs and liquidated most of their assets, cutting all bridges with their previous environment (Voutira, 1991).

Although their emigration was less abrupt, the Greek communities in Georgia found themselves in a similar state of unrest about whether to stay or not. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the out-flows gathered pace. Life was becoming increasingly difficult for Greeks due to the dramatic economic decline of the Georgian economy, and the nationalist and often xenophobic policies that swept the country in the early 1990s (Trier & Turashvili, 2007); emigration was increasingly seen as an option to escape social marginalization and poverty. Moreover, in the aftermath of independence, Georgia was tormented by ethno-political conflicts. The Greeks in Abkhazia as well as in Ossetia were caught between bloody civil wars. In 1992 the Greek foreign minister ordered a rescue mission to evacuate the Greek population of the city of Sukhum (Abkhazia) which was under siege. By the end of the war of 1992-1993, nearly all of the 14,700 Greeks who had lived in Abkhazia in 1989 had left their country for Greece (or Russia). Ethnic conflicts in Adjara also influenced the decision of local Greeks to emigrate.

Apart from those Greeks who were forced to flee due to war, and in contrast to the mass flight from Central Asia, Georgian Greeks emigrated through an intermittent pattern of settlement, and several retained property, investment, and family ties in the former Soviet Union (Voutira, 1991). However, persisting economic stagnation and political instability resulted in continuous emigration. According to the 2002 Georgian Census the Greek presence in Georgia had shrunk to approximately one seventh of its former size. The situation in Armenia was similar. Most Greeks left Armenia in two major waves, after the 1988 earthquake and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, while the remaining population evacuated their homelands in the coming years. Currently, the Greek presence in Transcaucasia, as in Central Asia, is nearly extinct despite the fact that emigration was not so widespread during the early years. Continuous migration also had a self-reinforcing impact, inducing further outflows. The flight of the Greeks from Tsalka district in Central Georgia, who comprised 61% of the local population in 1989, is illustrative of the influence of cumulative causation of migration (see appendix I.3, pp. 245).

The Greek communities in Ukraine represent the other end of the spectrum. Emigration has been relatively small in number and started at a later phase; it is only after 1994 that it took on some significance. Emigration was much more widespread among the Greeks in Russian territories yet not comparable to the massive flight from Central Asia and Transcaucasia. Several communities retained a large part of their population while a number of Greek urban

communities experienced a demographic *increase* as a result of migration from rural areas but also from Caucasus and Central Asia.<sup>63</sup> As already mentioned, emigration to Russia was seen as preferable alternative to mass flight to Greece by the proponents of territorial autonomy. The majority of Greeks spoke Russian as their first language and were acquainted with the socio-cultural environment of that country; thus they felt more confident about moving there. South Russia contained the most affluent part of the Greek population, and from the late 1990s onwards the Russian economy provided some opportunities for upward socio-economic mobility, provided one possessed the needed human and social capital.

The 1989 Soviet Census recorded 358 thousand Greeks of whom those living in Ukraine, in Georgia and in Russia made the 80%. Of the remaining population approximately 15% was living in in Kazakhstan, 2% in Armenia (see table 3.2).<sup>64</sup> A census carried out by the General Secretariat of Repatriating Greeks in 2000 registered 155 thousand immigrants half of whom were from Georgia, followed by those of Kazakhstan and Russia, and small number of people from Armenia, and Ukraine (see table 3.3).<sup>65</sup>

Soviet Republics	Persons	Percentage
<b>Russia</b>	80,500	22.5%
<b>Ukraine</b>	104,000	29.1%
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	49,900	13.9%
<b>Georgia</b>	100,000	27.9%
<b>Armenia</b>	7,400	2.1%
<b>Other</b>	16,200	4.5%
<b>USSR</b>	358,000	100%

Table 3.2 – Greeks living in the USSR in 1989, source Hassiotis 1997

<sup>63</sup> Not all migrants from the former Soviet Union headed to Greece; several emigrated to Cyprus and others to the Russian Federation. Emigration to Russia was in cases the first migration step before heading to Greece.

<sup>64</sup> The representatives of the Greek associations in the former Soviet Union claimed that the Soviet census substantially underestimated the real numbers of the Greek diaspora. Taking into account the demographic dynamics of the Greek populations and mixed marriages, Maos estimates its size at 1989 at approximately 478 thousand (Maos, 1992).

<sup>65</sup> Data were gathered in three waves from 1997 to 2000, thus lacking the accuracy of ‘real’ census data. Immigrants who re-migrated were not subtracted from the total population in 2000, while it is expected that some immigrants missed registration. It also unclear how the country of origin/migration (χώρα προέλευσης) was registered. There is no information whether the data stands for country of birth of the respondent or the country from where she/he migrated. Concerning the Armenian immigrant population, which appears slightly higher from their community’s size in 1989, this is possibly due to the considerable emigration from Armenia in 1988, due to the Spitak earthquake in that year.

The majority of immigrants had settled in the geographical department of Macedonia (60%) and half of those stayed in the city of Thessaloniki (33%). A substantial number of people also settled in central Greece (22%) and the Department of Thrace (15%). According to the census data the migration peak was in the year 1993. Migration stabilized around a mean of 14,000 people in the next four years, and dropped to an annual rate of close to 5,000 people thereafter (see chart 3.4). Taking into account that emigration continued yet at a considerably slower pace throughout the previous decade, the FSU Greek population in the mid 2000s stood at around 200,000 people (Kaurinkoski, 2008; Voutira, 2006).

Soviet Republics	Persons	Percentage
<b>Russia</b>	24,042	15.5%
<b>Ukraine</b>	4,660	3%
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	31,271	20.1%
<b>Armenia</b>	8,810	5.7%
<b>Georgia</b>	80,644	51.9%
<b>Other</b>	16,200	3.8%
<b>USSR</b>	358,000	100%

Table 3.3 FSU Greek immigrants by registered place of origin – 2000, source GGO 2000

The immigrant population has a rather balanced demographic structure due to the fact that migration has largely been taken up by whole families. In terms of the origins of the immigrant population, the clear majority are descendants of the mid nineteenth-century immigration from Pontos, and a substantial segment – approximately one fourth – comprises Turkish-speaking Greeks that had earlier fled to Georgia from Erzurum Vilayet. The descendants of the indigenous Crimean Greeks and the Greek settlers of the northern Black Sea region comprise a marginal segment of the immigrant population, since emigration from Ukraine was relatively low.

Year	Persons	Percentage
1987	169	0.1%
1988	669	0.4%
1989	5,195	3.3%
1990	16,716	10.8%
1991	17,331	11.1%
1992	19,846	12.8%
1993	25,720	16.6%
1994	14,737	9.5%
1995	14,586	9.4%
1996	14,298	9.2%
1997	12,381	7.9%
1998	5,761	3.7%
1999	4,676	3%
2000	1,307	0.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>153,392</b>	

Table 3.4 Arrivals of Greeks from the former Soviet Union in Greece by year, source GGO 2000

# The context of reception

## 4.1 Co-ethnic migrations from the former Soviet Union<sup>66</sup>

The outmigration of Greeks from the former Soviet Union and its successor states is just one instance of the dramatic increase of emigration from this region since the collapse of the Soviet regime. The political liberalization that had been introduced earlier together with *perestroika* had already led to a significant rise in outmigration. The transition policies after the collapse, the unfavourable socio-economic conditions, and the political instability during the 1990s drastically altered living conditions and triggered population outflows of nearly unparalleled volume (Shevtsova, 1992). Within this wider scheme, the ethnic element played a crucial role in determining the volume, origins, and direction of migration flows. In large measure, post-Soviet outmigration concerned migrations of ethnic affinity, i.e. of persons moving to their putative ethnic homelands.

In the final years before the collapse of the Soviet Union, and against the backdrop of rising ethno-nationalism, minorities were increasingly seen as violating the national unity in the Soviet republics. Ideas of national subjects bound to territories became dominant. After the restoration of 'the national order of things' (Malkki, 1995), Russians were supposed to move to Russia, Germans to Germany, Greeks to Greece and so on. Such views were not only embedded in the nationalistic rhetoric of the titular nationalities but had been partly internalized by the minorities themselves. As shown in the previous chapter, part of the leadership of the Greek diaspora supported either mass

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<sup>66</sup> I use the term 'co-ethnic migration' to refer to migrations of people moving to their putative ethnic homelands. The states of the ethnic homelands are referred to as kin states in the text.

migration to the homeland or the foundation of a Greek territory inside the Soviet borders. In areas troubled by ethnic conflicts and rising nationalisms, staying inside titular nations such as Georgia and Armenia was increasingly seen as problematic.

Nevertheless, co-ethnic migrants were not only 'pushed' by the economic and political crisis and deteriorating inter-ethnic relations in their places of residence, but also 'pulled' by a desire to move to 'their true homelands', the places to which they supposedly belonged and where they hoped to find their roots (Vourita 1991; Brubaker, 1994; Popov, 2010). Among the Soviet Greeks, failed attempts to reach their historic homeland in the Interbellum period were narrated to younger generations as efforts to materialize an unfulfilled dream. Now this dream became a real option, to be considered not only for affective but also for pragmatic reasons. Even those who had no illusions about the hardships of migration could imagine the ethnic homeland as a place where they would at least be more accepted and able to live peacefully among their own people. At the same time, immigration was more easily realizable for them since they were entitled to free mobility to and settlement in their imagined homelands. Especially for the Soviet Greeks, as well as the other non-indigenous 'nations' such as the Germans, the Jews, and the Finns, their ethnic origin linked them to the Western World and entitled them to a privileged reception. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, this access to the West was particularly desired.

Migration is not a direct function of someone's aspirations but very much depends on available resources in terms of networks, information, capital, and legal permission (see Carling, 2002). Privileged access to citizenship and the right to settle in their imagined homeland reduced the psychological and material costs of the project for the post-Soviet co-ethnic migrants. Staying in the former Soviet Union or going to their imagined homeland was a dilemma to be faced. Life in the actual homeland was compared with the perceived prospects of life in the imagined homeland. Migration was a pragmatic strategy to resort to in order to escape unfavourable situations as well as to achieve certain goals that appeared unrealisable if they stayed. Leaving the post-Soviet space happened more often among communities with an ethnic homeland outside the borders of the former Soviet Union because it was much easier in the first place. The availability of an ethnic homeland alone may not explain why migration happens, yet it accounts to a large extent for the scale it acquired among the non-indigenous populations of the former Soviet Union.

## The kin states' view

Post-Soviet co-ethnic migration to Europe and Israel is a rather complex case of mobility that has engendered a considerable degree of ambiguity concerning its definition. What is the appropriate term for the FSU Greeks, Germans, and Jews who left the former Soviet Union for their ethnic homeland? Are they economic migrants, refugees, or repatriates? The latter term was adopted by the kin states (*pallinostóuntes*, *aussiedlers*, *olim*). 'Repatriation' is claimed to be a separate case of geographic mobility not to be compared with any other kind of international migration. In the rhetoric of the states concerned, it is a 'return' grounded on the right of people to live in the country where they ethnically belong. According to this perspective the historic fatherland has a moral duty to provide preferential access to co-ethnic migrants. The term 'repatriation' is also chosen by the Council of Europe (De Tinguy, 2003) and is favoured by several academics, primarily those addressing 'national audiences' and thus susceptible to ethnocentric bias.<sup>67</sup> Others are critical to the use of the term 'repatriation' for this case of mobility. Calling co-ethnic migrants 'repatriates' is technically incorrect. Co-ethnic migrants are not returning (as nationalistic rhetoric has it), since they have never lived within bounds of the nation-state that claims them. More importantly, it keeps the dynamics and the many-sidedness of the actual migration out of view and creates false expectations.

Co-ethnic migrants were portrayed by state authorities as rejoining their homeland driven by innate national feelings. Co-ethnicity alone was considered a sufficient reason 'for any true national subject' to move to her/his 'real homeland' after years of being denied the right of 'return'. Within this same logic, the settlement of the 'repatriates' in their homeland was expected to be smooth, or at least much smoother than that of foreign migrants, since repatriates were perceived to be naturally uniting with their compatriots. The difficulties which co-ethnics experienced in adapting to a new social and cultural environment, and the reluctance on the part of the native and immigrant populations to mutually accept each other as their 'own people' (see De Tinguy, 2003), was largely unforeseen by the policy makers of kin states.

In the second half of the twentieth century, ethnicity has come to play a reduced role in shaping Western immigration policies; however, it did not disappear completely. Ethnic favouritism or exclusion conflicts with the liberal principles of public neutrality and equality. It became even more strongly eschewed after World War II, when racism was discredited and a universal human rights regime institutionalized (Joppke, 2005). Although selecting by ethnicity became less

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<sup>67</sup> For the Greek case see for instance (Vergeti, 2003).

legitimate, 'diaspora' favouritism showed resilience. Joppke (2005) shows that the persistence of the ethnic element in shaping Western immigration policies has not been exclusive to the post-Soviet migration experience. Either by directly favouring the migration of certain groups or indirectly by excluding others, ethnic favouritism has been established practice. 'Settler states' such as America and Australia practiced it until the 1970s. It still remains modestly endorsed in some post-colonial states and has been endorsed by states with sizeable diasporas, especially those with a strict ethnic conception of their nation. So-called kin states have sought justification for their favourable treatment towards post-Soviet co-ethnic migration by claiming they have an obligation to protect co-ethnics.<sup>68</sup> This claim is grounded on an assumption that their diasporas are subject to persecution abroad. In this way, repatriates appear as a quasi refugee group.

It is true that the diasporas in question have in the past been persecuted due to their origin. Moreover, a considerable segment of their population fled in fear of violence.<sup>69</sup> However, what remains notably arbitrary is the fact that the right to emigrate and the entitlements conferred with it concerned the whole diaspora population, and not only those fearing or having endured persecution. The challenge to be neutral, what Joppke (2005) calls the liberal challenge, was circumvented by the states in question through their refusal to acknowledge post-Soviet co-ethnic mobility as migration. Selecting the term 'repatriation' was not only a reflection of nationalistic assumptions but part and parcel of an attempt to avoid comparisons with other less privileged immigrant groups and to provide justifications for the preferential treatment of co-ethnic migrants.

### **A complex case of mobility**

Although repatriation was claimed by state officials to be completely different from international migration, the problems encountered with the settlement of the 'repatriates' turned out to bear resemblances to those encountered with the settlement of foreign immigrants (Ohliger & Münz, 2003). State officials have in some cases misleadingly traced the reasons for those unforeseen developments to the supposed lack of 'proper' (read: nationalist) motivations of migrants. They

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<sup>68</sup> According to Joppke (2005) the human need for protection is one of the three selection criteria that are legitimate today. The other two are the skills or economic need and the recognition of family ties.

<sup>69</sup> Although as Brubaker argues (Brubaker 1998, p.49), '[f]ear is a capacious concept: there is a world of difference between migration arising from a sharply focused fear of imminent violence and migration engendered by a diffuse fear, concern, or anxiety about one's well-being, or the well-being of one's children, in the future'.

saw them as turning into 'ordinary' economic migrants (for the Greek case, see Voutira, 2004).

However, the division of post-Soviet co-ethnic migrants into either 'repatriates' or 'economic migrants' is based on a false polarity. Both categories are myopically mono-dimensional, reducing to a single reason the complex process that in fact underlies migrants' decisions. A 'wish to return' does not preclude economic or other motivations. In essence, any decision to migrate is prescribed by motivations and expectations of socio-economic improvement. The significant disparities in the volume, direction, and origins of migration within and among the non-indigenous nations of the former Soviet Union shows that the affective pull of the imagined homeland is not enough to induce emigration. Well-rooted and/or socio-economically established populations generally prefer to stay. On the other hand, expectations of socio-economic improvement do not necessarily rule out the significance of ethnic attachments in the decision.

Post-Soviet co-ethnic migrants are neither economic nor ethno-cultural migrants. They are people who have moved to their ethnic homeland hoping to enhance their living conditions (see Popov, 2010). It is equally difficult to collectively categorize the post-Soviet co-ethnic migration as either voluntary or involuntary. It was both triggered by circumstances and was a voluntary act. For the Greek case, the Soviet Greeks fleeing the Civil War in Abkhazia can be placed at one end of the spectrum, and the transnational entrepreneurs from Russia at the other. Reviewing experiences from different times and places, one encounters substantial diversity reflecting the (shifting) limits in immigrants' ability to weigh up their decisions against potential alternatives.

Post-Soviet co-ethnic migration exposes the insufficiency of the most basic conceptual categories in migration studies (see Voutira, 1991; Brubaker, 1998). It is certainly not so qualitatively different (as claimed by kin states) as not to fit within a broader definition of migration. Yet it does not correspond closely to the existing categories. The ethnic link between immigrants and countries of destination lends this form of migration several particularities. A number of them have already been touched upon. In what follows, I will single out three issues that have significant repercussions for the position of post-Soviet co-ethnic migrants in their imagined homeland, and for the ways they relate to the 'natives' and other immigrants in that homeland.

The first issue concerns their preferential migration. Besides favourable access to their ethnic homeland and to citizenship rights, a series of measures were taken by kin states aimed at facilitating their settlement. De Tinguy (2003, p.119) argues that 'repatriates' have been de jure or de facto privileged migrants. This is an

interesting characterization that requires a qualification. Using the word 'privileged' assumes a comparison; migrants may be privileged only when compared with other non-privileged migrants. Moreover, given the context-bound character of migration, the frame of reference for such a relational concept ought to be synchronic, i.e. other immigrants moving *at the same time*. Co-ethnic post-Soviet immigration has taken place together with the so-called new migration in Europe (Koser & Lutz 1998), and co-ethnic migrants are indeed privileged when compared to the undocumented migrants and asylum seekers who comprise the majority of the other immigrants in the destination countries.

Secondly, post Soviet co-ethnic migration to the West was largely intended to be, or quickly turned into, permanent migration (Ohliger & Munz 2003). As already mentioned, for a considerable number of FSU Greek immigrants, especially the pioneers, migration was a one-way move and all bridges were cut with the old homeland. That was also the case for Soviet Jews and Germans. In the course of time migration became less abrupt. Yet for a substantial segment of the latecomers return was difficult due to the gradual vanishing of the communities within which they were located in the post-Soviet space.

Post-Soviet co-ethnic migrants may be nostalgic about their old homeland and some may cherish 'the good old days', but they are aware that their fate is now tied to the fate of their new homeland. For the majority of them, the dream or illusion of the eventual return (Piore, 1980) does not guide their long-term aspirations and as a result their efforts are concentrated at building their social and economic life in the new home. Post-Soviet co-ethnic immigrants may be privileged in comparison to other international immigrants due to their favourable access to the West and, for those with a European passport, free mobility in the EU, but a large number of them lack the option of a return to their old home. This puts them in a different position from other international immigrants whose presence abroad is a continuous negotiation of life prospects both here and there. As a result, post-Soviet co-ethnic migrants are more prone to get frustrated by everyday difficulties since they cannot consider them temporary stages in life.

The third characteristic concerns post-Soviet co-ethnic migrants' high expectations of life in the imagined homeland. International immigration negatively affects the political and social status of people by turning them from members of ethnic majorities to members of ethnic minorities. For post-Soviet co-ethnic migrants the reverse is true. Their 'repatriation' signified at least formally an upward move in terms of their group's socio-political position, since they have migrated to a country where they share the same ethnicity as the dominant group. Having endured the negative aspects of minority status, post-Soviet co-ethnic

migrants expected that in their ethnic home they would have considerably more opportunities for progress in all domains of life. Those expectations went hand in hand with idealized perceptions about the return to the fatherland. The pioneers in particular were making a move into the unknown, hoping to find their 'true home'. The privileged character of their migration together with their ideas about life in the West heightened their expectations further.<sup>70</sup>

### **The Greek case in perspective**

These interrelated features characterize post-Soviet co-ethnic migration, albeit with variations in the degree to which they hold true for each national case.<sup>71</sup> Together with their Soviet origin, these features constitute a background which all such immigrants have in common, and which influences their interaction with the native populations in all receiving countries. However, there are also differences. Inquiring how the Greek case compares to other countries places it in perspective and highlights its specificities more clearly.

The framing and reception of post-Soviet co-ethnic migrations has had two dimensions: an ethnic and a moral one (De Tinguy, 2003). Privileged immigration was firstly the outcome of a strict ethnic conception of the nation; the underlying idea being that diasporas are parts of a trans-territorial nation and that, because of this, ethnic descent alone is an adequate criterion for admission into the state. To this, a moral element was added, with kin states declaring responsibility towards co-ethnics who had suffered abroad and who were perceived to be still at risk of being repressed. As already mentioned, the moral argument of responsibility towards co-ethnics was also used as a justification to defend the privileged character of this migration against charges of not complying with 'liberal' ethics of neutrality. Its ideological background, however, was not uniform across countries. For Germany and Finland it was related to the idea that those two countries are responsible for the past sufferings of their co-ethnics.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> To that point we should add the fact that the promises made by state officials of kin states about measures to facilitate their settlement were overvalued by post-Soviet co-ethnic migrants due to their being accustomed to state interventionism (Papaioanou, et al., 2008). Soon immigrants understood that the work and housing stability they once enjoyed in the Soviet Union could not be guaranteed by any of the Western states.

<sup>71</sup> Regarding the privileges conferred to co-ethnic migrants, differences concern the kind of the measures as well as their quality and quantity. Policy priorities as well as state capacities play a role here. The Greek state, as will be illustrated in detail in the following chapter, having a relatively weak welfare system and inefficient public institutions, carried out ad hoc measures with a limited impact. Policies in Israel, Germany, and Finland may have also proved inadequate in several domains but on the whole were much more comprehensive.

<sup>72</sup> Germany feels responsible for the suffering of Soviet Germans. Those are thought to have been

This was not the case for Israel and Greece (De Tinguy, 2005). For the latter countries the responsibility towards post Soviet co-ethnics was not perceived as compensation for past iniquities but simply as an intention to provide protection.

The ethnic dimension has been more significant for Greece and Israel. Solidarity with the diaspora is a basic founding characteristic of both nation states. For Israel, immigration of co-ethnics is actually the *raison d'être* of the state. Israel is also a more complex case in that the moral and ethnic dimensions appear intertwined in the official rhetoric, making it difficult to tease them apart. The self-description of the nation, and of the state that represents it, is couched in terms of diaspora experience and collective suffering, so that being Jewish becomes equivalent to being persecuted (Joppke, 2005). However, the Israeli Law of Return is addressed to all Jews irrespective of whether they have suffered due to their origin. Being a refuge to Jewry, Israel is also a quintessential ethnic state. Similarly, the Greek nation state has been formed by and for a wider and dispersed Greek world. This is something that throughout its history has never been challenged. Indeed, as described in chapter 2, defining the contours of the Greek world was a much more fluid and opportunistic process than demarcating the limits of Jewry. However, the Greek state has also functioned and is self-perceived by Greeks as a refuge for the Hellenic World.

The special relations Israel and Greece have with their diasporas prescribes that any co-ethnic's immigration ought to be, at least officially, welcome. At the same time the long history of co-ethnic migration and refugee inflows that helped build those nations underlies the positive reaction towards the massive migration of Soviet co-ethnics in the early 1990s. In both countries 'repatriation', perceived as a natural sequel to previous co-ethnic inflows labelled as such, was treated as an asset for demographic, economic, and political reasons. This perspective has been most consistent in Israel. Having conflictual relations with its neighbours, and being an ethnically divided state where the share of the Jewish community in relation to the Israeli Arab community is declining, the demographic element alone suffices for promoting the migration of co-ethnics.

The Greek state was more ambivalent in that respect. As will be shown in the following chapter, the optimistic expectations of the initial reception plan were rethought in the course of time. Gradually, in the context of a general reconsideration of the Greek policy towards its diaspora, more voices were heard in favour of supporting the Greek communities in the Soviet successor state so

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caused as a result of WWII, which Germany had initiated. For the case of the Ingrian Finns, Finland wishes to compensate for their surrender to the USSR after their evacuation to Finland in 1943/44 (De Tinguy, 2003).

that they would remain there. However, this did not entail a radical shift in the policy approach. Restriction, attempted through stricter requirements on the proof of one's Greekness, was officially legitimated with the aim of curbing the migration of false co-ethnics rather than discouraging 'real FSU Greeks' to settle in the country. The policy reconsideration did not go so far as to cancel the privileges for those co-ethnics who wished to 'return'. In contrast, privileged migration in Germany<sup>73</sup> was meant to accommodate a unique historic event, the expulsions and repressions that ethnic Germans suffered in the aftermath of World War II (Joppke, 2005). This episode is now considered closed and FSU Germans coming after 2010 will not be entitled any of the privileges conferred on their predecessors. For Germany, 'repatriates' have returned to being 'normal' migrants.

A final issue that needs to be highlighted here is the way migrants are ethnically characterized by kin states. FSU Jews move to Israel because they are Jews, FSU Germans to Germany because they are Germans. Similarly, FSU Greeks are entitled to privileged access to the Greek state due to their Greekness. However, in Greece co-ethnics are not only seen as Greeks but as Pontics too. In this respect the Greek case resembles the Finnish case, where FSU Finns are not simply Finns but also Ingrians. As will be described in chapter 7.2, the real or imagined Pontic origin of FSU Greeks differentiates them from non-Pontic Greeks and mediates their relations with the native Greeks.

The present subchapter has served to highlight that FSU Greek migration is not a unique case of geographic mobility. It occupies a place in post-Soviet migration at large, specifically within the segment that concerns migrations characterized by ethnic affinity. However, FSU Greek migration will not be treated here as a case via which to explore post-Soviet co-ethnic migration in general. That is not the aim of the present study. This higher analytical level can only contribute marginally to providing insight into the development of local interethnic relations in Greece. Besides shared characteristics, each national case presents peculiarities constituting in essence a different context of reception. Immigrants are categorized by kin states, interest groups, and locals in the context of dominant national narratives and images. At the same time they are placed within a wider national history of old and contemporary migrations. Together with the national policy specificities, they shape the context of reception for the immigrants.

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<sup>73</sup> German policy was more selective and restrictive from the outset. Criteria of eligibility, such as language proficiency, were set to prevent unwanted immigration as early as the beginning of the 1990s (Munz, 2003) and the entry of FSU Germans had been regulated by increasingly restrictive governmental policies in the same decade (Dietz, 2000).

## 4.2 Migration policy for FSU Greeks

### ‘Repatriation’ as a demographic and economic resource for the state

In January 1990, the Greek authorities established a special body, the National Foundation for the Reception and Resettlement of Repatriate Homogenís Greeks<sup>74</sup> (henceforth the National Foundation), to plan and carry out the settlement of the co-ethnics – in Greek, *homogenís* – from the former Soviet Union.<sup>75</sup> The dramatic rise of FSU Greek immigration after 1989 made a new organization necessary to manage what was initially conceived of as a national crisis. However, concerns about the size of the phenomenon, which the Greek state initially perceived as unmanageable, soon subsided; the ‘national crisis’ was reconceptualized as an opportunity.

‘[T]he widespread acceptance of the Pontians<sup>76</sup> by the other Greeks in our society; the unanimous support from all political parties; and the willingness of the Government to face up to this problem but most of all the vigour and dynamism of the Pontians themselves’

would, in the words of the director of the new foundation, turn a major national challenge into an asset (Kokkinos, 1991, p. 399). The above quote illustrates the main assumptions underling the perception of FSU Greek migration as a resource for the Greek state. Let me first inquire into how precisely ‘the dynamism and vigour’ of the ‘Pontians’ was conceptualized by state officials and policy makers, and in what ways the government was willing to face up to the ‘problem’.

The National Foundation designed and implemented a rural settlement plan in the region of Thrace, to which the influx of FSU Greeks would be channelled. Funding was to be secured from EU and state resources. Thrace, an economically underdeveloped area and home to the Muslim minority, is the most eastern part of mainland Greece, bordering with Turkey to the east and Bulgaria to the north. The rationale for selecting this region was directly related to the vulnerable position of the region in Greek political and economic geography. The settlement of FSU Greeks aimed at demographic and economic revitalization of the area as

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<sup>74</sup> Εθνικό ίδρυμα υποδοχής και αποκατάστασης αποδήμων και παλιννοστούντων ομογενών ελλήνων.

<sup>75</sup> Thenceforth, the reception of repatriates fell within the tasks of the General Secretariat for Greeks abroad.

<sup>76</sup> The people from Pontos (Póntii) are referred to as both as Pontic Greeks and Pontian Greeks in English.

well as an alteration of its religious and ethnic composition in favour of the Christian population. The policy goals were set with a particular image of the newcomers in mind. As articulated in the 1992 annual report of the foundation:

The repatriates are people with low economic claims and demands, and therefore they can accept without any kind of complaint even the most difficult form of life in the border regions (National Foundation 1992 in Voutira, 2003b, p. 150).

Their presence in these regions will be able to create in and of itself an economic revitalization and this will generate the 'pull' for a return migration among the local population that has emigrated (National Foundation 1992 in Voutira, 2003b, p. 150).

What made policy makers hold such optimistic views about the newcomers' presumed loyalty to these plans and acceptance of their ascribed role for the revitalization of the area? Turning to the interwar refugee experience for legitimacy and inspiration, the National Foundation (Voutira, 2003b) attempted to duplicate what is claimed in the official state historiography to be 'the greatest achievement of the contemporary Greek state' (Andriotis 1999, pp. 163). Namely, the settlement and adaptation of the 1.2 million 1920s refugees.

Although the population exchange and the uprooting of the Orthodox Christian population that followed the Great Catastrophe is lamented as one of the most tragic moments in contemporary Greek history, it is also acknowledged as an event that decisively fostered the development of the nation state. With the demise of irredentism after the Great Catastrophe, Greece found itself in an emergency situation of unprecedented scale, and the rehabilitation of the refugees was represented as the new national struggle. In hindsight, this struggle was claimed as a victory because of pragmatic and effective state planning and a 'dynamic refugee population, devoted to the nation, that managed despite all odds to tame their fates and inject new blood into the old Greece'. The positive effects of successful re-establishment and incorporation of the uprooted were traced in different domains. The most widely and immediately recognized was the ethnic impact. The Hellenization of Greek Macedonia turned Greece into one of the most homogenous nation states of the Balkans (Mavrogordatos, 1983). In essence, the entire planning of the refugee resettlement, which prioritized rural settlements in the northern and north-eastern frontiers of Greece, was geared towards defending and consolidating this area (Kontogiorgi, 2006).

Following this same logic, 'the return' of co-ethnics from the former Soviet Union was treated by policy makers and gradually represented in the press and in public

forums as a resource for solving the ‘national issue of Thrace’ (Voutira, 2003). In the perception of the officials, the repatriation of FSU Greeks could, in the manner of the 1923 model, foster the Greek character of this region<sup>77</sup> and provide the necessary rural population and labour force for its economic revitalization. The presence of FSU Greeks in the country was not considered as a liability, as a group that only needed support, but as a population from which support could be drawn. The Greekness of the newcomers was taken as a certificate of their devotion to serve the interests of the state even if they would have to endure significant hardships. Their reading of the history of ‘the successful rehabilitation and assimilation of the 1920s refugees’ left the policy makers in little doubt about the eventual success of their project. However, as will be described in what follows, their expectations were not met.

The gradual re-establishment of the livelihoods of FSU Greeks in Thrace was supposed to be accomplished through housing, labour market inclusion, and language training. Participation in the plan was voluntary and every FSU Greek entering the country on a ‘repatriation visa’ was entitled to it. The reception of the newcomers was carried out in steps. Immigrants were briefly accommodated in hospitality centres and then transferred to so-called reception villages. These were perceived as ‘the main instrument with which to obtain the social grafting of the new arrivals to the tissue of [the native society]’ (Kokkinos, 1991). Immigrants, both children and adults, were provided with a number of everyday facilities and services, and attended language and orientation courses geared towards their smooth adaptation to the education system and the labour market. Having concluded this phase, adult participants were supposed to be able to find work. The duration of their stay at the reception villages was planned to be six months; however, for a number of immigrants it turned out last several years, due to the inability of the foundation to implement the plan effectively. From that point onwards, the National Foundation’s support focused on housing.

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<sup>77</sup> The Muslim population of Thrace was, together with the Orthodox populations of Istanbul and of the islands Imvros and Tenedos, excluded from the 1923 compulsory population exchange by the Lausanne Treaty. The treaty provided these minorities a number of rights in order to preserve their religious and ethnic character. In Greece, repressive measures and practices from the Greek authorities initially targeted only the Pomak subgroup of the Muslim population in Thrace. However, progressively after the 1955 pogrom of the Greeks in Istanbul, the complete Muslim population in Greece became victim of administrative and institutional discrimination (for a thorough analysis of the Greek Muslim minority, see Troumpeta, 2000). FSU Greek settlement started during a period of politically heated debate around ‘the Thrace issue’. The newly formed Muslim party ‘Equality, Friendship and Peace’, had united the ethnologically diverse Muslim population of Thrace and won a seat in parliament, further raising governmental concerns about the demographic balance in the area and the threat of Turkish irredentism and influence in Greek politics.

After a while, unfavourable cost-benefit calculations led to the curtailing of the initial orientation phase.<sup>78</sup> Finding a job proved particularly difficult for FSU Greeks and the training seemed to do little to help in that direction. The problems were primarily structural, relating to the local economy. In Thrace, widespread unemployment made inclusion of the new settlers in the labour market difficult. Moreover, the division of the job market among various Muslim groups had created economic niches which it was difficult for an outsider to enter (Voutira, 2003b). It gradually became obvious that the government had made plans without realistically considering the development potential of the area. As a response to this problem, it initiated a subsidized employment scheme, while promoting access to positions in the public sector in Thrace and Macedonia. Both measures met with limited success.<sup>79</sup> Grants were also given to newcomers wishing to set up their own personal business. However, as this measure was contingent on EU funding, the financial support reached only a limited number of people. Only 607 entrepreneurial initiatives were subsidized, of which 411 were in agriculture (Vergeti 2003).

Although housing was a clear priority in the national resettlement plan, the authorities encountered significant problems in that domain too. The aim was to provide permanent residence to all participants in houses bought or built by the National Foundation. However, this process progressed very slowly. The urgent need to move the immigrants out of the reception villages necessitated the makeshift solution of subsidized rent in the private housing market.<sup>80</sup> For the majority of the participants this proved to be the end stage in their housing trajectory. By 1998, a total of approximately 1,200 housing units had been given away, covering the needs of about one fourth of the participants (Papaioannou, et al., 2001). The output represents a huge deviation from the goal set for the construction of 13,000 urban and semi-urban houses and 2,000 rural houses (Kokkinos, 1991).

Despite the inefficiency of the strategies applied, and the insufficiency of the funding,<sup>81</sup> there was one more major problem that hindered the successful

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<sup>78</sup> In 1994 only 25% of the participants in the programme had attended the seminars for vocational rehabilitation, while a larger percentage had attended seminars on the Greek language (Psarou, 2004).

<sup>79</sup> Concerning access to the public sector, despite their promotion FSU Greeks lacked several prerequisites such as language or certified diplomas, and most importantly the connections with political parties (*πολιτικό μέσο*) that are commonly essential for such appointment.

<sup>80</sup> The National Foundation had difficulties in acquiring the necessary state funding to secure the contribution from the Council of Europe's social fund. At the same time the adoption of strategies deviating from the actual plan (subsidized rent) and its inability to deliver according to the programme further hindered its funding potentials.

<sup>81</sup> The National Foundation was also criticized for extravagant operational expenditure, centralism,

implementation of the resettlement plan. Thrace, especially its semi-urban or rural areas, was not an appealing destination for repatriates. FSU Greeks preferred to settle in urban centres where employment opportunities were greater (Voutira, 2004; Lavrentiadou, 2006). It was primarily the prospect of homeownership that made participation in the resettlement plan attractive to FSU Greeks, and in some cases had even induced their emigration from the former Soviet Union. Yet the circulation of information about delays in housing constructions made FSU Greeks realize that homeownership was not guaranteed. This made the resettlement plan even more unpopular. By 1998, fewer than 20,000 people had participated in the programme of whom less than 18,000 eventually settled in Thrace. This amounted to less than 15% of the actual FSU Greek population in Greece at that time.

Taking into account that the National Foundation was incapable of successfully carrying out the programme for even a significantly reduced number of people, an obvious question comes to mind: How did politicians and functionaries think they would be able to carry out the programme for the expected larger number of people? Somehow, the officials had not found it necessary to reflect on their expectation that one major condition would already be fulfilled: that FSU Greeks would be willing to tolerate difficult and makeshift conditions before they were provided with what they had been promised.

However, neither the Greekness of the repatriates nor their 'vigour and dynamism' could secure their fealty to the insufficiently organized routes to incorporation set up by the state – contrary to the policy makers' expectations. The vast majority of FSU Greeks followed individual strategies and/or used the help of family and kinship networks already settled in Greece. The available data suggests that their choices were justified. According to a survey carried out by Vergeti (1998) in 1996 in Thrace (Xanthi) and Athens (Menidi), housing conditions may have been better for those settled in Thrace, but those who settled in Athens experienced less unemployment, and homeownership (attained mostly through processes of unauthorized construction; see chapter 5.2) was much more common. These findings are corroborated by a study carried out by Lavrentiadou (2006) in 1998-1999. In her sample unemployment was also found to be less widespread in Athens, and those who settled there had higher incomes compared to those settled in Thrace.

Although state support was to a large extent provisional on settlement in Thrace, those who preferred not to participate in the resettlement plan in Thrace were able to benefit from a few measures that were implemented for all 'repatriates'

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and being overstuffed (Papaioannou et al 2001).

from the former Soviet Union. FSU Greeks received a small allowance supporting their initial settlement and were exempted from import duties. Greek language courses for adults as well as vocational training and programmes for promoting entrepreneurial activity were also set up outside Thrace in the context of EU-funded programmes. These reached only a minority of the total FSU Greek population. For FSU Greek students, reception classes were organized at schools and a few intercultural schools (Διαπολιτισμικά σχολεία)<sup>82</sup> opened, mainly in Thessaloniki and Athens. All FSU Greeks are eligible for free medical and pharmaceutical care from public hospitals. However, they cannot transfer their pensions nor is their previous work experience in the former Soviet Union officially recognized. The elderly receive the Greek basic pension from the public insurance organization OGA.

More substantially, FSU Greeks can easily acquire Greek citizenship and thus become eligible for any social benefit to which a Greek citizen is entitled. The 2130/1993 Law formalized the procedure of 'verification of nationality', which was introduced by a ministerial decision in 1990 aiming to ease and regulate the acquisition of citizenship by FSU Greeks. This is a summary mode of acquisition; citizenship rights are granted on proof of the applicant's descent through documents certified by the Greek consular authorities in the country of origin (Christopoulos, 2005). However, entering the country on a tourist visa - which had become very widespread from the mid 1990s onwards - meant exclusion from this privileged process. FSU Greeks who arrived on a tourist visa commonly overstayed the official period, formally becoming illegal immigrants. As such they were not entitled to any benefit, nor to participation in the resettlement plan.<sup>83</sup> Five years after the implementation of the resettlement plan its inefficiency was acknowledged and a change of approach was deemed necessary. A new state actor, the General Secretariat of Returning Diaspora Greeks (henceforth, General Secretariat), was assigned to complement the activities of the National Foundation - whose role gradually shrank - by expanding the scope of the settlement policy westwards to Eastern Macedonia. The General Secretariat provided legal assistance to FSU Greeks, social support to economically marginalized families, and attempted to connect the unemployed to the labour market.

At the same time, the legal status of the FSU Greeks was represented as a problem that required action. There was a general acknowledgement that, on the one hand, people could acquire a repatriation visa through illegal means, while,

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<sup>82</sup> These are special schools where at least 45% of the total student population are children of immigrants and in which the principles of intercultural education are implemented.

<sup>83</sup> They could only receive the free health care to which every person of Greek descent is entitled.

on the other, a number of people who could rightfully claim Greekness did not wish to apply for repatriation visas or could not acquire them because they lacked the necessary funding. To counter this problem, the General Secretariat (2000) provided 'certifications of Greek descent' to undocumented FSU Greeks. In the period 1996 to 2000, 2,372 such certifications were given, although there was no legal framework for such a process.

Concerning the National Foundation's resettlement plan, the deficiencies of the policy were recognized, without, however, challenging the core of the approach. Co-ethnic repatriation from the former Soviet Union was still represented as a 'gift from god'<sup>84</sup> whereby contemporary Greece could solve its 'huge demographic problems' in the 'vulnerable regions of Macedonia and Thrace' (Kamenidis as cited in Voutira, 2003b, p.152). To that end a more flexible model of self-settlement was adopted. Families who undertook agricultural settlement in those areas were provided with land and interest-free loans, which were subsidized for up to 30% of the total amount.<sup>85</sup>

### **Social exclusion and the reconsideration of policy goals**

Yet the new measures did not prevent the further clustering of FSU Greeks in Athens and Thessaloniki. Gradually, the presence of FSU Greeks became visible in these places. The majority of native Greeks first came into contact with their ethnic sisters and brothers from the former Soviet Unions through the open street markets. The right of repatriates to import and sell assets from their household without having to pay import duties, in combination with the existence of a network of relations at the country of birth which insured the steady supply of new merchandise, led a number of people to work as vendors of goods from the former Soviet republics in the open street markets (Lavrentiadou, 2006; Papaioannou, et al., 2001; Spilok-Malanda, 2007). At the same time, their social networks drove FSU Greeks into specific neighbourhoods. The low living standard in those neighbourhoods and the physical separation of Soviet and native Greeks exemplified the failure of Greek policy and raised concerns about the formation of 'ghettos' and the marginalization of the newcomers.

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<sup>84</sup> The representation of the newcomers is impressively analogous to the Israeli case even in the use of phraseology. According to Prime Minister Yitshak Samir, immigration from the former Soviet Union should be interpreted as a miracle and welcomed as a godsend (Tinguy 2003).

<sup>85</sup> Support in the form of remission from state levies was also given to individuals who had built or renovated their house irrespective of its location.

From the early 1990s, several researchers highlighted the vulnerable socio-economic position of FSU Greeks (Hatzivarnava, 2001; Kasimati, 1998; Mavrea, 1998; Terzidis, 1995; Vergeti, 1998). According to these authors, further political intervention was required to prevent ongoing social exclusion. These studies drew on empirical material from research carried out during the first years of immigration, and none adopted a longitudinal approach to provide evidence regarding the dynamics of their incorporation. Given that the passage of time can lead to the attainment of greater parity of life chances, it could be that the grim picture painted by the authors was characteristic only of the first years of settlement.

A large-scale survey carried out in Athens in 1998-1999 (Halkos & Salamouris, 2003) focusing on employment trajectories reveals that some ten years after the beginning of the mass influx of FSU Greeks, problems still remained acute. Halkos and Salamouris (2003), who reported on the survey, claimed that the demographic profile of their sample should have ensured the swift labour market inclusion of the FSU Greeks of productive age, with some (low) additional costs for professional retraining where necessary. However, the reported mean unemployment rate (across all population age groups in both sexes) was over three times higher than the official unemployment rates for Greece. Although it is too early to draw definite conclusions, it seems that migration resulted in significant downward economic mobility for FSU Greeks.

How does the socio-economic position of FSU Greeks compare to that of other immigrants? Restricting our focus to the city of Thessaloniki and using data from the 2001 census, the Albanian immigrant population provides an interesting point of comparison. The two immigrants groups started arriving in Greece approximately at the same period, both emigrated from former command economy countries, their numbers in the city are comparable,<sup>86</sup> while together they constitute more than half of the total immigrant population. Of course there are significant differences, of which the most prominent are the privileged status of the FSU Greeks and the positive framing of their migration in media and political discourse. Their favourable reception is in sharp contrast to the institutional exclusion and stigmatization with which Albanian immigrants were faced. It is logical to expect that FSU Greeks would have attained a better socio-economic position, an assumption that is further supported by the differences in

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<sup>86</sup> My analysis here draws on earlier work presented in (Labrianidis, et al., 2008). This includes the estimation of the number of FSU Greeks as Greek citizens born in the countries of the former Soviet Union. This methodology underestimates the total FSU Greek population as it does not include those who had not naturalized by March 2001 nor their children born in Greece. The data presented are thus susceptible to this bias. Moreover it should be noted that the Albanian population includes a minority of immigrants of Greek descent.

the education levels of the two groups. Education levels appear to be higher among FSU Greeks in comparison both to Albanians and also to the indigenous population. Among FSU Greeks, 9.2% have not completed primary education, as compared to 12.7% for local Greeks and 14% for Albanians. As for higher education, 19% of FSU Greeks have had a university education, as compared to 18.7% among the local population and 7.6 among the Albanian immigrants.<sup>87</sup>

However, for both immigrant groups their education level is not translated into a labour market position that matches their qualifications. The work that migrants do in Greece is mainly manual, physically demanding, often of a servile character, and, for the majority, in low-skilled positions unrelated to their educational attainments (Cavounides, 2006). While immigrants constitute no more than 11% of the Greater Thessaloniki population, they represent about 30% of the labour force working in unskilled jobs, nearly one third of whom are FSU Greeks. FSU Greeks have a slightly higher share of employers and the self-employed in comparison to Albanians; a small minority of self-employed FSU Greeks have even achieved high-income earnings by means of entrepreneurial and transnational economics. Yet the vast majority of the working population of FSU Greeks (88%) are wage earners just like Albanians and other immigrants in the city. Moreover, the unemployment rate is significantly higher for FSU Greeks than Albanians, whose employment figures are comparable to those of native Greeks.<sup>88</sup>

For FSU Greeks, immigration and resettlement entailed coming to occupy the lowest position in the labour market together with other immigrants. This was a substantial declassing and deskilling experience. Their case is particularly striking not only because of their high qualifications but also in the light of their privileged reception. The weak state institutions may have proved incapable of coordinating and implementing the plans successfully, yet the difference in terms of access to rights and benefits between them and non-Greek immigrant groups who arrived as undocumented migrants in the same period remains substantial. It seems that non-transferability of human capital, discrimination in the labour market, and inadequate language skills have blocked the social mobility of FSU Greeks to an equal measure with other immigrants. The oversupply in low-skilled

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<sup>87</sup> A large number of the Albanian population has completed some form of technical/professional education.

<sup>88</sup> The fact that access to unemployment benefit is provided to FSU Greeks due to their citizenship rights cannot account for this difference. Unemployment allowances are provided only for those who are able to prove they have legal work and many FSU Greeks were working informally. Moreover, they are offered for a limited period and are in any case not enough for someone to support his/her living.

jobs during the 1990s and 2000s resulted in a new division of the labour, with the migrants partly replacing the indigenous lower strata.

In 2001 the overall privileged situation of FSU Greeks was reflected only in housing. FSU Greeks were recorded having considerably higher rates of homeownership compared to Albanians. Acquiring their own house was a central strategy for FSU Greeks. It attested symbolically their establishment in the ethnic homeland and provided them security in the face of job instability and insecurity. Eventually, the majority of FSU Greeks managed to acquire their own housing, similarly to most native Greeks. In this domain the role of the state did appear crucial. It turned a blind eye to the processes of unauthorized construction that took place from the early years of migration (see chapter 5.2), and issued state funded housing loans through the 2790/2000 law.

The 2790/2000 law was supposed to set the legal and institutional framework for the incorporation of FSU Greeks in all domains of society. However, in practice most emphasis was placed on housing. With the law, the coordination of the settlement and the management of social incorporation of FSU Greeks was passed to the Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization. Two years later the General Secretariat and the National Foundation were abolished. Greek state policies continued prioritizing housing schemes due to its inability to provide any substantial help in the labour market.

The limited success of the rural settlement policy and the ongoing clustering of FSU Greeks in the big urban centres forced the state authorities to change their policy approach. A 'zoning' programme was implemented, dividing the country into four regions. The new scheme attempted to channel FSU Greeks into the more scarcely populated and less dynamic regions through the prescription of economic incentives. The aim was decentralization, rather than exclusively settlement in the north-eastern border areas which was promoted by earlier policy measures. In zone A, which included Thrace, Eastern Macedonia, but also the islands of the Northern Aegean, the privileges remained as before. Subsidised housing loans were also given in the other zones, but the state subsidy decreased progressively and was minimal for zone D, which encompassed the big urban centres of the country. The zoning system again proved insufficient to prevent the concentration of FSU Greeks in Athens and Thessaloniki. The majority of repatriates preferred to settle or remain in one of the two big cities. There (Zone D), every family was entitled to a housing loan of 60,000 euros with an interest rate that was subsidized up to 40%. Those loans were prescribed for a four year period (2001-2005), and were extensively utilized by those FSU Greeks who had not yet managed to solve the issue of their housing.

Besides the prescription of the housing loans schemes, the 2000 law marked a new phase in the legal inclusion of FSU Greeks. The so-called *homogenís* identity card was introduced with the aim of countering the felt problem of extended illegality among FSU Greeks. In essence it formalized a practice that had already been unofficially implemented by the General Secretariat with the distribution of a 'certification of Greekness'. The new document, tantamount to semi-citizenship, provides all but voting rights. It is issued to those who do not wish to acquire Greek citizenship in order not to lose their existing rights, or to those who need an intermediate document before the acquisition of citizenship.

Major changes were also implemented in terms of citizenship acquisition. On the one hand, in accordance with the new conceptualization of its diaspora<sup>89</sup> and due to the failure of the resettlement plan, it was no longer a policy goal to encourage FSU Greek migration. On the other hand, not much was done to restrict immigration. As already mentioned, the General Secretariat continued to conceive of the repatriation of FSU Greeks as a way to solve the demographic problems of the country. It was only in 1996, with the establishment of the Centre for the Study and Development of the Hellenic Culture of the Black Sea, that the new policy towards the diaspora started being pursued. In this vein, the 2000 law introduced the provision of citizenship without the prerequisite of settlement in the country. During the press conference where the law was presented, the president of the parliamentary committee of Greeks abroad explained the aims of the measure as follows (Niotis, 1999):

Until presently the attribution of citizenship was only possible through repatriation. It was like the fatherland was urging them to abandon their home to come to Greece in order to be provided with the self-evident, the recognition as Greeks equal under the constitution... This [the new mode of citizenship acquisition] is a big change because the reasons why Greeks from the Black Sea have been emigrating, which resulted in the diminishing of their presence in an area of vital importance for Greece and Europe, has been poverty, the collapse of the former Soviet Union states and the insecurity that those Greeks have felt fearing that something may happen in their unstable sociopolitical environment confining them there once more. Providing them the Greek citizenship and the ability to work freely in Greece, the Greek state frees them from the insecurity nexus, incorporates them in the national corpus and supports the continuation of their life there, if this is what they aspire to.

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<sup>89</sup> This new conceptualization, first proclaimed in 1994, prescribed that Diaspora Greeks abroad could better serve the multiple economic and political interests of the state from abroad.

## Illegal hellenizations and the FSU Greek vote

In no case has the Greek state gone so far as to set admission quotas or enforce any other active measures, such as language tests in the migrants' areas of origin, to contain the migration of FSU Greeks. Moreover, no legal framework anticipates a future equalizing of the legal status of potential FSU Greek immigrants with that of other immigrants. Such measures were pursued in Germany, where a complete reconsideration of the policy towards the co-ethnic migration from the former Soviet Union took place (Hess, 2008; Joppke, 2005). In Greece, the privileged admission of FSU Greeks has never been questioned. FSU Greeks are still welcome to come to the fatherland 'if they aspire to'. Sustaining strong ties with the diaspora remains a prime state goal.

However, citizenship acquisition under the new law did not become as easy as may be inferred from the above quotation; in practice it became more difficult. Stricter regulations and checks on the certification of documents that prove the applicant's Greek descent were implemented and formalized. Furthermore, the possession of 'Greek consciousness' was introduced as an extra pre-requisite in the determination of Greekness, and thus in the attribution of citizenship rights. Special committees are charged with the task of examining not only the descent of the applicant but also their Greek identity.<sup>90</sup> Officially, those measures were not supposed to pose obstacles to the attribution of citizenship to FSU Greeks, but were undertaken to curb immigration of non-Greek migrants and the prevention of attribution of citizenship to 'false co-ethnics'.

After the mid 1990s, information about a restricted number of cases of so-called illegal Hellenization (*παράνομες ελληνοποιήσεις*), i.e. the attribution of citizenship to 'false Greeks', hit the media. These claims contributed to the reconsideration of whether the repatriation process was unassailable, and the gradual application of more strict checks on the documents presented by the applicants for the citizenship verification process. According to the president of the parliamentary committee of Greeks abroad, during the 1990s, 440 decisions for citizenship attribution were recalled due to forged or lacking documents. This number also includes people of 'real Greek' descent who had not managed to acquire the necessary documentation or had done so through illegal means (Niotis, 2001).

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<sup>90</sup> No in-depth research has yet been carried out on how 'national consciousness' is actually assessed and what weight should be attached to tests for the attribution of citizenship. Voutira (2004) provides evidence of participants' having very different experiences. This possibly mirrors the inability of the state to set transparent criteria through which to assess something which is as vague, subjective, and arbitrary as 'national consciousness'.

After 2000, however, the scale of the phenomenon attained completely different proportions in the press and public discourse, and the issue acquired the dimensions of a major political scandal. In the 2000 elections, the political party PASOK (Πανελλήνιο Σοσιαλιστικό κόμμα) retained power with an extremely thin margin over the New Democracy party (Νέα Δημοκρατία).<sup>91</sup> On the 12<sup>th</sup> April, three days after the national election, the headlines of national papers affiliated to the latter party, such as *Adesmeftos Press* and *Vradini*, made reference to suspicions of adulteration after accusations of thousands of illegal Hellenizations. According to information that circulated through official and unofficial sources, a large number of non-Greek people had acquired Greek citizenship without being entitled, and on top of that people had been transferred from the former Soviet Union to vote.

A state attorney was authorized to carry out an investigation into irregularities in the process of citizenship verification and look into the political responsibilities behind these processes. The inquiry resulted in a rather confusing document presenting information about legal and practical insufficiencies but failing to provide any figures as to the extent of the phenomenon. No evidence of election adulteration was provided, and this was officially accepted by all opposition parties. The New Democracy party, although clarifying that they reject any accusations of election adulteration, suggested that a parliamentary committee be convened to look into the issue of illegal Hellenizations. According to the then president of the party, this was proposed ‘as a means for improvement of state institutions rather than as an assessment of political liability’. The proposal was rejected twice and since then the issue has officially been considered closed.

What did happen in the 2000 elections was that the majority of FSU Greeks voted for PASOK, the party that had just introduced the new law on repatriation. Since the election results were determined by a marginal 72,400 vote difference, in the perception of several native Greeks PASOK had won the elections because of the ‘FSU Greek vote’.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, a number of FSU Greeks with Greek passports living in Cyprus were indeed subsidized to come to vote in the elections. Although this has been a common practice for the two major political parties,<sup>93</sup> it was most probably the first time that they had appealed to this segment of the Greek diaspora. From that point onwards the ‘FSU Greek vote’

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<sup>91</sup> After the fall of the military junta of 1967-1974 and until the eruption of the financial crisis in 2009, the Greek political system was characterized by the absolute dominance of those two parties that alternated one another.

<sup>92</sup> The provisions for the distribution of housing loans were very positively received by FSU Greek community as a way to solve their housing problems.

<sup>93</sup> Expatriates are given cheap or free round tickets to Greece to come and vote in elections provided that they enrol in the party associations.

became a field of fierce political competition between the two major political parties. Before the elections a 'siege of the Russo-Pontics' took place (To Vima, 2007). Returning to the quotation from the managing director of the National Foundation, the cherished 'unanimous support from all political parties' was also partly challenged. The moral right of the state to provide support to Greeks returning home was indeed not questioned. However, the incorporation of FSU Greeks became a field of opportunistic political contestation aimed at the repatriate vote. Both political parties promised subsidized projects, positive action, foundation of schools and nursing homes, and so on, only to forget them, and only remember them at the time of the next election campaign.

Yet what about 'the widespread acceptance of the Pontians by the other Greeks in our society'? Being the main focus of this book, this issue will be extensively discussed in the following chapters in relation to the findings of my ethnographic research in Nikopoli.



# Nikopoli, setting the scene

## 5.1 Perceptions of non-residents

As mentioned, Nikopoli is a working-class district on the north-western outskirts of the city of Thessaloniki. It developed in the early 1960s by internal migrants who came to the city from neighbouring villages, and expanded rapidly after the 1990s largely due to the arrival of FSU Greeks. By 2010 Nikopoli had a population of approximately 10,000,<sup>94</sup> and was still a district in the making, with many unfinished houses and several building projects yet to be finalized.

The undeveloped urban space creates a feeling of estrangement in the visitor. Such feelings are augmented by the lack of any social life focused on a neighbourhood centre. In fact, in Nikopoli there is no neighbourhood centre; and the seclusion from the rest of the city and the concomitant lack of traffic further contributes to the rather isolated atmosphere prevailing there. The difference from the adjacent neighbourhoods is striking; crossing the ring road on leaving Nikopoli, one feels one is re-entering the 'real city'. During my first stay in the neighbourhood, when Nikopoli was still deprived of public lighting, at night everything was dark and quiet.

During the period of my fieldwork, the development of the neighbourhood progressed rapidly. In 2009, one year after my first stay, Nikopoli was connected to the public water supply, and public lights, bus stops, and traffic signs were

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<sup>94</sup> Following the estimate by Cavounidou and Kourti (2008) and including the sub-neighbourhood of Efxinoupoli.

installed. A high school, a primary school, a centre for the elderly, and a creative care children's centre were also built in this period.

Nikopoli is not an administrative unit. In fact, until 2011 it belonged to four different municipalities.<sup>95</sup> This extreme administrative fragmentation was an outcome of the unregulated way in which the neighbourhood developed. The settlers built Nikopoli without any urban plan, through a process of self-help housing construction in an area that happened to lie on the borders of four municipalities. The administrative fragmentation made it difficult for local authorities to coordinate and take action on the neighbourhood. As will be described in what follows, it also contributed to the development of a rather fragmented built environment.

Despite its internal fragmentation, Nikopoli forms a clear spatial unit that can be easily singled out. It is one of the few neighbourhoods of western Thessaloniki to be situated outside the city's ring road. The ring road marks its southern border, while the Asimakis torrent and the Lagadas Avenue form its western and eastern borders respectively (see appendix II, map2, pp.249). The northern border is less clear. Due to massive expansion to the north after 2000, Nikopoli has joined up with the adjacent neighbourhood of Efxinoupoli. Most outsiders, as well as many locals, refer to Efxinoupoli as a part of Nikopoli; and in my research, I will also treat Efxinoupoli as a sub-neighbourhood of Nikopoli.

Being a new neighbourhood on the margins of the city, Nikopoli is certainly not a familiar place to the residents of Thessaloniki. Taxi drivers are an exception. This is not simply a matter of their excellent general knowledge of the city; they have frequent cause to visit the place in order to take *Nikopolites* (people living in Nikopoli) to the city centre or to the eastern suburbs, since public transport in Nikopoli is poor. There is only one bus line that connects the neighbourhood to the city centre, and this goes via all possible side roads and alleyways before reaching Aristotelous square, in the centre of the city. Those locals who want to reach their destination sooner, have to call a taxi.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> As from 2011, the municipalities of Efkarpia, Stavroupoli, and Polihni have merged into the newly formed Municipality of Pavlos Melas. This happened under the Kallikratis government plan, which aimed to redraw the administrative boundaries and overhaul local government in Greece. Today the biggest part of Nikopoli belongs to the Municipality of Pavlos Melas, and a very small part to Evosmos.

<sup>96</sup> For car owners, Nikopoli is a far better place to live. Situated on the ring road, it provides easy access to different areas in the city while, due to the abundance of free space, it is by Thessaloniki's standards a parking heaven.

Interestingly, a few of my informants told me they had been refused a ride to or from Nikopoli; taxi drivers had claimed it was too dangerous a place to go to. In all likelihood, this was an excuse to pass up an unwanted ride in favour of one more profitable. Nevertheless, it points to a certain perception of the neighbourhood. At the time I did my fieldwork, non-residents who knew or claimed they knew about Nikopoli thought of it as an unsafe place. Such ideas had not, however, been shaped by media representations of the neighbourhood.

Media references to the neighbourhood might be generally negative, but they are also very infrequent. The few articles on Nikopoli that do appear in either the local or national press are primarily concerned with the problems faced by its residents due to the poor public facilities. Reference is also made to the local governments' and state's (lack of) action to counter those problems. Two issues are most extensively covered. Firstly, the pollution in the area which is due to the deserted chemical manufacturing plant DIANA in Efxinoupoli,<sup>97</sup> and secondly, the connection of the neighbourhood to the public water supply. The neighbourhood is also mentioned in a limited number of short press articles on petty crime incidents that have taken place there.<sup>98</sup> Notwithstanding such references, Nikopoli is not presented as a dangerous area to live.

Even more infrequent in the media is reference to the FSU Greek presence in the neighbourhood. Their high concentration has been reported by two articles in two of the most popular national newspapers: the first one, entitled 'The Greek-Pontics [Ελληνοπόντιοι] in Nikopoli live in an odd ghetto', was published in *Eleftherotipia* in 2006; and the second one, entitled 'A neighbourhood that shames Thessaloniki', was published in *Kathimerini* in 2010. Both articles are written in a sympathetic tone regarding the hardships faced by FSU Greeks, and are particularly critical of the Greek state's neglect of their problems. Emphasis is placed on the case of the unauthorized sub-neighbourhood of Efxinoupoli and the legal position of the houses its residents have constructed. The portrait of the FSU Greek residents is positive, in line with the general media presentation of FSU Greeks. Concerning the local press, a small number of articles on the FSU Greek community of the city make reference to the neighbourhood and include interviews with residents of the area.

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<sup>97</sup> This issue, described in detail in subchapter 5.3, has been also covered by television programmes.

<sup>98</sup> A violent incident that attracted the attention of the media was a murder that took place at the gas station on the ring road near Nikopoli. The event and its brutality were extensively covered by the press, as well as broadcast on the television news. The issue of the DIANA industry and the murder are presented in more detail in the following chapter.

These minimal references to the neighbourhood and its residents have had a very limited impact on people's perceptions of the area, if any at all. During my fieldwork, many of the non-residents I spoke to did not know the neighbourhood. When I told residents from the east or the centre of the city that I was living in a place called Nikopoli, I would sometimes be asked: 'So how is it to live outside Thessaloniki?' In their mental maps, any area with such a name had to be located far away from the city. Others had a vague idea that such a place might exist somewhere in the western part of Thessaloniki. They also had a conviction that it would not be a particularly pleasant area to live, in accordance with their generally low expectations and negative perceptions of the western suburbs; Thessaloniki is characterized by a social east-west division, the western part having a working class character and the eastern part being more socio-economically privileged. The most knowledgeable were aware that 'Nikopoli is an area of 'Russians' or 'Russo-Pontics' [Russopóntii]'<sup>99</sup> and would claim to have heard of 'the existence of a Russian church up there'.

There is a humble church in the neighbourhood, still under construction at the time of my research, where the service is held in Russian. However, people were not usually referring to that one, but rather to an impressive wooden church in the Russian architectural style situated 2.5km to the north of Nikopoli. People's information on the existence of this 'Russian church', which proudly stands out in Thessaloniki's otherwise homogeneous religious landscape, ties in well with their perception of Nikopoli as an area of 'Russians' or 'Russo-Pontics'.

People in the western suburbs have a much clearer idea about where Nikopoli is situated, but only very few have ever been there. Many, and especially those living in areas adjacent to Nikopoli, held a negative image about it. This image was based on distorted information about criminality, the quality of life there, and on stereotypes about the immigrant residents. Nikopoli is often described as a ghetto, the Russo-Pontic ghetto. A few of my contacts in adjacent areas would advise me to 'be cautious up there', when they learned I was living in Nikopoli.

I did not know anything about Nikopoli before I read a report on urban transformation due to immigration in the city of Thessaloniki, published by the Technical Chamber of Greece (2006). The report recorded the emergence of compact FSU Greek neighbourhoods in the western suburbs. The chapter on Nikopoli concluded that the concentration of a large number of immigrants in areas characterized by diverse urban problems, might pose problems for their assimilation and eventually lead to a phenomena of ghettoization. In a more

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<sup>99</sup> The category 'Russo-Póntii' is the word most commonly used by native Greeks to refer to the FSU Greeks; it has negative connotations as will be clarified in the following (see chapter 6 & 7).

recent publication the authors paint a gloomier picture, concluding that ‘Efxinoupoli and the other settlements in the western quarters of Thessaloniki will continue to be ghettos for many years to come’ (Katsavounidou & Kourti, 2008, pp. 90).

When I was trying to select the neighbourhood for my research, Nikopoli was an obvious candidate. I was alerted by the exceptional (for Greek standards) level of immigrant concentration, and the characterization of the area as a ghetto. I also developed an interest in recording what I then naively thought of as ‘the emergence of a new phenomenon in Greek urban history’.<sup>100</sup> Later I reconsidered these ideas. I understood that it would be much more interesting to assess what it is that different actors are implying by characterizing the neighbourhood as a ghetto and how the use of this word connects with what is happening there. Besides this, soon after I started my fieldwork and enquired into the history of the neighbourhood I realized that Nikopoli is certainly not a new phenomenon for Thessaloniki. As will be clarified in what follows, memories of the settlement of earlier flows of *homogenís* refugees and internal immigrants are still alive in this neighbourhood, and it is precisely the ubiquitous process of self-help urban growth that has resulted in this unfinished suburban sprawl.

## 5.2 Settling and accessing housing on the margins of Thessaloniki

### Internal migrants and *afthéreta*

In the early 60s the area today named Nikopoli was agricultural land belonging to the Municipality of Polihni. People referred to it as ‘the fields of Polihni’ (τα χωράφια της Πολιχνης). According to Panagiotis, one of the oldest residents of the neighbourhood, who spoke to me about the history of Nikopoli in a *kafenío* in the lower part of the district, the only ‘residents’ at that time were a shepherd, a hennery owner, his father who had a barn in the area, and ‘the ‘Cretan’ who ran a mixed-sex bar [μαγαζί με γυναίκες]’. ‘Like a modern bar’, he added. Sotiris, a man in his fifties sitting at the next table, corrected him: ‘It was more like a modern strip bar [κωλόδικο]’, he said.

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<sup>100</sup> When these lines were written, the debate over the emergence of Greek ghettos had been taken up by media and politicians. The debate did not, however, concern neighbourhoods with an FSU Greek population, but rather the city centre of Athens. This has a very high concentration of asylum seekers and undocumented migrants, many of whom have clustered there during the past five years.

Settlement in Nikopoli started in 1962. At that time, Thessaloniki was growing rapidly due to internal migration flows that transferred population to the city from villages and small towns.<sup>101</sup> From 1950 to 1970 Thessaloniki's population almost doubled its size, posing a major challenge to state authorities who had to cope with the great demand for housing. The policy response to this challenge was not articulated around schemes initiated and financed by the state. Following earlier practices, state authorities adopted more flexible and less costly policy routes to allow people to access housing (Economou, et al., 2007; Mantouvalou, et al., 1995). The city was expanded and changed to accommodate the newcomers largely in two ways, through the *exchange in kind* mechanism, *antiparohý*, and through processes of unregulated popular suburbanization (Hastaoglou, et al., 1987).

'Exchange in kind' is a scheme of informal and non-taxable partnership between landowners and builders, specific to Greece (Economou, et al., 2007). According to this scheme, the landowner passes his property on to a constructor in exchange for a part of the building which the constructor then builds. The landowner then uses the whole or part of the apartments he is provided according to the agreement for owner occupation (Emmanuel, 1995; Mantouvalou, et al., 1995). This scheme was appealing to the state due to its capability to respond effectively to the housing demands with minimal or no cost for the public. It also functioned as a substitute for welfare policies and helped provide a great variety of dwellings of different sizes and costs, thereby covering a wide spectrum of housing demands (Tsoulouvis, 1996).<sup>102</sup>

Many of the settlers, however, could not afford to buy or rent apartments in the newly built houses or in the older housing stock of the city. In order to access housing they engaged in self-help housing construction. They built unauthorized houses, *afthéreta*, on the margins of the city, where cheap land was available and property rights only loosely established. Although illegal, these houses were tolerated by the authorities. The Greek state, subordinating urban planning to social priorities, tolerated unauthorized housing construction so as to avoid social polarization in the city. The choice of the term 'afthéreta' is itself interesting. The

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<sup>101</sup> The population movements during the German occupation and the Civil War had drastically changed the contours of rural Greece. Together with the collapse of the Greek agricultural sector, itself caused by the liberalization of prizes and its gradual incorporation into urban capitalism, this paved the way for a mass rural exodus (see Kotzamanis, 1987; Vergopoulos K. , 1975) .

<sup>102</sup> As a system of housing provision, antiparohý had significant effects on the urbanization process in Greece. On the positive side it led to a very high level of owner-occupancy and to a plurality of mixed land uses. On the negative side, it saw very high densities in central city areas, the lack of public spaces, and a rapid diminution of space, through parcelling out of rural land at the urban fringe (Tsoulouvis, 1996).

unauthorized houses were not termed 'illegal' houses but 'afthéreta' houses. The word *afthéreto*, literally self-authorized, indicates the result of an act that took place according to the will, the personal needs, and aspirations of an actor who had neglected established criteria, the will of others, or/and of law. Although it does imply the illegality of the actor and rather discredits the act, it also indicates that there was a need to which the actor had to respond.

Unauthorized construction of homes in Greece differs from the process of urban squatting in that it is typically realized on legally possessed land (Leontidou, 1989). It takes place outside the official city boundaries, commonly on agricultural land which is illegally subdivided and sold by landowners as cheap 'urban plots'. Settlers buy the land and build their houses, becoming owner-occupiers, without obtaining a building certificate (Leontidou, 1989; Leontidou, et al., 2001). At rather regular intervals, the Greek state authorities have legalized entire clusters of *afthéreta* housing and incorporated them in the city plan. They have provided them with social amenities and prevented them from developing in a manner which would socially marginalize them. This was not an exceptional practice. In fact, it was mainly through this process that the built-up area of Thessaloniki, especially in the west, developed in the post-war period.

Nikopoli, settled by the last wave of internal immigrants, currently marks the ultimate border to the north of this spontaneous type of urban expansion. Androklis, whose family came in the 1960s to build their home in the area, recounts:

The reason we found ourselves here was because there were no 'plots' in lower parts of the city. People started buying land from Omonia and reached up to Nikopoli. Not all plots were built by then. There was still open land. In some cases, people bought the plots but did not build their houses immediately. In any case it was only in Nikopoli where one could find a plot to build his home at that time.

The fact that the state tolerated *afthéreta* house building did not mean that it also facilitated the process. On the contrary, policemen chased away workers and, less frequently, demolished segments or even the entirety of constructions that were still in their primary stages, in an attempt to prevent settlers from continuing building. As a result, construction work had to be done secretly, mainly overnight. In some cases it could take years before an *afthéreto* house was

finalized in Nikopoli.<sup>103</sup> In the meantime, many of the settlers had immigrated to West Germany to find money for the continuation of the work. The 60s was the decade of mass emigration to Western Europe; internal migration was often followed by a further move outside the borders of Greece. A large part of the remittances and the savings of those who returned were spent on housing, and in particular on the construction of *afthéreta*.

Early settlers in Nikopoli supported each other and showed solidarity towards newcomers. This infused them with a feeling of community which survived after the unauthorized neighbourhood expanded. Resident assemblies (λαικές συνελεύσεις) were organized so that decisions could be taken to counter common problems. A popular district council was also set up. This had both a political function, attempting to mobilize and organize the neighbours in fighting for their rights, and a cultural one aimed to self-cater for the neighbourhood's needs. Due to lack of resources, its actions were commonly based on self-organization strategies. One of its formerly active members, for instance, narrated to me stories of how they 'stole' electricity from the public power corporation to organize live music performances in the neighbourhood. This aspect of the neighbourhood had died out by the time I was doing my research. Residents' assemblies were still organized, but only on the initiative of the municipal authorities.

The majority of the *afthéreta* in Nikopoli are two-storey homes. Extra storeys were usually built at a later phase to host the core family of one or more of the daughters. Technical and social infrastructure was provided by the state after the actual creation of the neighbourhood by the settlers, and this attested to the residents' de facto establishment in Nikopoli. An electricity supply was provided in 1969, but it took more years before a basic network of streets was realized. School was far away, and my informants recalled wrapping plastic bags around their feet to prevent mud from sticking to their shoes and trousers on their long walk to and from school on rainy days.

During the early years, people used water from the Assimakis torrent and from wells in the neighbourhood. Later, a descendant of one of the very first residents started a local water drilling company to supply fresh water to the residents. This private business continued to be the exclusive water provider in Nikopoli until 2008. In 2005, the quality of the water was examined and found to be non-drinkable, with levels of nitrogens and dangerous bacteria well above the permitted limits. Residents were advised to avoid using the water for drinking

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<sup>103</sup> In election campaigns, legalizations of *afthéreta* neighbourhoods were promised for clientelistic purposes. For the same reasons, controls on illegal construction were also loosened. It was during these periods that major works in Nikopoli took place.

and cooking.<sup>104</sup> The water pollution had been caused by the deserted chemical plant DIANA, which is situated 500 metres north of the water drill and had seriously degraded the local environment.

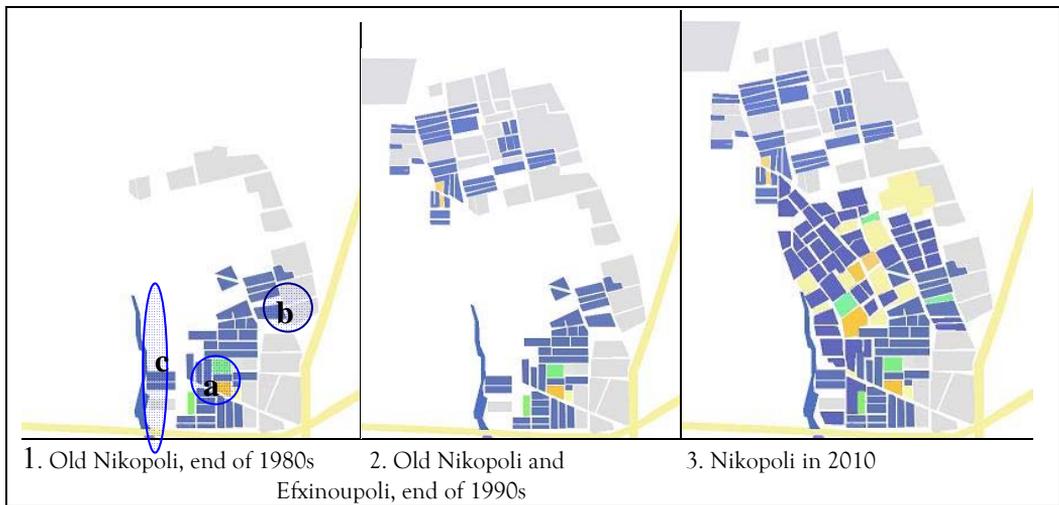
The DIANA industry came into operation in the 70s, producing pesticide. Locals had been calling for it to be relocated since the late 70s, when a fire had broken out there. It was pointed out that the industry had not even possessed an operating license until 1986.<sup>105</sup> Years of complaints and protests by residents were followed by many unfulfilled promises by politicians, and a series of disagreements between state institutions over the continuation of the operation and relocation of the plant. The industry only closed down in 1998, after going bankrupt for a second time. In 1999, Greenpeace highlighted the dangers of a potential fire in the unattended buildings. But the plant, which was possibly Greece's largest concentration of hazardous chemicals situated close to a residential area, had already polluted the soil and the water reserves of the neighbourhood. In 2004 a fire did break out in the plant and thirty barrels exploded, producing a thick fog over Nikopoli. The fire brigade prevented the fire spreading across the plant, something which could have caused an accident on a scale of that in Seveso, Italy. From 2000 until 2006, more than 1,600 tons of toxic material was gradually moved out of the neighbourhood, yet the grounds still await their final cleansing.

In 2008, Nikopoli was finally connected to the Thessaloniki public water supply. It is noteworthy, though, that the area had been included in the city plan since 1988. A common denominator of illegal settlements and spontaneous urban development is the negative impacts they have on residents' quality of life, due to fragmented and ex-post solutions in their technical and social infrastructure. In Nikopoli, marking the edge of the city, the delays were longer and the problems harsher due to its vicinity to the city's industrial zone. As an informant commented, 'Here it is more west than Thessaloniki's west' (*Δυτικότερα των Δυτικών συνοικιών*). With 'west' implying poverty for the City of Thessaloniki, his phrase was meant to indicate the desolation associated with Nikopoli.

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<sup>104</sup> After improvements in the hygiene provisions of the business the water was found drinkable. Yet the values were still close to the limit and exceeded it on rainy days.

<sup>105</sup> It is noteworthy that *afthéreta* construction did not only concern buildings for residency but small-scale industries as well. According to Economou et. al (2007) some three quarters of all buildings at the periphery of Greek cities are the product of some form of illegal construction.



Map 5.1 The expansion of Nikopoli

### The 1960s Soviet Greeks at the Réma

The earliest cluster of *afthéreta* houses was formed in the southwest part of Nikopoli (see map 5.1.1 a), close to where one can today find a large deserted tobacco warehouse. At that time, there were many more such warehouses in the vicinity, and these employed most of the first inhabitants of Nikopoli who used to work in tobacco agriculture in their villages. A second concentration of *afthéreta*, later called Nikopolitika, developed further to the east (see map 5.1.1 b). A tavern named Nikopoli was also built in that area. It was named after the village Nikopoli, situated in Lagadas, a rural department of the Prefecture of Thessaloniki, from which the majority of settlers originated. The postman used to leave the mail in the tavern and gradually the whole area started to be called Nikopoli. The village Nikopoli had in turn been named after the homonymous city in Pontos, by refugee settlers who, by the 1920s, had replaced its older inhabitants.<sup>106</sup> Apart from Nikopoli, the population of Theodosia,<sup>107</sup> another ‘Pontic village’, this one in Kilikis, had also almost completely relocated to the neighbourhood. In the main, though not exclusively, the other settlers had also migrated from various ‘Pontic villages’ in the neighbouring departments of Thessaloniki.

The third cluster of *afthéreta* in Nikopoli was an exceptional case in that it was not built on private property but on squatted public land at the banks of the

<sup>106</sup> The former name of the village was Zarova. It used to be a charcoal-producing *chiflic* inhabited by Slavic-speaking Christians all of whom left for Bulgaria after the Second Balkans War (Karakasidou, 1997, p. 167).

<sup>107</sup> The older name is Chatzi Bairamli.

Assimakis torrent (see map 5.1.1 c). People refer to this part of Nikopooli as the *réma*, which is the Greek word for torrent. The *réma* cluster was built by Greeks immigrants from the Soviet Union who came to Thessaloniki in the mid 1960s. As described in chapter 3 (pp. 57), a restricted number of FSU Greeks immigrated to Greece in that period, and mostly settled in Athens.<sup>108</sup> Only a small number of families came to Thessaloniki, many of whom settled along the banks of the Assimakis torrent.<sup>109</sup> Being socially and economically the most vulnerable group at that time, squatting land was the only affordable way for them to acquire housing. The first squatters, Pelagia and Nestoras, describe how *afhéréta* construction started in the *réma*.

Pelagia: Opposite the house where my mother-in-law lived there was a builder [εργολάβος]. He heard my mother-in-law crying every day, and he kept telling her, ‘Don’t cry granny, I will built you a house...’ He was sorry for us... seven people living in two small rooms... and he did help us! On a Saturday, no... it was Sunday – on Saturdays we were working – he said to my husband ‘Yorgo here we should build the house.’ We were very happy!

Nestoras: Here everything was deserted so, the day when we finished with the basement columns the rural guard came and destroyed them. He was guarding the area here... he was very strict. You know, what we were building was *afhéréto*... He asked me ‘Who is responsible for that?’ I said me, because I did not want to betray the builder.

Pelagia: Yes, and later on he [the rural guard] regretted this and he came back at night. His mother shouted at him ‘Aren’t you ashamed? We came here as refugees. They are refugees as well. Come on, stand up and go back there right now.’ She prepared bags with cans, crèmes, flour, spaghetti. She told him ‘Take those and go to ask them to forgive you’. He came back the same night.

Nestoras: He had come from Russia, from Kars in 1922.<sup>110</sup> He came back at night asking for forgiveness. ‘I am sorry Nestoras, you should continue the works.’ He also came to help in the end. We were digging the foundations of the building at the time...

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<sup>108</sup> According to Vergeti (2000), a small number of people had also migrated in 1971. There is no information on the motivation of immigrants and the selection criteria set by the Soviet Union and the Greek state. According to my research, based on an admittedly restricted number of informants, it seems that a basic qualification was the possession of Greek citizenship. Ties with Greece, i.e. having kin, seemed to have also played a role. Concerning the motivations on the part of the emigrants it seems that a strong Greek ethnonational identity, together with a mistrust of the Soviet regime, seem to have been crucial.

<sup>109</sup> Another big concentration is found in Kordelio.

<sup>110</sup> In 1922 Kars belonged to Turkey.

The experience of uprooting and the hardships of settlement forged a strong refugee identity for the 1.2 million people who were forced to come to Greece as part of the Greek-Turkish population exchange in the 1920s. In the early 1970s, five decades after the resettlement, Hirschon (1989) described the pervasiveness and significance of this identity in the refugee community of Kokkinia, in Athens, where she conducted her research. Although the 1960s Soviet Greeks were not refugees, the mother of the rural guard considered them as such and sympathized for their hardships, coming to settle in a homeland they had never known. The fact that she originated from an area that had been under Russian rule for several years made the tie stronger. She felt obliged to remind her son of 'his refugee past' and preach to him the value of solidarity and the consequent obligation towards Pelagia's family. His support proved crucial for them to acquire their own housing.

Access to housing had been particularly troublesome for the 1920s refugees. Their arrival found the state exhausted by the Asia Minor defeat and unprepared to deal with such a large-scale emergency. In Thessaloniki alone – the so-called mother of refugees (προσφυγομάνα) – 117,000 refugees arrived to settle. In the period from 1922 to 1930, the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Refugee Settlement Commission,<sup>111</sup> and building co-operatives founded more than fifty settlements of state-organized housing (Hastaoglou-Martinidis, 1997, p. 499). Yet even this was not enough, and they were soon encircled by *afthéreta* housing.<sup>112</sup> The roots of post-war unregulated popular suburbanization and *afthéreta* construction must be traced back to that period (Leontidou, 1990).

The Greek state reasoned that extensive homeownership could function as a safety valve in the face of work insecurity and poverty, compensating for the weak Greek welfare state (Economou, et al., 2007; Leontidou, 1989). Aiming to prevent social unrest and the radicalization of the sizeable socio-economically precarious populations, it allowed them to build *afthéreta*. During the interwar period, internal migrants were disadvantaged compared to the 1920s refugees who were treated as a special category (Leontidou, 1989). Similarly, the 1960s Soviet Greeks in Nikopoli were also in a slightly favourable position compared to the post-war internal immigrants. Their favourable treatment was not official state policy but rather the outcome of initiatives by local stakeholders. Possibly, *afthéreta* construction on squatted land would not have been tolerated if it had

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<sup>111</sup> A supranational body founded by the League of Nations.

<sup>112</sup> Public investment failed to meet the need of a sizeable section of the urban refugee population. In March 1940 the programme of urban refugee housing was still incomplete (Hirschon 1989, pp. 43).

been initiated by internal migrants. In the absence of any kind of state assistance, turning a blind eye was the only thing local authorities could do to help the FSU Greeks.

Pelagia and Nestoras's settlement on the banks of Assimakis presaged the settlement of the 1960s Soviet Greeks, who were in urgent need of housing. However, due to the informality of the process, some internal migrants managed to benefit from the state's lenience without 'being entitled to'. In Pelagia's words:

-Before we could finish our house the whole area was full of houses under construction. Following us, 160 more houses were built on the banks of the river.

-Were they all immigrants from Kazakhstan?

-No there were also some natives from the villages. I can't recall the name of the village... [...] Several of them. They did not have money, they were poor people. They let them build as refugees. Police did not know that they were natives. They [policemen] thought they were refugees as well. When my sister-in-law came to build here, some neighbours outside of the *réma* called the police. They came and partly destroyed the balcony, but they told them 'We will just do some very trivial damage to your construction to prove we did something [για τα μάτια], so don't shout nor get sad, and after we leave you can continue.' Being refugees we had this freedom. Otherwise they would not let us.

It is interesting that Pelagia had fully internalized the refugee identity. In her perception, it was by virtue of this identity that she and other 1960s Soviet Greeks were entitled to the state's lenience. Meanwhile, however, her FSU Greek background was experienced as an obstacle in everyday life. The timing of her arrival was unfavourable. In 1967 a military dictatorship seized power in a coup d'état. Among other things staunch anticommunism prevailed and FSU Greeks 'became' potential traitors, despite the fact that the majority of them were ideologically right wing.<sup>113</sup> It was inconceivable to speak Russian outdoors. For an entire year Pelagia was followed closely by a secret policeman, probably as a potential suspect of treason. Marisha, an FSU Greek who was a young student at the time, recalled being expelled from school simply for wearing red earrings. The native population was also rather inhospitable, at least during the early years. Several 1960s Soviet Greeks had difficulties finding rental accommodation. An informant claimed that they were received better by the Kazakhs after deportation

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<sup>113</sup> According to Lavrentiadou (Lavrentiadou, 2006), left-wing natives also distanced themselves from 1960 FSU Greeks, refusing to accept their personal histories of expulsion from the USSR.

to Kazakhstan compared to in Greece.<sup>114</sup> However, for the majority who remained in Greece, the initial suspicion by the locals ceased soon after they settled and found a permanent job.

In Nikopoli, 1960s Soviet Greeks were initially called Russo-Pontics, or simply Russians. At that time the neighbourhood space was very fragmented and the *réma* settlement was not connected with the rest of the settlements. For those living in Nikopolitika, *réma* was considered a far-off neighbourhood, and as a result there was not much contact between them. At the time of my fieldwork, the locals referred to them in positive terms. People used them as an example from which to make two rather conflicting statements. On the one hand, a few people referred to their case to stress how effectively and quickly the process of assimilation can proceed, and to speculate that soon the post-1990s FSU Greeks ‘will also become like us’. On the other hand, most of the people I talked to compared them with the newcomers to highlight the supposedly problematic behaviour of the latter.

Those who came in the sixties did not have problems with the language, they were hard working and easily became accepted. You could not see them as different people. I do not know... maybe many years have passed and the new ones have different experiences. Yet the older ones did not have problems with alcoholism and they did not live [βαθύ κάθισμα] in the streets. They were decent people [κύριοι] [...] they can't be fully Greek. They speak Greek like it is a foreign language to them [η γλώσσα δεν σπάει].

Several stressed that those who really loved Greece and felt Greek had come at that point, and that the rest came in the 1990s ‘only for economic reasons’. Others went further, arguing that the real Greeks had returned to the homeland in the sixties whereas the post-1990s migration had almost exclusively concerned ‘fake Greeks’.

Only one old woman living in the vicinity of the *réma* was still completely negative and prejudiced towards the 1960s Soviet Greeks. She made no distinction between them and the newcomers. For her all were the same:

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<sup>114</sup> Due to the turbulent situation in Greece at the time of their arrival, the lack of any state support, and their resulting socio-economic marginalization, some FSU Greeks returned to Kazakhstan. Their compatriots in Kazakhstan were critical of their return. As Pavlos, who eventually immigrated to Greece in 1992, told me, those who had wished unsuccessfully to leave Kazakhstan for Greece considered the return of the migrants to show ungratefulness towards the Greek state; they would say, ‘It is because of people like you that they will never let us go to Greece’.

Russians. Although being a second-generation refugee herself, she claimed she could not understand the reasons why FSU Greeks were allowed to build on squatted land, when she would be pursued by the police for building a small house on owned property. Her case, although very exceptional, is suggestive. As evident also in the initial suspicion of locals, a refugee identity alone, at least for second-generation refugees from rural areas, was not always enough for FSU Greeks to be welcomed immediately and without reservation. Neither was the Pontic origin they shared in common, nor the fact that they all are Greeks. At that time, the locals in Nikopoli were also trying to make their own rather uncertain way in Thessaloniki. For people in a comparable socio-economic situation, any slight preferential treatment for a social category can produce feelings of bitterness and neglect as compared to the rest.

### **Efxinoupoli and the FSU Greeks**

Nikopoli developed into a separate neighbourhood in the mid 70s when the construction of the ring road severed it from the rest of the city. By that time, most of the houses in the older part of the neighbourhood – from here onwards referred to as old Nikopoli – had been built. Unauthorized construction mostly concerned additional works in already built houses. In 1983, the Greek government introduced legislation which aimed to legalize and officially incorporate the existing unauthorized settlements into the cities. In 1988 Nikopoli was incorporated into the city plan of Thessaloniki and its residents, excepting those from the *réma*,<sup>115</sup> were able to legalize their *afthéreta* dwellings after paying a fine. Since building activity on the banks of water courses is prohibited by the Constitution, people who had build their houses in the *réma* were not given the option to legalize their dwellings.

In the 1990s, Nikopoli experienced a further unregulated expansion. In 1992, two years after the beginning of the massive ‘return’ of FSU Greeks, a completely new district – Efxinoupoli – started to be built by them among the fields and small-scale industries. This was triggered by land speculators involved in the ‘*afthéreta* business’, who intervened to ‘offer FSU Greeks the opportunity’ to build their own homes. These constructions were not in scenic areas, as was the trend for *afthéreta* construction at that time,<sup>116</sup> but on the margins of Thessaloniki.

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<sup>115</sup> A small number of *réma* squatters had to be re-housed because of the construction of the ring road.

<sup>116</sup> The 1983 law aimed to lower the pace of unauthorised construction and urban sprawl through the introduction of urban land use zones and the prescription of severe sanctions against any new

The area that was incorporated into the city plan in 1988 extended beyond the bounds of the built-up area of Nikopoli. Efxinoupoli was built just outside the city plan borders, separated from the older settlement by a distance of approximately 600m (see map 5.1.2). Administratively it belonged to the then Community of Efkarpiia and was officially defined as a manufacturing zone.<sup>117</sup> The land not used for industrial purposes belonged to a small number of people. After consultation with a broker who had previously been involved in the holiday resort '*afthéreta* business', the main landowner illegally subdivided his property – two fields of 1.35 ht each – into small parcels of 200m<sup>2</sup>. The same broker also played the role of mediator between the landowner and the authorities of the Community of Efkarpiia. Consensus at the local level was necessary. The fact that the social circle of the broker intersected with the local governments in Efkarpiia was probably a basic reason why construction took place in that particular locale.<sup>118</sup>

In the course of time, more property owners, including the then president of the Community, became involved. A notary and a topographer were also needed, and the new design with the illegal parcels was circulated among potential buyers and advertised in the local press. Land in Efxinoupoli was sold at a price three times lower than that within the borders of the city plan which extended to an area approximately 600m to the north from the built area of old Nikopoli. This is the reason why Efxinoupoli developed there and not in direct proximity to the residencies in old Nikopoli. The project explicitly and exclusively targeted FSU Greeks and it was based on two speculative assumptions: firstly that FSU Greeks would be willing to invest in buying those plots, and secondly that the state would tolerate the emergence of the unauthorized neighbourhood. Both assumptions proved to be well founded.

FSU Greeks migrated as families, unlike most migrants who often come alone and only later install their nuclear or extended family. For that reason, their housing needs were more urgent. Moreover, homeownership could provide a certain security to their unstable work situation and their general socio-economic

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illegal construction built after the law was passed. However, the law was inadequately implemented. Illegal building continued. The new unauthorised constructions were not the homes of the poor but mostly second residencies as well as speculative ventures such as hotels and small enterprises. The spatial distribution of *afthéreta* constructions also changed. The majority were built in the countryside, on the coast, the islands, and in mountainous areas, rather than close to cities and in suburban areas (Polyzos & Minetos, 2009).

<sup>117</sup> In that year Efkarpiia was a community. It later upgraded to a municipality and eventually merged into the newly formed Municipality of Pavlos Melas.

<sup>118</sup> I found no information supporting the hypothesis that FSU Greeks selected Efxinoupoli after information provided to them by the 1960s FSU Greeks or people from the local Pontic community.

precarity during their first years in Greece. In this context, buying the (illegal) parcels appeared an attractive prospect. In the face of restricted resources, the option of gradually building their own house was appealing in comparison to the prospect of buying a small and degraded apartment.<sup>119</sup>

Just as for the majority of native Greeks, acquiring their own housing was important for FSU Greeks not only in material terms but also as symbolically attesting to the establishment of their roots in ‘fatherland’.<sup>120</sup> Several older-generation FSU Greeks, who had been immigrants three or even four times, stressed that they had always had their own house and that ‘wherever we go we built our own houses’. They claimed that the need to have their own house in their ‘homeland’ was even greater still. The phrase ‘Pontii are hard-working people’ was echoed by several of my FSU Greek informants in relation to the group’s achievements in the housing sector. Lelya, a Turkish-speaking woman from a village in central Georgia (Tsintskaro), noted:

There [in the FSU], we built our houses by ourselves. If it was necessary, big houses, two storey, three storey... one was helping the other. And here, once more, we acquired the best houses. Everyone got one or two of them. My father came here without a penny, he built a house on his own and then took the housing loan and bought one more. [...] we are *nikokirei*<sup>121</sup> [...] there is no one among our people [δικός μας] that does not have a two-storey house and if such a person exists he will acquire one... you are considered a worthless person if you do not have your own nest [φωλιά].

My FSU Greek informants attributed particular significance to home ownership. According to a Caucasian saying, which others claim to be Pontic, there are three things a man must do in his life: have a child, build a house, and plant a tree. Being such a central duty in a man’s life, housing became a field of competition within the FSU Greek community as well as a status symbol. Once, I was in a house in Efxinoupoli chatting with the owner when a friend of his dropped by. His daughter was getting married and he had come to issue an invite to the wedding. My host asked the visitor about his house and whether he had his daughter’s apartment ready. His friend also had an *afthéreto* house elsewhere in

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<sup>119</sup> *Afthéreta* construction was also practised by FSU Greeks outside Efxinoupoli. Three more compact neighbourhoods can be seen in Western Thessaloniki, Filothei, and Galini, and Amfithea and several scattered houses were built outside of the urban core.

<sup>120</sup> The failed project by the Greek state to provide housing to FSU Greeks in Thrace brought up the issue of the FSU Greeks’ access to housing as an unfulfilled promise.

<sup>121</sup> Literally ‘masters of the house’, but here used with the connotation of hard work and devotion to family.

the city. However, he did not give a clear answer to the question, and for that he was confronted with a half joking, half serious comment.

I do not care whether you will buy her a house, a ship or whatever. Is the new storey ready? Is your daughter's apartment ready? What I want is to see your house growing taller.

Another time, during an interview in Efxinoupoli, the host showed me from his window his neighbour's three-storey house. Downplaying his achievement, he explained that 'people may be surprised how can they have such a big house, but it is normal. They are a big family; three brothers – three apartments'. Owners of such big houses receive admiration from the FSU Greek community, as well as jealousy. Competition over material earnings, especially housing due to its symbolic value, were also experienced by some of informants as a negative force in Greece, corroding social relations. Boris cherished the good old days:

Here people changed. The obligations are many, we do not have time to party... a quick coffee and you go. Always obligations, to pay your debts and to build higher, more storeys to outdo the other. Such antagonism did not exist in Russia.

By the time FSU Greeks were buying their houses in Nikopoli stricter rules applied to land subdivision. Dividing the plots was in fact illegal. To circumvent this legal constraint, the land owner did not officially sell them coherent 200m<sup>2</sup> plots, but rather a share of up to 200m<sup>2</sup> over the complete 1.35 hectare field. By law,<sup>122</sup> no settler owns a coherent plot of land but all have rights up to 200m<sup>2</sup> over bigger fields. Officially, the FSU Greeks in Efxinoupoli share the land of the neighbourhood.

FSU Greeks were not fully aware of these legal complexities. The sellers' assurance that 'you will have no problem' was sufficiently convincing to them. Having lived in the Soviet Union where property rights were restricted and marketing much more straightforward, the chaotic and informal Greek land market was alien to them. The priest of the local church told me:

People were informed that cheap building plots are sold here and they bought them. How could they know about permissions, licenses and 'city plans'? There were no such things in Russia. If you had money you could build your house. Maybe you had to bribe someone, and you proceeded.

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<sup>122</sup> *Ex adiairetou* is the legal term denoting joint ownership of property which should not be divided.

The first settlers disseminated the information and attracted kin and friends. In the course of time potential settlers became more aware of the informality of the process and many were discouraged by this fact. However, in less than ten years a completely new neighbourhood had emerged (see map 5.1.2). The residents were almost exclusively FSU Greeks, apart from a Roma family, a native Greek family and a couple of non-Greek migrants from the FSU. The FSU Greeks of Efxinoupoli originate from different areas. The majority had immigrated from Kazakhstan and Abkhazia but Greek migrants from the Russian Federation, Uzbekistan, Armenia, the Tsalka region, and other areas in Georgia can be found too. Pontic-speaking families are the majority, but several Turkish-speaking FSU Greeks also live in the neighbourhood. The area's expansion halted in 2001 with the issue of the state housing loans,<sup>123</sup> resulting in an area that hosts approximately 2,600 people (Katsavounidou & Kourti, 2006).

The formation of the new neighbourhood has striking similarities with the process in old Nikopoli. The construction of the illegal houses preceded the urban infrastructure, which was initially dealt by the settlers themselves. The construction of houses involved a lot of personal work, and in some cases immigrants built the house completely by themselves. After their arrival in Greece, most FSU Greeks became familiar with the building process while working in the construction sector. Others were already experienced from the FSU. According to informants, settlers in Efxinoupoli drafted a weekly schedule and worked jointly on each other's houses. Many family members and friends were also mobilized to help. Furthermore, many settlers emigrated to Germany for work in order to save up money to finalize the construction of their houses. Immigrants were mostly young males, but also couples who often left their children in the care of grandparents.

Although the building processes in old Nikopoli and Efxinoupoli were very similar, there are differences between the two sub-neighbourhoods with respect to the housing stock. Houses in Efxinoupoli are more diverse in size. The majority of *afthéreta* are two storey, as in old Nikopoli, yet three- and even four-storey houses for bigger families are not uncommon. Extra storeys were not exclusively reserved for the daughters as was the case in older Nikopoli. In some cases houses were built to accommodate the whole extended family. Some houses are rather expensive and pompous constructions, others are substantially more modest, and a number of them use the free land around their perimeters to produce vegetables. The interiors I witnessed on my visits were extremely clean, well

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<sup>123</sup> The state housing loans appeared to most FSU Greeks as a better way to acquire housing compared to the uncertain and unofficial option of *afthéreta* construction.

furnished, and equipped with all modern equipment; this was a striking contrast with the usually unfinished facades, the extremely low quality of the technical infrastructure of the neighbourhood, and its location in a manufacturing zone in direct proximity to electricity pylons.

The first settlers suffered many hardships, having to live in an area with no electricity, drainage, water, or road infrastructure. Nevertheless, by the time the majority of houses started to be built those vital services had been provided with the support of the president of the local government, who was indirectly involved in the creation of the area, and the crucial intervention of the prefect of Thessaloniki: if speculation was the reason for the creation of the neighbourhood, cliental motivation at the local level was the reason why it was sustained. The central governments did nothing to prevent or regulate *afthéreta* construction in Efxinoupoli, notwithstanding the fact that it was built in an area studded with small industries, lacking any potential for development into a residential area. Several houses were built in direct proximity to the DIANA plant and high-voltage electricity pylons.

Efxinoupoli is not a unique case. FSU Greeks developed *afthéreta* neighbourhoods in other areas on the margins of Thessaloniki and Athens. It should be noted that speculators have not targeted other non-Greek immigrant groups. That would have probably caused an acute state reaction. On their part, non-Greek migrants did not attempt to access housing through such informal ways. *Afthéreta* construction concerned only FSU Greeks, symbolizing and enacting their inclusion into the lowest Greek social stratum.

However, it should be noted that the state did not always turn a blind eye as in Efxinoupoli. The authorities in Athens had been more keen to enforce the law to collect relevant levies, and in cases to demolish houses when levies were not paid. Yet such attempts were met with fierce opposition by the FSU Greeks, who organized protest marches and even came into open confrontation with police.<sup>124</sup> By contrast, the situation in Efxinoupoli was not conflict ridden; speculators had achieved the consent, and even the involvement, of the local authorities.

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<sup>124</sup> This was one of the few incidents when collective action was taken by FSU Greeks. Media coverage favoured them and presented their *afthéreta* neighbourhoods as symbolizing the FSU Greeks' attempt to build roots in the fatherland. They also portrayed them as victimized by the state. Panagiotis Grigoriadis, a 1960s FSU Greek, emerged as a central figure at that period. Proclaiming himself 'the president of the Pontics', Grigoriadis became popular among FSU Greeks in Athens due to his central role in the demonstrations organized by FSU Greeks to defend their *afthéreta*. Grigoriadis capitalized on his popularity to get involved in politics with the political party DIKI. He then served as vice-prefect in East Attica with the political party Nea Dimocratia, from which position he resigned a year later.

Efxinoupoli was given its name by the local authorities. The choice is symbolic and highlights the significance attributed by authorities to the residents' connection with historic Pontos (*Efxinos Pontos*) is the ancient name for the Black Sea). A monument commemorating the exile of the Greeks of Pontos was also set up at the south edge of the neighbourhood. It appears that constructing a Pontic identity for the neighbourhood was a conscious effort by the authorities. It was probably considered a way to legitimize the unauthorized emergence of the neighbourhood in the eyes of other Greeks; attributing to it a Pontic Greek identity and representing it as a shelter for Pontic migrants settling in their homeland after years in exile. The support of Thessaloniki's Prefects, Papadopoulos (1998–2002) and Psomiades (2002–2010), who are both of Pontic descent, proved also crucial. Aiming at the FSU Greek vote, they highlighted sameness in ancestry and supported the FSU Greeks' case, making use of their connections and authority at different levels.

*Afthéreta* building was possibly less troublesome for FSU Greeks in Efxinoupoli than it had been for internal migrants in Nikopoli during the 1960s. Nevertheless, the FSU Greeks found themselves in a much more precarious legal position after they had constructed them. They had to pay the state an extremely high so-called retention fine to preserve their *afthéreto* from demolition, which none could afford. FSU Greeks who had an *afthéreto* were eventually acquitted of the payment of this fine through a legal regulation in 2003. However, they did have to pay a high fee to the Social Insurance Institute (IKA), as well as judicial costs if taken to court.<sup>125</sup> And yet it is rather improbable that they would have been able to legalize their property, given the designation of Efxinoupoli as a manufacturing zone. Giouras, a FSU Greek who mediated between the Municipality of Efkarpia and the local community at the time of my research, describes it as follows:

The process was illegal but they did not know and in the course of time they paid... they paid a lot and many have been taken to court. You could understand the illegality but we couldn't [...]. People have regretted that they have come here. Well, regretted is maybe not the right word. We simply were not used to being taken to court and we do not like that. To be taken to court for us meant that you are not a decent person.

The municipality of Efkarpia built a small square at the south edge of the neighbourhood, where it also placed the monument to the exile of the Greeks of Pontos. A church and a community house were also built. All were constructed

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<sup>125</sup> As will be explained in the following, no systematic action was taken by the police to stop the process. However, when personal complaints were made they had to enforce the law.

illegally, yet inaugurated with all necessary formality and pomp. At the time of my research, the authorities of the municipality had tried to reclaim rights over two nuclei of land by changing the urban plan and transferring them from manufacturing land to residential areas. That was considered a necessary step to provide Efxinoupoli with some public spaces, as well as basic social infrastructure such as schools, a medical centre, old people's centre, and post-office.<sup>126</sup>

An association was founded in Efxinoupoli by locals with the aim of taking care of people's everyday needs and lobbying the local authorities. The association, however, no longer existed by the time I conducted my research. In early 2000, Grigoriadis, a 1960s Soviet Greek who became popular among FSU Greeks in Athens due to his central role in the demonstrations organized by FSU Greeks to defend their *afthéreta* there, visited Efxinoupoli. Being an aspiring 'ethnic leader' he was traveling through Greece meeting FSU Greek associations and individuals to mobilize FSU Greeks to fight for their rights and strengthen his status as a representative of the FSU Greek community. He gave a public speech in Efxinoupolis square and tried to organize protests, mainly concerning the issue of the legalization of residents' *afthéreta*. In his speech he also accused the local Efxinoupoli association of passivity. The leaders of the association felt insulted and resigned.

When I conducted my research, there was no active association in the neighbourhood. There were only a couple of locals who mediated between the residents of the neighbourhood and the Municipality of Efkarpiá. These people also assisted locals in dealing with a number of bureaucratic and legal issues and tried to exert influence on the community in favour of the political party they supported. However, trust in local politics was low. FSU Greeks felt themselves to be victims of local and national politics. They told me that politicians gathered them together in the period prior to the elections to make promises which they never fulfilled. During national elections the two big political parties would send to the neighbourhood notable party members who were usually of Pontic descent in an attempt influence their vote.

Efkarpiá was a small municipality of less than 7,000 people and FSU Greeks made up more than one third of its total population.<sup>127</sup> Familiarity between residents has remained very prominent in Efxinoupoli. Many of the residents knew each other before coming to the neighbourhood. Moreover, the experience

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<sup>126</sup> Efxinoupoli, being severed from the residential area of the Efkarpiá, could not be served by the existing social infrastructure of the municipality.

<sup>127</sup> In Efkarpiá, FSU Greeks are also concentrated in Filothei and Amfiethéa, both *afthéreta* neighbourhoods.

of constructing their houses and the self-organization that this process required, especially during the early years, has engendered a feeling of solidarity. But this solidarity has not materialized in the organization within the community of a strong interest group active in local politics. Mihail, a 35-year-old resident of Efxinoupoli told me ‘they [politicians] made promises to the people in Efxinoupoli: I will find you a job, I will put you there, I’ll do this, I’ll do that... and our own naïve people (τα ζώα) believed them...’.

After the fall of the Greek military junta, which held power from 1967 to 1974, up to the eruption of the Greek financial crisis in 2009, the Greek political system was highly polarized. The two major political parties, PASOK and New Democracy, had established their dominance by developing clientel relationships<sup>128</sup> with the electorate. My fieldwork provided evidence that to a certain degree this division seemed also to have permeated the FSU Greek community in Greece.

### **The housing loans, the social contribution, and the expansion of Nikopoli**

The issuing of the state housing loans (see chapter 4.2, pp. 87) changed the ways in which FSU Greeks accessed housing. It also influenced the development of Nikopoli. It brought a large number of FSU Greeks into the neighbourhood, which in that period expanded due to private developers who built there with the aim of catering for FSU Greeks’ housing needs. As a result of this expansion Efxinoupoli and old Nikopoli merged (see map 5.1.3, pp. 102 and appendix II map II, pp.249). FSU Greeks were positively in favour of the state housing loans, which they saw as the first substantial help they had received from the Greek State. Yet, in Nikopoli, several FSU Greeks were reticent about admitting that in our initial talks. Since the policy is controversial among native Greeks, my FSU Greek informants felt the need to defend themselves against stereotypes and distorted information. Evgenia’s account is illustrative.

Indeed we took loans but they did not give us the houses for free. This is something I have to fight over every day with my Greek friends. They say ‘you came here [to Greece] and the state gave you loans’. But they do not know the complete truth. The loan was only for 60,000 and you know well that you can’t purchase a house for such money. Most of Soviet

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<sup>128</sup> Political clientelism may be viewed as a more or less personalized affective and reciprocal relationship between actors, or sets of actors, commanding unequal resources and involving mutually beneficial transactions that have political ramifications beyond the immediate sphere of dyadic relationships (Lemarchand & Legg, 1972).

Greeks are drawn into debt [πνιγγμένοι στα δάνεια] to pay the bank, to pay the constructor. Moreover, it was not an interest-free loan as Greeks believe [...] the most positive thing was that there was no economic precondition to get it.

Several of my informants argued that the housing loans were in any case European Commission funds aimed to help them. They also argued that they functioned as a boost to the Greek economy through a multipliers effect. With such statements the FSU Greeks aimed to counter the widespread belief that FSU Greeks have greatly and unjustly benefited from affirmative action measures. Such comments were also frequently made to me by my native contacts in the neighbourhood. According to Nikos:

How is it possible that they should all have houses while Greeks working for thirty years are not able to build theirs? Are all those people lazy? Are all Greeks lazy? My nephew wanted to get a loan but could not ... they were telling him: if you were a 'repatriate' [παλινοοστήσας] you could get it. Isn't this racism? And the same goes with the jobs in the public sector. I had to put my house up for a mortgage to take a loan of 15,000 euro [...]. How can they [FSU Greeks] take low interest loans with no control?

The housing loans had indeed provided substantial help to those FSU Greeks who wished to acquire their own housing. Given the short period for which they had been in the country, as well as their financial positions, the majority wouldn't have been able to get loans from private banks without the special arrangement provided by the law. However, their attempts to acquire their own housing were far from trouble-free. Contrary to what the majority of native Greeks think, the interest rate was not fixed. At the time I conducted my fieldwork, it was over 7%, higher than what they would get if they applied for a private loan. An organization called the 'Pontian Association of Loan Receivers' was set up by Grigoriadis with the aim of reducing the variable interest rate of state loans back to the initial 2.8%. Many FSU Greeks are heavily indebted and the rising unemployment in the construction sector, where the majority is employed, has put them into serious financial problems at that time. Moreover the fixed amount of 60,000 euros was indeed small for the Greek housing market. FSU Greeks have developed several strategies to compensate for that, such as combining the funds of different applicants and repaying a part of the property to the contractor by working for them. In any case, the vast majority chose to buy houses in the areas with the lowest real estate prices, thus gravitating towards the western neighbourhoods of the city, particularly Nikopoli.

The reason why a large number of FSU Greeks clustered in Nikopoli relates to the oversupply of cheap and new apartments there. Those apartments were mostly built after the distribution of the housing loans, and were especially aimed at matching their housing needs and economic capacities. The reason why the big construction companies, in their turn, chose Nikopoli as the locus of their investment targeting FSU Greeks relates to the implementation of a city-planning tool called 'social contributor' (κοινωνικός συντελεστής) in the neighbourhood. This mechanism, which was approved by Stavroupoli municipality in 1988, when the area was included in the city plan, can only be applied to areas of urban expansion of cities.

The social contributor permits the increase of the floor area ratio from 0.8, which is typical for areas of urban expansion, to 2.0. Simply put, landowners can build five-storey instead of two-storey houses. In exchange, the municipality gets back pieces of land from the owners in order to install social amenities. It is on this basis that the choice of the implementation of the social contribution is made: the municipality accepts a much denser urban tissue in order to raise funds to accommodate central functions such as schools and playgrounds (Katsavounidou & Kourti 2008). The social contributor was applied in all non-built-up land within the city plan that belonged to the Municipality of Stavroupoli. However it was not applied to the adjacent area that belonged to the Municipality of Polihni, whose authorities disapproved of it. That led to a further fragmentation of the urban landscape of Nikopoli where the western part, which belonged to Stavroupoli, is built with substantially higher constructions than the eastern part belonging to Polihni.

The area was built through the exchange-in-kind mechanism. Concretely, land owners passed their plots to construction companies in exchange for a number of apartments from the housing blocks eventually built by them. The construction companies had also to return land or apartments to the municipality of Stavroupoli in line with the social contribution ruling. The increased building ratio still ensured very high profits for the constructors.

Construction had started in 1998 but the pace increased drastically in 2000 after the issuing of the loans (Katsavounidou & Kourti, 2006). The low real estate prices of Nikopoli made it an obvious choice for FSU Greeks.<sup>129</sup> A number of

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<sup>129</sup> It should be noted that the social contributor was implemented in other areas on the outskirts of Thessaloniki such as Nea Politeia and Ai Giannis. In those areas the demand by native Greeks was higher and thus prices were considerably elevated compared to Nikopoli. The seclusion of latter from the rest of the city, its proximity to the industrial area of Oreokastro, and possibly the concentration of FSU Greeks, made it a less attractive place for middle-class Greeks.

low- and middle-class native Greek families, mostly young couples and single men, also bought houses in Nikopoli. They acquired the bigger apartments on offer. Like FSU Greeks, they were also attracted by the opportunity to buy better quality housing for a substantially lower price. The newly built apartments include a number of amenities such as airing, natural light, central heating, and elevators, which similarly priced apartments in other areas of the city lack. (Katsavounidou & Kourti, 2008). However, the majority of the people who moved to the neighbourhood were FSU Greeks, a large number of whom were Turkish speaking. Information diffused through the community due to the presence of other FSU Greeks in Efxinoupoli. At the same time the constructors started building small (for middle-class Greek standards) apartments to match the FSU Greeks' economic potentials. The demand for these was great, resulting in frantic development; very soon Nikopoli merged with Efxinoupoli to the north. The area of Polihni was also built, albeit with lower constructions. It also attracted primarily FSU Greeks. Since the apartments in that area are more expensive it has probably concentrated the more well-off members of the community.

While Nikopoli is not a familiar place for the native residents of Thessaloniki, for the FSU Greeks it has acquired a central place in their mental maps. In their decisions as regards moving house or acquiring their own apartment, Nikopoli is now a serious option to consider. The majority of FSU Greeks in Thessaloniki have relatives and/or friends in the neighbourhood, while almost everybody's social network encompasses the neighbourhood. The presence of FSU Greeks in Nikopoli constitutes an extra pull for many other FSU Greeks to move there. At the same time it prevents others from doing the same.

A large part of my FSU Greek contacts living outside the neighbourhood – the majority of whom are of young age and have many social ties with native Greeks – represented Nikopoli negatively. This was for two reasons. Firstly, due to the pressure they expected would be exerted on them by the local FSU Greek community, and secondly in fear of stigmatization by the natives for living in a Russo-Pontic neighbourhood. They also told me that when FSU Greeks live together in neighbourhoods such as Nikopoli they tend to stay within a close social circle. In their view, this would prevent them coming into contact with native Greeks. They further claimed that this social isolation in the community breeds what they thought of as prejudiced views of native Greeks. In such discussions Nikopoli was again referred to as a ghetto. The presentation of the neighbourhood as a ghetto is, however, rejected by the FSU Greeks in Nikopoli. In the words of one of them:

It is not correct that they call Nikopoli a ghetto. We are not living in a fascist state, and neither have we fences around us, natives live here too.

## A Pontic neighbourhood?

The residents of old Nikopoli were very negative about the vast expansion of their neighbourhood. A member of the local association that once existed there told me he regretted they had not acted effectively to prevent the implementation of the social contributor. According to him, the law had been signed secretly, the night after the then mayor had bought land in Nikopoli – land which gained significant value after the implementation of the social contributor. Those residents who bought apartments before its expansion regretted their moving to and investing in Nikopoli. They told me that the neighbourhood had developed into something they had not foreseen and did not like.

The residents of old Nikopoli were also negative about the clustering of migrants. This was an opinion they shared with the native Greeks who had settled in the new part of the neighbourhood at the same time as or even after the majority of the local FSU Greek population. Taking into account the FSU Greek population of Efxinoupoli, native Greeks comprise a minority in Nikopoli, constituting less than 30% of the total population. In less than ten years Nikopoli emerged as the neighbourhood with the highest immigrant concentration in Thessaloniki.

The local government of Efkarpia had promoted a Pontic Greek identity for the area of Efxinoupoli, as is evident in the name given to the area and the Pontic monument built there. Nikopoli itself borrows its name from the city of Nikopolis in historic Pontos. The vast majority of the FSU Greeks and a large segment of the native Greek population in the neighbourhood are of Pontic origin. In fact, Nikopoli is one of the neighbourhoods in Thessaloniki with the highest concentrations of people originating from Pontos. Yet neither the sub-neighbourhood of Efxinoupoli nor Nikopoli as a whole are seen as ‘Pontic neighbourhoods’ by outsiders; nor are they perceived as *homogenís* immigrants neighbourhoods (*συνολικά ομογενών*). To those who are aware of the existence of the neighbourhood, Nikopoli is ‘the Russo-Pontic ghetto’, or simply an immigrant neighbourhood.

As mentioned earlier, people living in adjacent areas held negative images of the neighbourhood as a whole due to the presence of FSU Greeks there. FSU Greeks were thought of as different people, and their difference was explained in ethnic terms – i.e. ‘they are not like us, Greeks’. As will be described in the following chapters, similar views were also expressed by the native residents in the neighbourhood. How do such negative images of the FSU Greeks living in Nikopoli relate to experiences of living together in the neighbourhood? In

answering this question I will also give voice to the FSU Greeks and record how they experience their relationship with natives in and outside the neighbourhood. Do FSU Greeks have similar negative views of native Greeks as a collective category, and if so in what terms? Are the native external categorizations accepted by FSU Greeks and, if not, what are their self-identifications? What is the relative power of each group to categorize the other group in the neighbourhood and in general?

# ‘Soviet’ and Native Greek neighbours

## 6.1 Encounters in the neighbourhood

Until the 2000s the residential separation of FSU and native Greeks in Nikopoli was nearly absolute. Efxinoupoli was built by FSU Greeks approximately 600 metres to the north of old Nikopoli, and the two areas were physically separated by wasteland. In addition, they belonged to different municipalities, and thus people’s demands had to be addressed to different authorities. The physical and administrative fragmentation of the neighbourhood certainly did not facilitate interaction between the two communities.

Efxinoupoli and old Nikopoli were eventually joined during the early 2000s through the hasty development of the middle of Nikopoli. This part of the neighbourhood attracted mostly FSU Greeks, but also a considerable number of native Greeks. However, the majority of the natives rented or bought houses in the southern part of the neighbourhood, closer to old Nikopoli, so reproducing the north–south division. Native residents living in the lower parts of the neighbourhood, especially those in old Nikopoli, saw the upper part of Nikopoli as a different neighbourhood. Some of them also referred to the local FSU Greeks as ‘those living up there’ (*αυτοι εκει επάνω*).

The north–south division was also reflected in the distribution and spatial organization of several local institutions, notably the open market that takes place on Thursdays (see appendix II, map III, pp. 249). The northern part of the market hosted mostly FSU Greek vendors and the southern part mostly native Greek vendors. Moreover Nikopoli also has two churches. The oldest one, built

between Efxinoupoli and Nikopoli, hosts exclusively FSU Greek and other non-Greek immigrants from the FSU. Many of native residents of Nikopoli to whom spoke referred to this church as the 'Russian church'. The newer one is in the middle part of Nikopoli and attracts mostly – although not exclusively – native residents.

Nikopoli is almost entirely residential, without a main shopping street and with no bars. There are a restricted number of *tavérnas*,<sup>130</sup> a place with pick-up girls, and a few *kafeneía* and cafeterias, only one of which stays open until later at night. These establishments are scattered around the neighbourhood, lost amid the residential blocks. There are also a couple of small playgrounds and sports fields. Nikopoli has plenty of free space, most of it apparently waiting to be turned to some more permanent use. At the time of my research, residents used these undetermined spaces to park their vehicles. Some places look like junkyards because of the abandoned car wrecks. Except for a tiny plaza on the border of Efxinoupoli and new Nikopoli, which is home to the memorial to Pontic Hellenism, the neighbourhood yet does not boast any squares or parks. One place that was meant to be a park is currently a bus terminal.

The unused open spaces of Nikopoli are not particularly inviting of social interaction between residents. The lack of a neighbourhood centre and the unexploited open areas hamper social life in Nikopoli. Interaction has been further constrained by the diverging attitudes towards leisure and out-of-house activities. FSU Greeks make extensive use of the public space of the neighbourhood, while the natives prefer to frequent local cafeterias and *tavérnas*, or spend their leisure time outside the neighbourhood altogether.

### **Shacks and open space gatherings**

Immigrants, especially the elderly and middle-aged, gather in *pilotis*<sup>131</sup>, on streets and pavements just outside their private residences, or outside small shops, to play cards, socialize, drink, eat, and chat. Without permission from the local authorities, they also have built shacks from all kinds of material (wood, sheet iron, cardboard). These shacks are erected in proximity to their homes and also further afield, in the plentiful free space of the neighbourhood. They are found all over Nikopoli, mostly in the northern part where the majority of immigrants

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<sup>130</sup> A small and unimposing restaurant.

<sup>131</sup> The term *pilotis* is used in Greece to denote the space between the ground level supporting columns (*pilotis*) that raise a building. Building houses with *pilotis* is very common in Greece. The ground level space is used mostly for parking.

live. The shacks form meeting places and are also used to store the chairs and sofas that people use outside. Commonly, they are attached to buildings to provide shade and protect visitors from the sun during the summer.

These rather peculiar constructions bring together the elderly FSU Greeks, who spend much of their days there. During wintertime, on cold days, people stay inside them, while during the rest of the year they take the chairs and sofas outside. Men and women do not mix; the majority of shacks are for men only, although there is one such place for elderly women. I noticed only one shack frequented by younger FSU Greeks, a quasi bar at the north end of Efxinoupoli. Middle-aged FSU Greeks meet and socialize outside their houses, or in front of convenience stores (*ψιλικατζιδικια*), where they can purchase alcohol. Youngsters also make extensive use of the public space, meeting in the playgrounds and sports fields of the neighbourhood. People aged twenty to thirty are least visible in Nikopoli. Although some do meet in the open spaces, they are criticized for this by their peers. As Ivanko, a nineteen-year-old son of an FSU Greek mother and a Turkmen father, told me: 'My friends (*η παρέα μου*) go to parks and drink beers. They go there and drink one, two, three beers... I tell them: You assholes, what are you doing in the parks with the beers? Let's go to [a bar to] get some pussy.'

The FSU Greeks' extensive use of the open space of the neighbourhood as a place of recreation and socialization is not exclusive to Nikopoli. Spots where people meet up regularly are also to be found in other areas in the city with a large FSU Greek presence. During my second stay in Nikopoli, I paid several visits to the suburb of Peraia. On one of my first visits, I coincidentally met an FSU Greek I knew from Nikopoli. Since I was trying to find my way in the neighbourhood and wanted to meet people, I asked him if he knew a place where I could meet locals of FSU Greek background. According to him there were two places where FSU Greeks, mostly the elderly, gathered: one frequented by elderly women and the other by elderly men. Those meeting places were both in open spaces next to squares.

On a later visit, I was informed that the FSU Greeks in Peraia had also constructed an unauthorized 'leisure shack'. This, being made of brick, was a much more sturdy construction than those of Nikopoli. It was built next to a community house provided by the municipality to host the local FSU Greek associations. Yet at the time of my fieldtrips the authorities had demolished this shack. It was summer, and many middle-aged and elderly FSU Greeks were still playing cards by the ruins of their construction. Apparently, the FSU Greeks' use of public space in Peraia was quite similar to that in Nikopoli.

In Nikopoli the shacks were not permanent features either, and several had been demolished by the authorities, with new ones then constructed in different places in the neighbourhood. Some native residents saw them as eyesores and public nuisances. A man in his thirties, interviewed in the context of the GEITONIES project, objected:

I went to the Mayor and asked him to take the shacks down... he didn't... most probably for the votes, you know.... And then them [the FSU Greeks]... they do not adapt, what's all this with the shacks? Where do they think they are? What are those shacks?

Attached to the house where I lived during my second stay in the neighbourhood, there was what some natives called the 'shack of the grannies' (*η παράγκα με τις γιαγιάδες*). This was a shack used by elderly FSU Greek women. In the summer of 2009 it was demolished. According to one of those who frequented it, the reason why it was demolished was related to the youngsters who gathered there late at night. After complaints by a neighbour, they had to demolish it to prevent those youngsters from going there and making noise. But a young native woman who lived 200 metres from the shack offered a very different account.

-Do you know what happened with the shack of the grannies? My cousin lives in the building opposite to it. He had several of his neighbours sign a letter about the shack and he threatened them that he would make an official complaint [...]

-Why did they make the complaint?

-They had problems... the grannies were peeing in the *pilotis*... you passed by and you saw the grannies with their panties down.

I never witnessed such a sight during my seven months' stay in the house. I surmise that the incident as described by the younger woman was distorted and exaggerated through gossip. Gossiping about the behaviour of their FSU Greek neighbours is a common activity among several natives. In any case, if the real goal of the neighbours had been to expel the grannies rather than the youngsters from their hang-out, they failed. Even without the shack the location remained their meeting place. When I visited the neighbourhood a year later a newly built shack for the grannies was proudly standing in the same place.

For the native residents, the shacks exacerbate the already degraded built environment of the neighbourhood and are an indication of what they perceive as the refusal of their FSU Greek neighbours to adapt. Stamatis, who owned a business in the neighbourhood, claimed that it is FSU Greeks' choice not to

mingle with others and said that they themselves wished to stay in their own community. In his words:

That's also the reason why they came to live in this neighbourhood all together. The grannies will go to those shacks they built, the grandpas will go there to play cards, others will gather in groups out in the streets to drink beer [μπιριτσά]. It is their choice to stay separate from others.

The FSU Greeks themselves provide a different account of their frequent gatherings in open spaces; these are not aimed at avoiding native Greeks, but rather constitute a much more economical way of socializing and spending their free time, avoiding the premiums of cafeterias, bars, and other commercial entertainment spaces. In their turn, the FSU Greeks are critical of the native Greeks' habits of frequently going out and spending a lot of money on leisure activities. According to two FSU Greeks in their thirties who live in Efxinoupoli:

-They [referring to native Greeks in general and not the locals in Nikopoli] are asking us how did you built a house? How? Through frugality... we are not out every night

-Greeks want to go out every night, eat outside, and take their wife for a drink. We are economical.

- [...] In our free time we stay in our courtyard or outside this convenience store over there [στο μαγαζάκι] [he points at the store], we also entertain ourselves at weddings, when they happen.

-The convenience store sells a half litre of beer for 1.2 euros; if you go downtown you will pay 5 euros for a 0.33 litre beer.

Traditionally, using the open space for socialization was not uncommon for native Greeks too. Due to the general inadequacy of public recreational facilities and green spaces in Greek cities, during warm days much of children and adults' life took place on streets and pavements.<sup>132</sup> However, as leisure culture for native Greeks moves increasingly towards consumption and as entertainment options are more and more oriented towards the private sphere, the public space is gradually being 'taken over' and used by immigrants (Hatziprokopiou, 2005: 127). Public space is particularly important in migrants' life in Thessaloniki, not solely as place for socialization. It is also a place where they meet to exchange information about practical matters, and where they work or look for a job. A considerable number of migrants, notably FSU Greeks, work as street vendors

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<sup>132</sup> Women used the public space outside their homes more extensively than men. The *kafénio*, literally coffee house, had always had a central role in men's lives.

mostly in open markets, while selling their labour in 'job-finding piazzas' was a common practice for Balkan migrants.

Several central squares of the city are used primarily by immigrants. The dominance of certain groups is attested by the names migrants ascribe to these places. For them, the square of Makedonomahon is the 'Albanians' square' and the Dikastiriou square the 'Russians' square' (Vizoviti, 2006). The latter square has served as a spatial reference for FSU Greeks from their early days of migration. Nikolas, an FSU Greek in his late twenties, describes it as follows:

From our very first days here we got to know that this [Dikastiriou square] is the place where our people gather. It was not only a place to meet people and have a chat but also a place to solve basic everyday needs. My father is a doctor. People would go there and ask information how and where to reach him. And they could easily find him, you know... there would always be someone around who knew his phone number or his address.

FSU Greeks' extensive use of public space is thus generally similar to other migrants in the city; however, the construction of leisure shacks is exclusive to them. It is very probable that the construction of such shacks by immigrants of non-Greek descent would have been much less tolerated by the authorities. And there is one more difference between FSU Greek and Albanian and other Balkan migrants: the latter go out more frequently, especially if one takes into account their limited budget. Moreover, they tend to frequent the same leisure places as Greeks (Hatziprokopiou, 2006).

Hatziprokopiou hypothesizes that this could relate to common cultural habits. Since contemporary popular culture in the neighbouring countries (commercial music and dance, club-culture, etc., but also traditions and cuisine) does not differ much from that of Greece, Balkan migrants are largely incorporated within the dominant leisure culture. They gradually abandon the public space as their material situation improves and consumerist values prevail among their communities (ibid.). As will be described in what follows, their tendency to use the same leisure places as Greeks may also relate to a concern on their part not to appear different from Greeks. This sort of concern appeared less widespread among FSU Greeks.

### The *kafenío* and *tavérna* vs drinking in the street

During my first stay in the neighbourhood in 2007, there were two cafeterias and two restaurants owned by FSU Greeks, all of which had a very limited clientele. In 2009, only one of the cafeterias was still open. There were also three *tavérnas*, two of which closed down during my second stay in the neighbourhood, and four *kafenía*.<sup>133</sup> The *kafenía* and *tavérnes* are owned by native residents from old Nikopoli. They attracted almost exclusively local native Greeks, though some Albanian immigrants also visited them. Those places do serve cheap alcohol; not as cheap as at the convenience stores, but at a much lower price than the downtown bars and cafeterias. Nevertheless, they were not popular among FSU Greeks residents.

The residential segregation within the neighbourhood might have played a role in their lack of popularity; the *kafenía* and *tavérnes* are all situated in old Nikopoli, outside the area where the majority of FSU Greeks live. However, different perceptions about leisure activities also seem to have contributed to the FSU Greek absence from the old Nikopoli's *kafeneía* and *tavérnes*. The limited number of commercial entertainment spaces such as cafes and bars in the former Soviet Union meant that people pursued other social activities in their free time such as social visits, taking walks, going to parks, and watching theatre and ballet (Moskoff, 1984; Zuzanek, 1980). In addition, according to my informants' accounts, the design and organization of public space in the former Soviet Union was done in ways that facilitated everyday encounters of neighbours in the immediate surrounding of peoples' houses. This may also have contributed to a culture of socializing in public spaces.

Although the open spaces of Nikopoli were not particularly inviting for such use, people were by no means deterred from gathering and meeting there. Conversely, they made rather limited use of the few commercial entertainment spaces of the neighbourhood. They told me that they saw no reason why one should go to a *tavérna* or *kafeneía* to drink a beer as opposed to outside a convenience store.

Many native Greeks criticized the FSU Greeks' extensive use of public space, and especially their habit of drinking in the street. They judged this practice to be indicative of alcohol problems rather than a form of socializing, and related it to stereotypes of people from Russia as being heavy drinkers. Drinking is a culturally defined action and, as such, different drinking habits are regarded as acceptable by native and FSU Greeks. The latter have looser social constraints on drinking alcohol; they are more tolerant towards drunkenness, and drinking in the street is

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<sup>133</sup> One more place with pick-up girls had opened during my second field period.

more widely practised (Connor, 1971; Partanen, 1987).<sup>134</sup> For native Greeks, appearing drunk is traditionally perceived as a sign of personal weakness. Drinking large amounts of alcohol is accepted, even praised for men, but only in so far as the drinker is able to persuade others that his actions remain unaffected. Intoxication without self-control is perceived a loss of personal dignity and loss of motor control in public is strongly disapproved. Drunkenness is perceived as threatening the values of self-control, personal and family honour, sociability, privacy and secrecy, which are represented as important values in Greece (Allen 1985, 470).

In the public perception, drinking on the streets is characteristic of marginal social groups, and sustained drinking through the day is perceived as the mark of a drink problem – especially if the person in question is drinking strong alcohol. For native Greeks, strong alcohol or drinking in large amounts should be accompanied with food, the *meze*. Drinking *xerosfiri* (without eating – literally ‘dry-hammer’) is considered harmful. It is also considered unwise, especially when practiced by grown-ups ‘who should know better’.<sup>135</sup> In the eyes of their native neighbours, FSU Greeks staying out on the streets for long hours to drink beers, chat, and have fun is considered improper behaviour; not a social practice, but rather an indication of the alcoholism allegedly widespread within the FSU Greek community.<sup>136</sup>

According to Androklis, the ‘Russo-Pontics’ who arrived in the 1990s are different from those who had come in the mid 1960s and settled in the *réma*. In his view the latter ‘neither had problems with alcohol nor spent hours crouching in the streets [βαθύ κάθισμα] ... they were gentlemen [χύρτοι]’. Many native Greeks in Nikopoli felt that they were separated from their FSU Greek neighbours by a

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<sup>134</sup> Drinking alcohol is unofficially associated with a great multiplicity of social occasions in Russian culture (Connor 1997). In fact, sociability is to a large extent intertwined with drinking. Alcohol is also used as a direct refuge from the tension of painful situations. Vodka is the primary drink. In the Caucasus (especially Georgia) people have traditionally followed different drinking patterns, which resemble to a certain extent to those of the Mediterranean, concentrating on wines and cognacs. However the dispersion of Russian drinking culture has been substantial.

<sup>135</sup> Although in most bars and entertainment spaces, alcohol is served together with a snack, in contemporary Greek club culture it is the norm to drink strong alcoholic drinks, particularly shots, without food. Although disapproved as a general practice, *xerosfiri* drinking is tolerated in this particular context and it is widely practiced among younger native Greeks.

<sup>136</sup> There are no data available and I could not have observed whether alcohol dependency is more common among the FSU Greeks in Nikopoli. Taking into account the extent of alcoholism in the former Soviet Union one might hypothesize that this is the case. However, alcoholism was not a visible problem in the neighbourhood. Concerning my respondents’ accounts, only a marginal number of my FSU Greek informants reported it as problem. Many more people referred to the issue of drug abuse. As described in the following lines, it was this issue that was represented as a major problem by the FSU Greek community, especially affecting the youth.

cultural gap. In their view it was this gap, and what they claimed to be the FSU Greeks' sullen attitude and lack of manners, that prevented their intermingling. According to Panagiotis, a native regular customer of one of the *kafenía*:

They [FSU Greeks] do not come here at all. There are only a couple of them who do. The rest do not... They do not go out [δε βγαίνουν απο το σπίτι τους αυτοι να κάτσουν κάπου] they stay out on the streets or in *pilotis*. They also build their own places with metal sheets and grannies and grandpas go there to chat and play... they have different habits [άλλα χούγια]. They do not go out so as not to pay. They also drink a lot, what to do with them? ... we do not drink much here. They can't have enough [δε χορταίνουν] they put their drink in the water glasses... how can we keep company with them? [πως να κάνουμε παρέα]?

The *kafenio* has long been an important institution of social life in the Greek village (Papataxiarchis, 1992). Male villagers use it intensively to meet friends, hear news, play games, and drink. Through this interaction, the *kafenio* generates a cohesive system able to exert strong control over its members. In fact, the control also extends beyond the male adults and beyond the *kafenio* itself. In order to preserve his status in the *kafenio*, the male adult expects his family to behave in an approved manner. The *kafenio* group even exerts control over the formal structure of the village by influencing decisions made by formal organizations, particularly the village government (Photiadis, 1965).

In the city the *kafenio* also forms a central place in the social lives of middle-aged working-class Greek men, and as such it is an institution of social control at the neighbourhood level. The function of local *tavérnas* is similar. Yet, as institutions, the city *kafenía* and *tavérnas* are not as strong as those in the village, nor do they represent closed social systems: a more restricted segment of the local male population frequents them, and people from other neighbourhoods do visit them as well. This, indeed, is also the case in Nikopoli. Nevertheless, they remain an important institution for discussion of issues that concern the neighbourhood – as well as for spreading gossip, and producing ideas about neighbours and the neighbourhood. Thus, the *kafenía* and *tavérnas* of Nikopoli do function as an important public forum concerning the neighbourhood, but it is one in which FSU Greeks are not represented.

*Kafenía* and *tavérnas* are not closed spaces. They can bring together people of different backgrounds. Yet they have their internal control mechanisms. Guests who differ in class or ethnic terms from the regular patrons will be thoroughly sized up before they are accepted as part of the group. The Albanian residents

who visited two of the local *kafenía* seem to have gained the patrons' trust. They go there after work, drink a beer or two, chat and make jokes about politics with locals, discuss the neighbourhood news, and in the evenings watch the Greek football league, place bets, or play cards. They keep a low profile and show a willingness to fit in. When I asked them about their Albanian neighbours, *kafenía* patrons painted a favourable image. They represented the Albanians in Nikopoli as good, decent guys, while in certain cases contrasting them to the local FSU Greeks.<sup>137</sup>

Yannis, the owner of a *kafenío*<sup>138</sup> situated at the point where the old and new parts of Nikopoli meet, went further, stating that FSU Greek customers are not even welcome in his shop. Yannis is of Pontic origin and very proud of this. He argued that the FSU Greeks who came after 1990 are not real Greeks, claiming that they do not speak a word of Pontic and that they are all rogues who had paid bribes in Moscow to get a Greek passport. According to his estimations a maximum of 20% of them are Pontic; the rest, he claimed, came with forged passports or are partners of mixed marriages. In response to my question as to whether he had any relationships with the FSU Greeks in the neighbourhood he replied:

-What to do with them?... they have a different culture, ok a few of them do feel like Greeks... but why would I want a Georgian? To come here and ruin my business? [να μου χαλάσει το μαγαζί]. To flash his pistols? [να μου βγάλει τα πιστόλια να πούμε] You can recognize the real Greek, that of Pontic origin, by his *philotimo*.<sup>139</sup> He will come and seek for his compatriots.

-Do then real Greeks come to your *kafenío*?

-Yes, they do.

-From this area or from other neighbourhoods?

-From this area.

According to Yannis, 'real FSU Greeks' would seek out the native Greeks. This was the case for the few who had visited his *kafenío*, and who had thereby also proved their Greekness. The seclusion of the rest in his view corroborated his claim that the vast majority of the FSU Greeks in Nikopoli are not real Greeks.

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<sup>137</sup> That did not necessarily entail a positive idea of 'the Albanian immigrant' in general (see Pratsinakis forthcoming).

<sup>138</sup> Not one where Albanians residents of Nikopoli visited.

<sup>139</sup> This is a complex and rather flexible cultural concept denoting socially appropriate behaviour, self-restraint, and a willingness to subordinate selfish to collective interests (Campbell, 1964; Triandis, 1972).

Yannis also represented them as dangerous. His words are in accord with what is possibly the most widely held stereotype of FSU Greeks: that they are violent and aggressive. This idea makes many natives fear that FSU Greeks will break into a fight for any minor reason. Michalis, a big man, and the owner of a *tavérna* in Nikopoli, described an incident to me that possibly illustrates what other shop owners may mean by the phrase ‘to have FSU Greeks ruin their shop’.

-Once, three Tsalkalides [FSU Greeks originating in Tsalka] came to the *tavérna* (*sto magazi*). They told me: ‘vodka’. I put a bottle of vodka on their table. Then they told me ‘bring us another bottle of vodka and something to eat’. When the time came for them to pay they told me it was too expensive and that I had not warned them how much it would cost. I replied to them: ‘In which *tavérna* do they say to the clients when they order how much the things they order cost? If I had told you, you might have got insulted. You might have thought I was implying that you would not be able to pay.’ I then told them ‘I do not know Turkish, you do not know Pontic, my Greek is too dirty for the occasion, so give me the seventy euros before I call the police’.

-Did they pay you?

-Yes, they paid me. I have two brothers who are policemen. You know, they say things like this to the other shop owners and they tell them: ‘Do not pay but leave and do not ever come back here’. They do not want them to ruin their business [να τους χαλάσουν το μαγαζί].

Michalis is also a native of Pontic descent, but unlike Yannis he was much more positive about local FSU Greeks. He told me that it makes sense that FSU Greeks do not go out so often, since they cannot afford to. He also claimed that, like all Pontics, FSU Greeks are good people. Michalis is married to a Romanian woman and is generally more positive towards immigrants. He also has several migrant acquaintances, both Albanian and FSU Greeks, some of whom live in the neighbourhood. These he met mostly through his second occupation: he also works in construction, as do many FSU Greek and Albanian immigrants.

Michalis described the above incident as an exceptional case. However, he seemed to imply that his FSU Greek customers had tried to escape paying him by intimidating him, a strategy that according to him they apply to others as well. He implied that a fight had been looming, which would have given his *tavérna* a bad reputation. His actual description, however, provides no evidence that his Tsalkalides clients tried to threaten him.

## Perceived markers of distinction

Stathis, a native Greek man in his late forties who had moved to the neighbourhood in the early 1990s – just before the area began to expand – was the first native resident of Nikopoli to whom I spoke. He worked in one of the municipalities to which Nikopoli belongs, and his professional relationship with the neighbourhood made him a valuable entry point as well as a key informant. Stathis was negative about his FSU Greek neighbours. When I explained the set-up of my research to him, he introduced his neighbours in the following words:

Today their presence is obvious in Nikopoli. One can see them [βαθὴ κάθισμα], they shout a lot and generally refuse to comply with the common rules of public quietness and cleanness. They can also be spotted from their language, which does not bother me and should not concern me since it is their matter, as well as from the banners in their shops... also from the flags they fail to hang up for national celebrations, and the satellite discs they have in their houses to watch foreign channels which in my opinion is a waste of money [...] also they drink a lot, more than a lot.

To be visible is to be different in the eyes of others. Stathis described what he saw as ‘the difference’ of FSU Greeks in a negative manner. Similarly to many other natives, he also appealed to this as evidence in support of his conviction that the majority of the FSU Greeks in the neighbourhood are in fact not Greeks at all. The issue of language was central in such arguments.

The dispersion of the Greek diaspora in the former Soviet Union, its lack of any institutional organization, and the importance of the Russian language as a vehicle for social mobility contributed to the gradual loss of the mother tongue of many FSU Greeks (see Chapter 3, pp. 59). Russian gradually prevailed as the dominant language of the Greek diaspora. Excluding the political refugees and the Pontic speakers – mostly, though not exclusively, older generations – the remaining FSU Greek migrants were at best minimally acquainted with the Greek language.

At the same time, the FSU Greek migrant population is characterized by exceptional multilingual diversity. This is not restricted to the initial internal linguistic diversity of the FSU Greek Diaspora (see chapter 3.2 pp. 50-51) and the dominance of the Russian language. After years of coexistence with local majority populations in various FSU republics, FSU Greeks learned other languages such as Armenian, Georgian, Azeri, Kazaks, Ukrainian, etc. Mixed marriages as well as close interethnic friendships at an early age played an important role in the interchange of linguistic skills. According to my field experience the ability to

communicate in three different languages is the norm within the FSU Greek migrant community. Many of my informants spoke more than four languages. Boris, for instance, could speak seven. A brief outline of his biography illustrates how this became possible.

Boris was born in Georgia to a Pontic Greek father and a Georgian mother. When he was seven years old his family migrated to Armenia to the village from where his father originated. In the village there were several Azeri families, and some of his best friends were Azeri. Boris was sent to serve in the Soviet Army in Ukraine. After he completed his military obligations, he migrated together with his siblings and his mother to a village outside Tbilisi because of a family conflict. There he married a Georgian woman. He later migrated to Rustavi, Georgia for work. In 1990, when the economic situation in Georgia became critical, he migrated together with his family to Greece.

Excepting his mother tongues, Pontic Greek and Georgian, Boris learned Russian, the lingua franca in the former Soviet Union. He was also taught Armenian at school and he learned Azeri through his friends. Due to his love for Turkish music he also learned Turkish, and claimed he could speak and understand it. Boris learned Modern Greek in Greece, where he reported using five languages on a regular basis.

In Greece it could be that I speak five different languages in one day, for example I speak Armenian with my father's brothers, Pontic with my siblings, Russian with my colleagues, Georgian... Thessaloniki has so many Georgians and Greeks... well I now speak Greek with you....

According to data collected via the GEITONIES survey, 45% of the FSU Greeks in Nikopoli speak three languages at home, something which is slightly more common than speaking two languages (43%). Almost all speak Russian (90.3%) and the majority speak Greek (74.2) too. Approximately one in three speaks either Pontic Greek or Turkish, while a substantially smaller number of respondents reported speaking Armenian (9.7%) and Georgian (6.5%).

Speaking Turkish or Pontic usually relates to the presence of an elderly person in the household. Conversely, speaking Greek often relates to second-generation members. Although the Greek-born FSU Greeks understand Russian – in some cases Pontic Greek and Turkish too – they can seldom speak any of those three languages fluently. They may be exposed to (some of) those languages on a daily basis, but the majority of parents choose to speak to them in Greek.

The same holds true in public spaces. Even when FSU Greek adults are speaking to each other in Russian they will address their children in Greek. However, in discussions solely among adults the dominance of the Russian language in the public space is absolute. Even in Greece, Russian continues to serve as the lingua franca of the FSU Greek community. Although the vast majority of FSU Greeks do speak Modern Greek (with the exception of a few of the elderly), their Russian language skills are usually more developed than their Greek. For the majority, Russian is their first language and was the language of their education. Pontic Greek, Turkish, Georgian, and Armenian are an option only in closed family or village groups. When groups of people come together who vary in age, origin, and educational background, they can usually only communicate in Russian or Greek. In most cases they prefer the former.

Interestingly, according to my observations, Turkish is the second most widely spoken language after Russian in the public spaces of Nikopoli. This is despite the fact that at home it is spoken as frequently as Pontic, according to the GEITONIES data. Possibly my observations could contain a certain bias due to the lesser amount of time I spend in the sub-neighbourhood Efxinoupoli. There, Pontic speakers are overrepresented and possibly Pontic Greek is more widely spoken. However, since Efxinoupoli is characterized by an absolute lack of public and private entertainment spaces, native residents hardly ever go there. Their ideas regarding the language of their FSU Greek neighbours are also shaped by their encounters in new Nikopoli, where they hear FSU Greeks speak Turkish.

Listening to FSU Greeks speaking Russian and other non-Greek languages makes native residents doubt their Greekness. Their mistrust is further fed by the presence of Russian newspapers in local convenience stores and kiosks (*περίπτερα*), and Cyrillic characters on banners and in announcements in local shops. The number of latter should not be overstated, since they concern a very restricted number of businesses. It is only during Christmas and Easter when written Russian can be seen all over the neighbourhood. At these times, Nikopoli is covered with posters advertising commercial music performances and other festivities for the FSU Greek community. Another characteristic of the neighbourhood that relates to the presence of the FSU Greeks is the satellite discs on the balconies of apartments and the rooftops of houses.

The vast majority of FSU Greek residents in Nikopoli prefer to watch Russian rather than Greek television. During our conversations, they casually attributed this preference to the higher quality of Russian television. By 'higher quality', younger FSU Greeks usually meant that there was more choice of programmes, a greater presence of big international film and pop stars, and that new films were quicker to appear after their release. A more practical reason for their preference

concerned the difficulty many FSU Greeks found in following the subtitles on Greek television, especially since they are used to dubbed Russian programmes. Some of my informants further mentioned that they understand Russian humour better, and others that they watch Russian television for certain programmes that they follow regularly, such as pro-wrestling, and theatrical and student contests. In our discussions, many of my informants referred to things they had seen or heard on Russian television. The majority followed the news of both countries. Nikopoli is one of the few places in Greece where you can go to the kiosk to buy cigarettes and, while chatting with the shop keeper, be informed about the weather in Siberia.

Concerning Stathis's claim that FSU Greeks do not display the national flag on national celebration days, I wanted to see whether that was indeed the case, and if so whether this had symbolic importance. While it is possible that relatively fewer families had the Greek flag displayed in Nikopoli on national celebration days compared to most of Thessaloniki's neighbourhoods, in general my observations did not confirm Stathis's claim. I did not know precisely where native and FSU Greeks lived, but the flags far exceeded the number of native residents. Moreover, in Efxinoupoli, where only FSU Greeks live, a considerable number of households had their flags on display. A rather general conclusion that I draw is that FSU Greeks did not systematically refrain from exhibiting the flag, but that they were also not particularly eager to prove their Greekness through this custom.<sup>140</sup>

### **Difference as a privilege of the similar**

Intercultural communication presupposes mutual openness and understanding; rarely do these preconditions apply in immigrant-native relations. As argued in chapter one, immigrant-native relations are embedded in a power configuration whereby immigrants are subordinate categories whose 'difference' is

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<sup>140</sup> Other native informants did not raise the issue of the flag. It was not something that much concerned them. In contrast to the vast majority of my native informants who were approached in much more informal circumstances and who usually did not exactly understand the purpose of my study, Stathis, who had a university education, attempted to provide an 'objective overview' of what is happening in Nikopoli. He was also cautious about making statements that could be perceived as prejudiced or offending. For this reason, he underlined that the issue of 'their language' was not of concern to him. By contrast, most of my other informants put more emphasis on this matter. However, being convinced that they did not feel Greek, Stathis attempted to provide an objective ground to his argument. It is in that context that he brought up the issue of the flags. He also claimed that during football games between Greece and Georgia, FSU Greeks supported the Georgian team. I find this improbable since, according to my fieldwork experience, a very small minority of the FSU Greek population is pro-Georgian.

problematized and devalued. Immigrants are expected to comply with the native rules of conduct. Their behaviour is judged by the degree of their compliance to the native norms, rather than on their willingness to share their worldview and habits with the natives. Refusal to conform is perceived as provocative behaviour by the native group and as proof of the supposed threatening nature of the immigrant.

Immigrants settle in their destination county bringing with them their history, traditions, ways of living, feeling, acting, and thinking, as well as their language and all the other social, political, and mental structures of their previous society (Sayad, 2004). Renouncing their way of life entails a high personal cost; immigrants will attempt to reconstruct their lives according to their own norms and values to the degree their resources allow. This attempt does not necessarily indicate a rejection of the native society's values, but is simply the outcome of them trying to act as usual. Given that cultural change is an essential part of the immigrant's life, though, they are attempting something which is never entirely possible (Waldinger, 2003).

Resisting a complete change in their way of life is partly what FSU Greeks are doing in Nikopoli. Drinking beers on the street with friends, watching Russian television, speaking in Russian, and building leisure shacks, are not meant to be public statements but are practices aimed at rebuilding the past in the present. Yet, in the eyes of several native residents in Nikopoli, this is provocative and disrespectful behaviour and is evidence of their false Greek descent. A comparison between native residents' views of the local FSU Greeks and the local Albanians is illuminating of their expectations of them.

Most of my native informants who had experiences of interaction with both Albanians and FSU Greek immigrants in Nikopoli favoured the former, whom they described as peaceful, hard-working, and 'causing no problems' in the neighbourhood. I have already referred to the views of the natives in the *kafenio* in old Nikopoli. Similar views were expressed by some native residents with reference to parents' attitudes. For instance, Roula told me:

Russo-Pontic boys speak Russian at home and when they come to school they have difficulties. It is natural as the children have no help from their parents. They also use bad language. Those issues depend on the environment in which you are raised [...] . On the contrary I have a close Greek friend who I visit regularly. He has an Albanian friend. I have an excellent opinion about her as a mother. She tries to provide for her children whatever they need. They are a very good family and nice people; you can drink your coffee with them and have a nice time.

When one takes into account that undocumented Albanian migration was framed in the media and in policy discourses as a threat, as well as the fact that 'the Albanian' has emerged nationally as a heavily stigmatized category, the contrast in natives' perceptions of their FSU Greek and Albanian neighbours appears paradoxical. This paradox can be solved once one considers the behaviour of the two groups in Nikopoli. The Albanian immigrants in Nikopoli appeared willing to adopt social behaviours better accepted by natives. Keeping a low profile and developing personal relations with some of the natives, they managed to build a favourable image for their group at the neighbourhood level despite the generally prejudiced views of native Greeks about their ethnicity. Their behaviour in Nikopoli<sup>141</sup> was in line with their attitude as generally observed in Greece (Pratsinakis, 2005). Albanians, being a severely stigmatized category with a precarious legal status, had no option but try to fit in order to strive for inclusion (Pratsinakis, 2005).

The native residents in Nikopoli did not judge their better relations with Albanians as being an outcome of cultural proximity, nor did they express appreciation of Albanian immigrants' cultural traits. What they appreciated was the Albanians' willingness to fit in, in contrast to what they perceived as the disrespectful behaviour of the FSU Greeks. The difference between the FSU Greeks and the Albanians in Nikopoli thus lay in the willingness of the latter to adopt social behaviours at the neighbourhood level that were better accepted by the natives. This relates directly to the symbolic capacity of each group to lead a life according to what they themselves think is best for them.

One day during my first stay in Nikopoli I was having lunch and chatting at a *kafenio* in old Nikopoli, when a group of three Albanians came in. The Albanians joined an older man who was sitting alone, and they started having a casual and friendly talk. Apparently they were working for him. They were renovating his house. One of the immigrants mentioned that his mother-in-law would be visiting next week. He mentioned that she was single. Then his friends

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<sup>141</sup> The ethnographic research by Andrikopoulos (2013) in a downtown neighbourhood of Thessaloniki where Albanians are more numerous than FSU Greeks provides similar evidence to that from Nikopoli. Similar comparisons between Albanians and FSU Greeks were also drawn by some natives in Peraia. The relationship between native and FSU Greeks appeared less polarized there than in Nikopoli and in the neighbourhood where Andrikopoulos did his research. However, the views of most natives who drew comparisons between the behaviour of their FSU Greeks and their Albanian neighbours were again more negative about the former. As a respondent claimed: 'Those from Russia came here to impose themselves, they make no effort to change, they do not try at all, they speak Russian and they act like it is their country... the Albanians are more friendly.'

started teasing the old man, saying that he should come over to meet her and maybe, who knows, he could get lucky and develop a relationship with her. They were giving him hints on how to keep her in Greece.

All of the sudden the old man became very serious. He said that there was no way this would happen, because she is Albanian. He said ‘One should never get involved with an Albanian woman’ (είναι να μην μπλέξεις με Αλβανίδα). The others seemed rather surprised and asked him why he said that. He replied, ‘Albanians are not trustworthy people’, and added that although he did not know that from personal experience he had heard a lot about ‘the Albanians’. The immigrants, again surprised, reminded him that they are Albanians too. One of them added ‘what does it mean what I have heard...? do you know what I have heard? I should better not say.’ Very intimately, the old man reached for the shoulder of one of them and told them, ‘I really have no problem with you all, you are very good guys [πολύ καλά παιδιά] ... you know what people say: “It is better to lose your eye than your good name [καλύτερα να σου βγει το μάτι παρά το όνομα]”’. One of the Albanians continued complaining but his friend next to him advised him to stop; ‘It is ok, don’t say too much’, he told him.

The above incident provides evidence that the positive opinion endorsed by some of the native residents about their Albanian neighbours did not necessarily entail the acceptance of those people as Albanians, nor any change in their ideas about Albanians in general. It is also an illustration of the pervasiveness of the stigma of ‘the Albanian immigrant’ and the difficulty which Albanian immigrants find in coping with this in everyday life.

In one of the focus groups I organized with high-school students (the group of 16-year-olds), the issue of the supposed criminality in Nikopoli monopolized the discussion. The focus group took place in the classroom of the high school (Λύκειο), which is situated outside the neighbourhood in Stavroupoli. Only some of the students were from Nikopoli. An FSU Greek student, a resident of Nikopoli, claimed that people’s perceptions of Nikopoli as a dangerous place were false. She said, though, that it used to be dangerous when Albanians had lived there. Luan, one of the two Albanian students in the class, expressed doubts that the presence of the Albanians could have been the reason for the criminality of Nikopoli.

Interestingly his comment triggered a change in the discussion, which became very heated. The students started talking about Albanian migration to Greece and its supposed negative contribution to criminality. Luan tried in vain to convince the other students that the whole issue of Albanian criminality was overblown. At

one point, he became upset, and said forcefully that Greek television and radio only mentions the nationality of a criminal where he or she is Albanian. The other Albanian student, who had not spoken up to that point but was equally upset, now intervened, telling him: 'Luan don't you know why they do that? Don't you know? So then stop... do not discuss it anymore'. Challenging natives over their ideas about Albanians was very difficult for the Albanian immigrants. Later, the FSU Greek student who had brought up the issue denounced Luan to me. She told me 'We really had a nice discussion. It is a pity that some people have to take things personal and ruin the discussion'.

Unlike Luan, most Albanian immigrants preferred to downplay accusations about Albanian immigrants, claiming that in every group there are good and bad people. As I have argued elsewhere (2005; forthcoming), due to this stigma, Albanian immigrants do not have much room to present themselves in a way that is congruent with their own self-conception. During their first and extremely precarious years in Greece, Albanian immigrants follow strategies of dissimulation to avoid discrimination and to escape the heavy burden posed by their stigmatization in their interaction with Greeks. Conscious of the significance attributed to ethnic descent by Greeks as well as the privileged position of ethnic Greek immigrants, their tactic involved a certain blurring of the ethnic boundary between Greek and Albanian identity. A widespread strategy was that of name-changing. Albanians with a Greek name who also spoke Greek could pass as Albanians of Greek origin. Where such passing-off as Greek was not actively attempted, hiding vital elements of their identity such as religion was also a tactic used to avoid mistreatment, especially for Muslims (Pratsinakis, 2005).

After regularizing their residency and substantially improving their material conditions in Greece, Albanian immigrants renegotiate their social position (Pratsinakis 2005). Yet at the time of my research their attempts to seek social inclusion were still being made through individual strategies aiming at blurring the boundary that separated them from Greeks (Pratsinakis, forthcoming). Their effort to negate the stigma attached to the Albanian migrant turned on their claim to a common way of life and cultural similarity with Greeks.<sup>142</sup> In some cases this even involved distancing themselves from their own ethnicity. For instance, in her research among second-generation Albanians, Tentokali (2010) found that many make a distinction between themselves, as people whose

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<sup>142</sup> The specific nature of Albanian migration is important in explaining the high assimilation aspirations with which Albanians began their migration project (E Pratsinakis, forthcoming). However, their persisting inability to present themselves in ways congruent to their own self-conception, twenty years after the beginning of immigration process, points to the pervasiveness of the stigma.

upbringing took place in Greece, and those who came to Greece at a later age. They claim the latter carry 'the Albanian mentality', which is seen as backwards, conservative, and repressive (Tentokalli, 2010).

On their part FSU Greeks did not hide the Russian influence in their upbringing, nor were they willing to change their habits where these appeared foreign to native Greeks. They saw no reason to do so despite the fact that native Greeks expected them to act in that way. Being more resourceful in symbolic terms, partly due to their official recognition as de facto part of Greek society, they were not only less eager to comply but also more empowered to pursue their own paths.

### **Compliance and resistance**

A native Greek friend of mine introduced me to Galina, an FSU Greek woman in her late forties who had emigrated from Tbilisi in the early 1990s. Describing her life in the Georgian capital before she emigrated, Galina emphasized her feelings of insecurity. The words of President Gamsakhurdia, who had said that Georgia is the land of the Georgians and that people of all other ethnicities should feel as temporary guests there, were strongly imprinted in her memory. My friend told her she found it ironic that FSU Greeks 'have come to Greece, a western and supposedly more tolerant society, and here they have found Karatzaferis,<sup>143</sup> a politician with the same attitude'. Galina disagreed, so my friend felt the need to defend her position by explaining that Karatzaferis could be seen as the Greek equivalent of Gamsakhurdia. Galina replied that this was not what she meant. She explained: 'He (Karatzaferis) may be saying whatever he wants to but that does not affect me, I am not here like I was in Georgia... here it is my country.'

Galina thus made clear that she feels much more secure in Greece than in her country of birth, a feeling shared by a large number of FSU Greeks. The official recognition of FSU Greeks as part of the Greek nation underlies their feeling of security in Greece. It also makes them unwilling to accept any offences levelled at them by the native population. Several of my informants told me that they had to endure insults and discriminatory practices in the former Soviet Union. They told me that such behaviour could be partly tolerated there, but under no circumstances in Greece, the country where they ethnically belong. Others had had a much more positive experience in the former Soviet Union. They claimed that FSU Greeks were highly esteemed 'there', and they presented this experience

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<sup>143</sup> A far-right-wing political leader of the xenophobic party LAOS.

as an extra reason why they should not tolerate any negative behaviour in Greece. Stefanos, a tall FSU Greek from the Russian Caucasus with a thick moustache, described a personal story to me which illustrates this in a blunt way, and with a touch of dark humour.

When I first came to Greece I was working in a small business painting signs [επιγραφές]. I was sitting at my table and arranging the letters of a sign post when someone entered and started the 'story': that we, Russo-Pontics, have come here and we are taking your jobs and so on. I replied 'Do not tell those things to me, tell them to Mitsotaki' - at that time Mitsotakis was the prime minister - 'haven't you invited us? Didn't the borders open up? And actually you allowed not only the true Greeks but also the Georgians and the Chechens and so on. I would not have come if I were not invited. I would have stayed home. But since I came here, I have to work.' However, he went on 'what work? You have ruined the country, you steal, you rob.' 'For sure', I told him, 'If I did not have a job I would steal from you and in your house, I have children to support and if you tried to prevent me I would kill you!'

He made a sign indicating that the other man had been really afraid, and added, smiling, 'he never said anything to me again...'.

Most of my FSU Greek informants expressed disappointment at their reception by native Greeks and the Greek state in general, and several of them narrated personal experiences of being treated in a degrading way by native Greeks. They described situations in which they felt the need to defend or legitimate their breaking with certain native norms, or felt embarrassed about their origins in the Soviet Union or their inability to speak proper Greek. For instance Lukia told me that she was made to feel bad in several occasions by people that mocked her for her Greek language skills and pronunciation. Not everybody was so blunt and successful in countering accusations by natives as Stefanos.

Most examples that my informants mentioned concerned encounters with bureaucracy, interactions in the field of work, but also random encounters with native Greeks in their everyday life in Thessaloniki. They did not refer to experiences in Nikopoli. In fact, contrary to the rather strong views that most of the native residents held about their FSU Greek neighbours, the latter hardly expressed any opinion about the natives in Nikopoli. When asked explicitly, they would either comment that they did not know any natives from Nikopoli or that they only have formal relations (τυπικές σχέσεις) with a limited number of people. They generally described those relations as friendly. From my conversations with FSU Greeks, I concluded that they were not aware of the negative views expressed

by a considerable segment of the native residents in Nikopoli. Nevertheless, their rather neutral attitude towards their native neighbours did not reflect their attitude towards Greece and towards native Greeks in general.

FSU Greeks were outspoken and critical about their reception by the Greek state (see chapter 7.1). Migration to the fatherland did not provide FSU Greeks with the easy and socio-economically secure life-conditions to which they aspired and which they had expected to find in Greece. To the contrary, the majority of FSU Greeks found themselves in insecure and poorly rewarded jobs, which did not match their skills and educational backgrounds. FSU Greeks expressed feelings of bitterness towards their historic homeland for their precarious socio-economic situation. Their disillusionment was particularly acute in view of their idealized perceptions of a 'return to the fatherland'. Maintaining a Greek identity in the former Soviet Union, which had often come at a high cost, had shaped their high expectations of migration to Greece (Voutira, 2003a). Those expectations were also augmented by state promises and an overestimation of the capacity of the Greek state to provide support (Papaioanou, et al., 2008).

Besides this, for a considerable number of FSU Greek immigrants, especially the pioneers, migration was a one-way move. Often, all bridges with the country they had departed from were cut. In the course of time, return to the former Soviet Union also became difficult for some of those FSU Greeks who had migrated with less clear plans of staying permanently in Greece. As their old communities in the former Soviet Union were vanishing, their migration acquired de facto a more permanent character. For those immigrants, native Greek society emerged as their only frame of reference and their relative disadvantage in life standards compared to native Greeks became psychologically more acute. The most disappointed described their immigration as one of their worst life decisions.

The inability of the highly educated FSU Greeks to find jobs that matched their qualifications<sup>144</sup> was an experience that acquired symbolic significance within the FSU Greek community. Several FSU Greeks referred to it as proof of the exploitation FSU Greeks faced in 'the fatherland'. This, together with incidents of mistreatment by the local and national bureaucracy, was widely discussed, especially among those FSU Greeks who were more negative about their migration to Greece.

Concerning their attitudes about native Greeks, at the time of my research FSU Greeks could be roughly divided in two groups: those who were also critical

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<sup>144</sup> That was partly due to discrimination in the labour market and lack of human capital transferability, and partly due to the non-dynamic character of the Greek economy.

towards their own community, claiming that 'their people' were partly or primarily responsible for the unfavourable image native Greeks attributed to them, and those who put all the blame on native Greeks, accusing them collectively of arrogant and disrespectful behaviour. The division reflected a polarization within the FSU Greek immigrant population over what their strategies in Greece should be, as well as over different reactions to native accusations regarding the supposed extensive criminality within their community and their alleged aggressive attitude.

For instance, concerning their being stereotyped as aggressive, several FSU Greeks turned this on its head, claiming that native Greeks were in fact weak. Like Stefanos, they used their negative reputation to put native Greeks at a disadvantage in their interactions and boasted that native Greeks feared them. During a focus group with fourteen-year-old students in Nikopoli's school, Pavel, an FSU Greek student, told me that 'In Nikopoli it is very commonly discussed that Greeks are cissies (αγαθιάρηδες), that they are too soft'. When I asked him if this discussion related to the fact that FSU Greeks are the majority there and whether in other places in Thessaloniki it is different, he told me 'No, we never fear them; they fear us, even downtown, because they know that the Russo-Pontics go all together if there is trouble.'

The more negative group among the FSU Greeks claimed that natives are soft, lazy, and ignorant and criticized extended relationships with them as signs of assimilation. For instance, Nikolas, an FSU Greek from Tsalka in his late twenties, told me that members of his family are negative towards him because he is different. When I asked him to explain in what ways they saw him as different, he told me that they did not approve of his distant relationships with his extended family and his choices concerning his appearance, such as his long hair and earrings. Nikolas told me that in their eyes all this proved that he was too 'Hellenized'. Negative experiences of interaction with native Greeks and, most importantly, reproduction of those experiences in in-group discussions raised attitudes of resistance 'to becoming like them' among certain FSU Greeks. They re-activated the strong minority culture that had characterized several close-knit subgroups of the FSU Greek Diaspora in the former Soviet Union.<sup>145</sup> They also mobilized a deep belief in the potentials of their community, and the feeling that 'we will make it based on our own resources and soon we will be better off than them'.

However, most of my FSU Greek respondents were critical of such attitudes. They claimed that such views locked them into an unprofitable contest with the

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<sup>145</sup> Notably those from Tsalka.

natives and did not help them to progress in Greece. For instance, Petros, an FSU Greek from Russia, took a critical stance on what he considered as characteristically stubborn FSU Greek behaviour.

Albanians and Armenians are more cunning than we are and rightly so. Pontics are stubborn, I cannot even work with my father... we were working together really intensely and I was telling to him take a rest for a bit... nothing, very proud person [εγωιστής]. At the worst timing, when the boss came he decided to take a rest. I told him, father you know it is not the right time to rest. He replied 'Hey son, mind your own business! I am a human too - what do you think that I am made out of iron?' Such stubborn behaviour. I do not work with him anymore, he works with his son-in-law and I work with my best man from my wedding [κουμπάρο] and Albanian colleagues. I have been working with them for years and we are close friends. The Albanians are cunning and that is good for them.<sup>146</sup>

It is possible that the refusal of FSU Greeks to engage in submissive behaviour, and in some cases to express this through actual reactionary behaviour, could have impeded the rapprochement between them and native Greeks - especially in light of the prejudiced attitudes of the latter. Yuri, my roommate during my second stay in Nikopoli, was very critical of the attitude of young FSU Greeks. He told me:

In Georgia they had a custom that men do not clean up and for that they say they won't pick up other conscripts' cigarette butts from the ground.<sup>147</sup> Once one person refuses, the rest go along with him. No one from the group can bring them to reason and explain to them, 'Hey guys what you say is just stupid'. They think: 'What can they do to us? Beat us up? They do not have the right'. In Russia<sup>148</sup> they can't do the same because there is a lot of physical violence in the army [γιατι εκει πέφτει ξύλο]. They think 'Maybe they punish us with a retention.. so what? We gonna stay here ten to twenty more days smoking our cigarettes and you will be picking up our butts.'

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<sup>146</sup> Albanians are stereotyped by FSU Greeks as uneducated and as being 'jackals', a simile which in Russian implies being obsequious. Some FSU Greeks I talked to did allow that there were similarities between them and the Albanians in certain respects, e.g. lack of fear of engaging in a fight if necessary, but were nevertheless convinced about their superiority in bravery overall.

<sup>147</sup> Cleaning up cigarette butts from the ground is commonly ordered by higher-ups in the Greek army to keep conscripts occupied.

<sup>148</sup> 'Russia' here is used to refer to all countries of the Commonwealth. Such a use of the word 'Russia' was also very common among my FSU Greek informants.

It is true that many younger native Greeks first come into contact with FSU Greeks in the army, and foster the idea of FSU Greeks as being aggressive and provocative through such experiences with them. A minority developed a similar idea from interactions in the field of work. When I asked Andreas, an owner of a construction company, who had a xenophobic attitude, whether he had employed FSU Greeks he told me, ‘they are the worst of all [immigrants] because they think they are someone, super smart and more Greek than the Greeks [ελληναράδες]... they want to convince you that you are nothing in comparison to them.’

## 6.2 The stereotype of the aggressive ‘Russo-Pontic’

### Conflict in the neighbourhood

The qualitative research carried out with a subsample (N = 54) of GEITONIES respondents in Nikopoli (see chapter 1.2, pp. 21) yielded findings on FSU and native Greek relations, and the views they held of each other, which were in line with those which emerged from my ethnographic research. The FSU Greek respondents either expressed a positive opinion of their relations with native Greeks residents or commented that they did not know them. To the contrary, however, half of the native Greek respondents were negative about their immigrant neighbours.<sup>149</sup> Of those natives, more than two out of three (69%) attributed their negative opinion, partly or exclusively, to the allegedly improper – usually further explicated as asocial or aggressive – behaviour of FSU Greeks, and/or to perceptions of their alleged engagement in some sort of illegal activity.<sup>150</sup>

Like many of my informants, the GEITONIES respondents claimed that FSU Greeks very often become engaged in scuffles (όλο μαλώνουν), and several respondents, mostly women, said that they fear interacting with them. Only three persons had had personal negative experiences, one of whom said she had been hit during a dispute with an FSU Greek over the parking place of her house.<sup>151</sup> The other two persons mentioned being annoyed by noise disturbance caused by FSU Greeks. Two of my informants reported similar problems too. In all cases, people who mentioned having problems with noise disturbance were living in new Nikopoli, close to hang-outs where regular street gatherings of FSU Greeks took place. It was those street gatherings that caused the nuisance.

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<sup>149</sup> Of the remaining half, 35% were neutral or had no opinion and 15% were positive.

<sup>150</sup> On perceptions about crime see subchapter 6.3.

<sup>151</sup> None of my informants reported similar experiences.

Magda, a young woman who was living alone in a first floor apartment just above a spot where young FSU Greeks regularly met, had had the worst experiences. She said that the people who gathered there drank all day long, in some cases until late at night, and that they were loud. She also had a feeling that they were looking at her and for that reason she had fenced her balcony with reeds. Magda recounted a story about when two cousins had a violent brawl, and the next day they were hugging each other. She thought this incident indicative of their behaviour, which she characterized as totally absurd. Feeling insecure about being alone, she asked one of her native Greek neighbours with whom she has a close relation to present himself as her partner to others in the neighbourhood.

Apart from those people, the rest of my native informants, as well as the respondents who were interviewed in the context of the GEITONIES survey, did not mention any problems about living together with the immigrants in the immediate surroundings of their house. In fact, most of them reported having good relations with them.<sup>152</sup> Vasilis, a thirty-year-old native who lives in new Nikopoli and owns a shop there, told me:

Let me tell you something, there are of course assholes (μαλάκες), but we do not have any in our block (πολυκατοικία). In fact there is a great asshole and he is Greek. But I have to say that there are seventeen apartments in our block, quite a lot... and also in my shop I never had any problem with any Rosso-Pontic client. I also play football in the local team... no problems, so it can't be just luck [...] with the apartments though it is a lottery, I know a person who lives in one apartment where he has problems with his Rosso-Pontic neighbours, they are possibly the extreme from this group, the uncivilized ones. But in his case it is just a matter of bad luck. Before I was living in Charilaou [a district at the eastern part of Thessaloniki] in a block with only natives and within one year we moved out. We could not stand it there. We had terrible relations with the neighbours.

Many native Greeks living in upper new Nikopoli justified their opinion of FSU Greeks, be it positive or negative, on the basis of their experience of everyday interaction. In contrast, native Greeks in old Nikopoli and lower-new Nikopoli developed their views of FSU Greeks against a background of limited interpersonal interaction. Negative ideas were mostly inferred from stories 'heard

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<sup>152</sup> Close interpersonal relations between FSU and native Greeks are uncommon in the neighbourhood. According to the GEITONIES survey only 6% of the FSU Greek residents and 1% of the native residents had developed a close tie with a neighbour of the other category.

from others', usually concerning the FSU Greeks' alleged aggressiveness and delinquent behaviour, or, as described in the previous subchapter, were supported with reference to how they saw them use the neighbourhood's public spaces. Most of them had very distorted ideas about how things are in northern parts of Nikopoli, which they barely ever visited. They would commonly tell me, 'here we are just fine but up there many things happen...'

According to the main data set of the GEITONIES survey, Nikopoli holds the second-worst position out of eighteen European neighbourhoods in terms of the native residents' perception about safety; 58% of respondents consider it an unsafe place to live. Nikopoli holds the same position concerning native residents' feelings of being threatened by the behaviour of their neighbours. Approximately one out of three native residents reports feeling threatened by the behaviour of her/his neighbours.<sup>153</sup> Taking into account the general discourse among native residents in the neighbourhood, one may hypothesize that their fear most probably relates to 'the behaviour' of their immigrant neighbours.

During my stay in the neighbourhood, I was never verbally or otherwise provoked by any resident of Nikopoli, native or FSU Greek, and I never came across a scuffle between FSU Greeks. Concerning immigrant-native conflicts, I only once witnessed a verbal dispute between a native and an FSU Greek. This dispute took place in the street where I was living during my second stay in Nikopoli. An FSU Greek person was fixing the pavement to make it more accessible for cars to park. It was approximately 15:30 in the afternoon and he was making noise. This is unacceptable by native Greek standards: in siesta time everybody is expected to be quiet, something which is even prescribed by law.<sup>154</sup> A native Greek living in a house opposite to mine came out on his balcony and requested the FSU Greek to stop. He did stop for a short period but after a while he started again. The same native Greek came out at his balcony again, furious this time, shouting at the FSU Greek. After a failed attempt to convince the annoyed native Greek to let him go on since 'he was nearly done', he stopped. Apart from this dispute, I

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<sup>153</sup> The perception of Nikopoli as an extremely unsafe area might also relate to a murder that had happened half year before the GEITONIES survey took place (see chapter 6.3). FSU Greeks also perceive their neighbourhood as an unsafe place. Yet, as will be described in the following, they do so for different reasons. In terms of their perceptions of being threatened by their neighbours there is a big difference between them and the natives, with only one out of ten FSU Greeks in the neighbourhood reporting so.

<sup>154</sup> In Greece, the siesta, *mesimerianós ípnos*, is a social institution. For most Greeks the working day starts early, usually at 8:00 in the morning, and many people take a midday break before they go on working in the evening. The shifts of many shops and offices are organized accordingly and people are legally obliged to be quiet from 15:00 until 17:30. FSU Greeks were generally unaware of the *mesimerianós ípnos* institution before they immigrated to Greece.

witnessed three aggressive verbal disputes in the neighbourhood, all between native residents.<sup>155</sup>

Although my observations are rather too limited and scattered to sustain generalizations, they do seem to indicate two things. Firstly, conflict between FSU and native Greeks did not seem to be very common in the neighbourhood and FSU Greeks did not engage in fights very often, or at least not as often as native residents perceived them to. These tentative observations are corroborated by the GEITONIES survey. FSU Greeks were recorded as engaging in conflicts slightly less often than native Greeks in the neighbourhood. In the period of three months preceding the survey, 10 out of 102 immigrant and 13 out of 98 native residents had entered into an argument with a neighbour. Of those 23 cases recorded, only 9 concerned arguments between native and immigrant residents. When compared to the other neighbourhoods of GEITONIES survey, conflict occurrence in Nikopoli is about average and immigrant-native conflict rather infrequent.

Experiences of conflict alone do not seem to adequately explain the perceptions of insecurity and feelings of threat felt by a considerable segment of the native population as regards their FSU co-residents. As will be explained in the following, these feelings seemed, at least to a certain extent, to respond to prejudicial views of 'Russo-Pontics' as aggressive and prone to criminality. Such stereotypical images were widely adopted by the natives in the neighbourhood. Most of them described aggression as an innate characteristic of their immigrant neighbours or as a result of their socialization in the Soviet Union.

### **The aggressive Russo-Pontic**

The first time I visited Michalis' *tavérna* there were three groups of native residents sitting at different tables. They seemed to know each other well and there was a very intimate atmosphere, similar to that of the local *kafeneía*. People were communicating between tables in very informal manner, in essence forming one big company. They were also very loud. Moreover, two of them were swearing and provoking each other, half seriously half joking. When I paid my bill Michalis told me in an apologetic tone, 'my friend, I hope you are not driven out by those savages here'. Since it was my first time there, Michalis felt that he needed to apologize for the behaviour of his other clients in case I was bothered.

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<sup>155</sup> Two of those disputes were over personal grudges, and the other over a disagreement about local politics. They took place in the street outside a garage, at a *kafenio*, and at a neighbourhood assembly.

In fact, I was not at all bothered. I found the atmosphere inside the *tavérna* cozy and the conversation style by no means exceptionable, but more or less in line with what I considered pretty much a typical native Greek way of interacting.

Challenges, insults, and attacks, within appropriate limits, are almost synonymous with conversation in Greece (Broome, 1996). As Friedl (1962) observed in her research in Vasilika, conversation in the village had some of the quality of an arena in which each man displays himself as an individual and waits for an audience response (see also Papataxiarchys, 1992). To unaccustomed ear, most informal dialogues between Greeks sound like a conflict. Verbal, rather aggressive, disputes are also not uncommon. According to my observations as well as the data from the GEITONIES survey, native Greeks seem to engage in conflict no less often than their FSU Greek neighbours. What was it then that they found negative and different in the behaviour of FSU Greeks which made them perceive it as aggressive?

As mentioned, I never once witnessed a scuffle between FSU Greeks in Nikopoli. Only once did I witness a fight between two people at a marriage festival outside the area. I did, however, make some observations about the public performance of masculinity by FSU Greek men. Below, I include an account from my fieldwork diary. It describes a friendly encounter I had, together with my friend Vaso, with an extended family of FSU Greeks of Pontic origin from a village near Batoumi, Georgia. The meeting took place late at night on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August outside the Virgin Mary Soumela Church, on Mount Vermion. On this date those FSU Greeks who still adhere to the Old Calendar celebrate the procession for the dormition of Virgin Mary.

[...] at the same spot where people were earlier dancing to some traditional music coming from a parked car, Pontic music, there was a company with an accordion, playing and singing the last, discordant notes after a long, soon to end, feast, with plenty of alcohol.

Aristides: Hey guys. How are you?

Vaso: Ehm, we heard the music...

Aristides: Ok, good, sit with us then.

Achileas: [approaching with more curiosity] So tell us guys what's up?

Me: Ehm we heard the music and decided to sit down and listen.

Achileas: Sit down then... because if you don't, you insult my cousin Aristides and then me and that is like insulting the whole Pontic population.

It didn't take much to convince us... only we couldn't figure out where we had to sit. After introducing themselves, our hosts leave us for a moment. Suddenly Aristides is back with a plastic cup in which he offers us soup. He explains it is *haslamas*, a traditional Pontic soup (Yuri told me it is actually a Turkish soup which they also eat at Caucasus). Vaso says we had better drink something since we had already eaten. Aristides responds that we should eat it first and the drinks are on their way.

Although we were sceptical about the food, it turns out to be magnificent. There is a lot of coriander and spices that are uncommon in the Greek cuisine. Then Achileas appears with a vodka in his hand and Vaso happily says: 'yes, that's good, bring it over here!' He gets quite excited and tries juggling with the vodka... trying such fancy bartending causes disaster: he drops the bottle which shatters with a crash. After a moment of silence Aristides enters the scene to clean everything up and calms everyone down. 'Nothing serious...' he says and uses a leafy branch to clean up the broken glass. Everyone calms down through his intervention. In the meantime Achileas disappears. Aristides serves us *tsipouro* (strong Greek alcoholic beverage made from distilled pomace) and invites us to the table. [...]

In the centre there are two drunken guys in their 40s. One of them must have been the accordion player and the other the improvising percussionist. Behind Vaso there is a group of younger people, a mixed company of guys and girls who didn't talk much. I didn't notice when they joined, and whether they knew the company or whether they just joined to drink some vodka. On the left, next to the musicians, there was Aristides and another person who was coming and going all the time during the evening. Achileas sat next to Vaso on the left and on the other side there was a young girl with her little sister in her arms and their grandma close by. Soon their grandma served them some *haslama* from a pot next to her. Further back there were some women, probably wives and relatives of other people. Behind us some people were sleeping on the grass. They were actually the ones who were dancing to the music when we first saw the company.

Suddenly uncle Leonidas comes. Apparently he was upset about someone's behaviour, and he was swearing in Greek and Russian. Some cool-headed members of the party leap up in order to calm things down. Achileas promptly reassures us that we shouldn't worry; it's nothing important. As long as we are with them we are safe. He humorously adds a pledge he was to repeat several times that night: 'I don't know about Manolis but if anyone harms Vaso I will beat him up for three days and

three nights!' Aristides walks towards uncle Leonidas who is still shouting and chastizes him sternly in order to settle him. I am panicking a bit, assuming uncle Leonidas is condemning 'one of ours' and that we would be having trouble... At that point Aristides tells us with some pomposity: 'You know uncle Leonidas has killed a bear with his hands!' Brave uncle Leonidas stands approximately 1.70m tall, slightly chubby and bald. Aristides tries his best to calm him down. The women of the group also step into the scene rather wearily and modestly: 'Not today Leonida it's a shame, it is the dormission of the Virgin Mary'. Someone from the group promises: 'Leave it for tomorrow uncle, we will wake up early and we go all together to beat them up'. The atmosphere gradually calms down.

Achileas: Vaso do not worry, there is no problem, if anyone dares to disturb you, I will beat him up for three days and three nights. Here you are perfectly safe. But uncle Leonidas is right.

Me: What happened?

Achileas: He is right.

From what I extracted from a jumble of Pontic and Russian exclamations, someone had told him something insulting before leaving earlier... were they the guys we saw when we first arrived there? It did not matter anyway. The important issue is that tomorrow they will beat them up.

Achileas: Tomorrow early morning we will beat them up... they are the guys who will perform the Kurpan [literally, 'sacrifice' in Turkish; Achileas refers here to the ceremonial killing of an animal, usually a sheep, for the celebration of an event; (see chapter 7.2, pp. 221)] we will first beat them and then they will do the Kurpan.

Vaso takes the bottle of vodka to serve herself. Achileas prevents her. 'I will do it'. 'Go on then', Vaso replies. He takes the bottle, turns it upside down to pour alcohol in her glass and leaves the bottle there even after her glass is full spilling vodka on the floor. I managed to save some. Vaso tells him something with the directness and easiness that is characteristic to her. Achileas turns to me and comments with respect and bewilderment, 'She is some tomboy eh?'

At that point the second explosion of uncle Leonidas takes place and people rush to calm him down. His eyes are blazing, things appear more difficult this time, and the scenario of him going to wake them and beat them up appears probable. Some of the women mention that there are guests and that he should not behave like that. Achileas yells annoyed

'Nooooooooo uncle Leonidas do not ruin the company we have guests'  
[Μμησηηηη Θειο Λεωνίδα μην χαλάς το χωρίον και έχουμε μουσαφιραιοιους]. People try to calm down Achileas which is a much easier task, but their efforts for uncle Leonidas are in vain. At that point women leave without any hesitation; for their part they had done what they ought to, and it is time to go to sleep. It should be mentioned here that the granny and the young children are still there, completely unperturbed. With the passing of time, uncle Leonidas's yells recede into the background; he goes on and on and always someone goes to calm him down.

Achileas says 'God did not give me a strong body but if my hands are short to help me then I have something in the boot of the car that may do the job'. As the atmosphere calms down again, we are having a nice friendly chat with Aristides and Achileas. It should be noted that even in the tense moments everybody was gentle and discreet with us. Their attitude was like they had known us for years. They were warm and cordial and offered us everything generously. We felt safe, as well as a sense of solidarity 'that we are all to go and beat the guys who would do the kurpan'.

Aristides mentions something with which we all agree. This drives Achileas mad 'Yes, you agree because Aristides told so' and he moves darkly towards Aristides. Aristides calms him down: 'Eee cousin you broke a bottle of vodka and I played the housewife and you dare to speak?' After a while there also is a fuss between the accordionist and the percussionist but in two minutes time the latter one hugs the former warmly, ending the misunderstanding.

Meanwhile, uncle Leonidas had again started his delirium of anger. At one point he sits on chair but then he rises and starts again. They promise him anew that they will beat them tomorrow and he kind of calms down. He also takes notice of our presence. He looks at us full of wonder 'Who are they?' All the sudden the group of youngsters besides as gets activated and asks for vodka. The CD player was at that time playing a kind of Pontic ballad.

Uncle Leonidas: I am a sober person.

Vaso: It seems so... .

At that point I thought we are in a real trouble.

Uncle Leonidas: What do you mean?

Vaso: I understood you are a sober man.

Uncle Leonidas: How could you understand since you do not know me?

Vaso: But one can tell by your looks and your ways. Probably someone really pissed you off and probably you have a very serious reason to act like that.

Uncle Leonidas: During my whole life I was trying to de-escalate tension and I have always played the mediator to prevent trouble, I am not provoking anyone but this bum...

He gets crazy again...

[...] Time passed by, and the youngsters behind us are drinking vodka. The drunken fellows speak to each other, all women are gone. Uncle Leonidas has finally calmed down. Achileas leaves. He claims he has an important job. While leaving he tells Aristides to take care of Vaso. Aristides replies, 'Manolis is a good guy too. He is from Creta.'

Throughout the evening, probably the end of a day-long feast, there was a continuous balance between tension and feelings of warmth and solidarity. That was not only due to the incident with uncle Leonidas; in several cases fights between members of the group, probably friends and relatives, threatened to take place. These were resolved with cordial hugging, after misunderstandings were settled. Women were sitting to one side, only marginally interested in what was taking place in the male group. They seemed honestly unconcerned with uncle Leonidas's outbursts and the small conflicts that threatened to erupt. Their reaction seemed to imply such incidents were neither uncommon nor particularly worrisome to them.

Regarding the incident with uncle Leonidas, it is interesting that nobody was really concerned to explain to us what had happened; there were two important issues that we were supposed to know: that uncle Leonidas was right; and that we, and especially Vaso, were safe. The assertion by the other men that they would go to beat the guys up the next day was intended to de-escalate his temper. However, in our conversations, Aristides and Achileas confirmed that indeed the next morning they intended to go and beat them up. Interestingly, they presented his outburst as a reasonable and expected reaction. Rather than downplaying the importance of the incident, Aristides and Achileas considered it more important to confirm and emphasize the physical strength and bravery of uncle Leonidas.

Although the above incident would have appeared extreme by the standards of a native Greek raised in a city, it is not all that exceptional to native Greek perceptions of masculinity and the public performance of machismo in general. Several of my FSU Greek informants recounted stories attesting their personal bravery that were reminiscent of stories recorded by ethnographers who had earlier done research in (rural) Greece (see Campbell 1964; Herzfeld 1988).

Iordanis, who had a much more positive idea of the local FSU Greeks than most residents in Nikopoli, told me that he does not find the behaviour of FSU Greeks that different from the behaviour of Greeks in rural areas. He told me that native people who had migrated to Thessaloniki from adjacent villages at earlier phases behaved exactly in the manner for which they accuse FSU Greeks. The vast majority of my informants, however, did not make such comments. They considered 'the aggressive behaviour of the Russo-Pontics' as characteristic of their alien culture.

In the closing sentence of the excerpt from my fieldwork notes, Aristides is quoted as telling Achileas that he should not worry about Vaso because I am a Cretan. There are two assumptions underlying this statement. The first, which is in accordance with perceptions of gender relations that are not unique to FSU Greeks but rather are dominant in Greece and other Mediterranean countries (see Peristany, 1965), is that a woman is incapable of protecting herself in 'the violent world of men' and that a man has to take up this role. The second assumption has to do with my origin, which is partly Cretan. Achileas attested that I would be able to take on my role successfully, due to my Cretan roots.

Several of my informants who got to know my surname<sup>156</sup> or asked me about my origin told me that Cretans are nice and interesting people. They claimed that Cretans are 'similar to us Pontics' and, less frequently, 'similar to the Caucasians'. The Cretans think of themselves, and are also represented by other Greeks, as brave and tough men, *pallikária* (brave men, warriors). Cretan males take pride in their virility and the *palikári* ideology underscores much of their public behaviour (Damer, 1988; Herzfeld, 1985). Together with pressing abundant food and drink upon strangers, which is also of great social value in the cultural codes of the Caucasian societies of many FSU Greeks, the *pallikári* public behaviour of Cretans and the honour code it expresses is highly praised by FSU Greeks, especially those from the Caucasus.

Due to their common marginal position within the Greek nation and its history, 'native Pontic Greeks' also think positively of the Cretans. My native Pontic informants also responded positively to my origin. They placed emphasis on music, dances, and traditional clothing traditions of Cretans, which in their view have similarities to those of the Pontics. However, FSU Greeks – the vast majority of whom are of Pontic descent – attributed their good image of Cretans to a perceived cultural affinity on different grounds: 'They are crazy [τρελοί] like us', as an FSU Greek woman told me. Even Yuri, my room-mate, who took a critical

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<sup>156</sup> Cretan names may be recognized by their ending -akis. Similarly, Pontic Greeks may also be recognized from their surnames which usually end in -ides or -ades.

stance towards the macho behaviour of certain FSU Greeks whom he categorized as Caucasians (as will be described below), expressed admiration for the Cretans. He told me that even the FSU Greeks of Beshtasen,<sup>157</sup> who are considered as the strongest and toughest, have been beaten in fights in Crete.

Crete has a long tradition of blood feuds. Moreover, in several rural areas in Crete, people indulge in a wide assortment of petty infractions, including systematic sheep-stealing, and carrying and using firearms, which the local police systematically overlook. Unofficially, Crete is treated as a special case by the state and a number of Cretan villagers take pride in themselves as living 'in free Greece' (Herzfeld, 1980). The role of Cretans in the development and defence of the Modern Greek nation state is widely acknowledged (Herzfeld, 1988). State authorities have diachronically fostered the image of the unbiddable and rebellious Cretan as the vanguard of the nation and as a symbol of the supposedly indomitable Greek character (Astrinaki, 2007).

Not every native Greek is positive about the Cretans. In fact, several Greeks outside the island despise them for 'their violent traditions'. However, 'their' Greekness and bravery are widely praised. In contrast, native Greeks might think of the Russo-Pontics as tough guys<sup>158</sup> but at the same time they devalue them as aggressive, uncivilized, and not fitting with Greek mores. By claiming that they are similar to Cretans, the FSU Greeks were not only claiming cultural affinity with them, but were also attempting to valorize their norms and assert their identity as quintessentially Greek.

### **'The Caucasians'**

FSU Greeks are aware of their image as aggressive people. Some of my closest FSU Greek informants in Nikopoli made sarcastic jokes such as 'How can you do research with those savages, the Russo-Pontics' and 'If you have any problems with those Russo-Pontics call us for help'. Interestingly, several FSU Greeks also stereotyped a sub-segment of their group as aggressive, those they named as 'the Caucasians'. 'The Caucasian' was not a category invented in Greece but one that also existed in the FSU. Constructed in opposition to the ethnic norm of 'the Russian', this category embodied the historically ambivalent perception of

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<sup>157</sup> A Turkish-speaking Greek village in Tsalka.

<sup>158</sup> This possibly relates to the engagement of many of them in martial arts and to the accomplishments of FSU Greek athletes in weightlifting, Greek Roman wrestling, Judo, boxing, and other power sports. It may also related to stereotypes of (native) Pontic Greeks being physically strong. Such images are indicated in the popular expression of someone having 'a Pontic head', which signifies physical endurance.

Imperial Russia as regards the Caucasus and its people (Mamedov, 2008). It still remains a broad ethnic categorization in the post-Soviet world, and a negative, racialized label in Russia ascribed to immigrants originating in this area (Brednikova & Pachenkov, 2002).

The label 'the Caucasian' was not only an external categorization but also an identification term used positively by some of my FSU Greek informants. Hospitality was generally presented as a virtue of Caucasians by all FSU Greeks. However, 'Caucasian' conceptions of masculinity were contested.<sup>159</sup> Several FSU Greeks, mostly although not exclusively people who had lived in big urban centres in the FSU, disparaged what they characterized as 'Caucasian behaviours' as backward and uncivilized. Among the FSU Greeks from Caucasus, those originating in the Tsalka area in Georgia were the most notorious (see chapter 7.2, pp. 206-211). Many FSU Greeks spoke about them in ways similar to how native Greeks speak about the 'Russo-Pontic': they represented them as savage/uncivilized people. As an informant told me, 'If the people of Tsalka are around there will always be a fight'. In addition, FSU Greek women accused Tsalkan men of being phallocratic and conservative.

Yuri, my room-mate, is the son of an FSU Greek man born in Georgia and a Russian mother. He was born and raised in Uzbekistan without much contact with other FSU Greeks. However, he had an understanding of what he claimed to be the Caucasian norms about how real men should behave, through his father and his Caucasian friends. In one of our discussions he compared them, and what he described as his own 'Asian subtype of Russian culture', to the norms and perceptions of masculinity as he experienced them in Greece:

-This is probably the biggest personal change I went through here [in Greece], because when I came I also had this mentality, you know ... the 'did you look at me?' kind of attitude, always looking around and being ready to respond, to react, to defend yourself. I think it is important to understand that you do not have the right to hit other people.

-So was it different in your home country?

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<sup>159</sup> According to Aruniunov (2007), who argues that the Caucasus is characterized by socio-cultural unity, a certain degree of machismo can be found in almost all discourses of 'Caucasian life' and the drive to acts of derring-do is part of many 'Caucasian narratives'. Similarly, Mars and Altman (1983), who used the concept of honour and shame society (see Peristiany, 1966) to explain the cultural basis of goods distribution and the black market in the Georgian Soviet Republic, argued that men in Georgia have to constantly prove themselves as 'men' and that their web of personal relations is characterized by instability and continuous competition.

-Sure, it was especially among the Caucasians, the Pontics<sup>160</sup> too... the Georgians have the particularity of being more verbal.

-You mean, in terms of saying much but not doing enough, what many claim as 'the Greek way' ?

-No, no certainly not... it is a bit difficult to explain to you. Say we are a group of friends and I tell you something like 'Manoli you are an asshole or something like that, you should reply and you should reply in the right way. If you fail you might get beaten... possibly even by the whole group. There are rules and there are correct and wrong answers and you should have arguments and self-confidence to support your words.

Similarly to other FSU Greeks I spoke to, Yuri viewed the contemporary moral code of male relations in Thessaloniki as different from what he perceived as the Caucasian one. He thought that 'the Caucasians' are more prone to engage in fights than native Greeks are. Several FSU Greeks recounted to me scuffles or clashes between groups of people when they wanted to describe the violent character of 'the Caucasians'. According to those descriptions, such fights commonly expressed older rivalries between villages, notably between people from the Turkish-speaking villages in Tsalka, which formed the majority there, and people from the few Pontic-speaking villages in the same area. Several people told me that they were ashamed by such behaviour. They differentiated themselves from 'the Caucasians' who in their view could be seen as accountable for the native Greeks' negative views, at least to some extent.

## 6.3 Perceptions of criminality and neighbourhood stigmatization

### **Illicit drug (ab)use, delinquency and its conceptualization**

The issue of illicit drug abuse was raised by a large segment of both native and FSU Greek residents in Nikopoli. The native residents referred to it as a problem for the neighbourhood which contributed to their feeling of insecurity there. The FSU Greeks discussed it without reference to the neighbourhood. They described it as a negative force that corrodes their community, dissolves families, and harms the youth. The issue was also brought up during a focus group I organized with frequenters of the church in Efxinoupoli; our discussion centred on their migration experience and how their life in Greece compares to their life in the former FSU. When Ivan, a thirty-year-old FSU Greek from Russia, referred to the

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<sup>160</sup> 'Pontic' in that context was used without any reference to the 'native Pontic Greeks'. It indicated the Greeks in the FSU.

problem of drug dependency, Eleonora, a middle-aged woman from Georgia, intervened to highlight that such problems were non-existent in the FSU. Ivan disagreed:

Of course there were drugs there, especially in Georgia there was marihuana and other drugs too. It was simply different times then [ήταν άλλες οι εποχές τότε], it was Communism... do not mix things up... if you would go there now it is not like it used to be. It is democracy... you do whatever you want. Earlier, if you were not working, police came and asked you: What's up? Do you have a problem? Why aren't you working? You couldn't just stay like that [...].

Heroin is the most widespread hard drug used by FSU Greeks. Cross-national data from Israel, Germany, and the USA indicate that heroin abuse is more common among post-Soviet migrants than among native populations in those countries (Isralowitz, et al., 2002). In Greece, small-scale data collected during 2005-6 in a drug dependence unit in Athens, hint at a prevalence of FSU immigrants among the drug-dependent immigrant population (Dalla, et al., 2009). A possible relationship between heroin abuse and socialization in the FSU – where heroin use was widespread – may be cautiously inferred.

There are no data available at the city level, but among my FSU Greek respondents in Nikopoli and elsewhere in the city, drug addiction was represented as an acute social problem in the FSU Greek community. It is noteworthy that although the norm is of FSU Greek parents actively encouraging their children to keep ties with other children of their own group, especially relatives and co-villagers, a minority disfavours their contact with them, fearing it will get them into drugs [μην μπλέξουν με ναρκωτικά]. Katerina, a Greek woman from Armenia, comments:

My brother's son was hanging around [έκανε παρέα] with our people but after a few years he stopped, rather suddenly. My brother called him down 'why you do not hobnob with our people any more, and instead mix with natives?' His son did not tell him but after some time he got to know that his old friends had got into drugs [είχαν μπλέξει με τα ναρκωτικά]. And still they are not clean [δεν έχουν ξεμπερδέψει]. I told him: 'You should be proud of your son'.

My FSU Greek informants mentioned unemployment and the lack of opportunities with which their youth is faced as the most important reason why 'their people' get into drugs. They accused the Greek state of being unsupportive

and argued that several families are unable to help their children due to their financial problems. They also cited the FSU Greeks' damaged self-esteem, for which they in turn blamed their negative reception by native Greek society.

A few of my informants told me that some FSU Greek youths refused to participate in their parental model of progress through hard work, and had instead adopted reactionary forms of behaviour. In this group they included people with serious drug addiction problems and people involved in petty crime and/or in the pursuit of easy money. They related the 'deviant behaviour' of this group to a violent lifestyle they told me had prevailed in the former Soviet Union after the fall of the regime, and/or to a street gang culture that prevailed in Georgia among the youth (see Zakharova, 2010). In their view, most of them started taking drugs and got involved in petty crime in order to prove that they are tough guys (για να αποδείξουν ότι είναι μάγκες).

The information they gave me about this group of people resonates very much with Giannaris's (1998) filmic portrait of a group of FSU Greek petty thieves and rent boys, the adolescents in his movie *The Edge of the City*.<sup>161</sup> The film narrates their experiences, their identity, and their web of relations with Greek patrons and clients as well as other migrants involved in illegal activities. It follows them hanging around the city taking drugs, street dancing, traveling in fast cars, and negotiating their own version of uneven urban reality (Papanikolaou, 2009). Much of the film is about the psychological and physical rupture caused by the violent uprooting during their childhood or adolescences. The protagonists try to mend this rupture through strong friendship bonds. They dream of making it 'their own way' without being willing to accept what they perceive as a preordained and miserable future. They live in a marginal space in their supposed homeland, which is experienced as an alien space.

The study of the (sub)-culture of the people who endorsed a deviant lifestyle, their relations with the rest of FSU Greeks and the native society, the lack of choices with which they were confronted, and the reasons underlying their choices: all this merits focused and extended ethnographic research that I have not done within the context of the present study.<sup>162</sup> However, for the purposes of my

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<sup>161</sup> Originally conceived as a documentary and with most characters played not by actors but by real-life FSU Greek immigrant youth, the film contains rich information about male FSU Greek youth and young adults in general. I have recorded experiences and views in my discussions with younger FSU Greeks that converge with those of the protagonists of the film. This includes perceptions of superiority over other immigrant groups, popularity of martial arts and street dance, perceptions of passive and active homosexual sex as different (the first being heavily stigmatized whereas the second tolerated under conditions), and perceptions about marriage.

<sup>162</sup> I only met one person in Nikopoli who had drug addiction problems, but we lost contact.

subject matter, it is important to mention that such a group was not visible in the neighbourhood. The age group of residents aged between twenty and thirty, both native and immigrant, was largely absent from the public space of the neighbourhood.<sup>163</sup>

The problem of drug abuse was also not visible in the neighbourhood. It was not common at all to encounter drug addicts in the streets of Nikopoli,<sup>164</sup> and I have never seen drug trafficking (selling drugs) in the neighbourhood. However, most of the native Greek residents I spoke to claimed that in ‘upper Nikopoli, they sell drugs with a price list’, or that ‘those Russians are dishing out drugs like candies in bus stops’. It was only a minority of native residents, mostly men who have lived also elsewhere before moving into Nikopoli, who viewed those comments as exaggerations, telling me that drugs are a problem everywhere, and not in Nikopoli in particular.

Lelya, my neighbour during my first stay in the neighbourhood, is an FSU Greek woman from Georgia who migrated to Greece in the early 1990s. When I moved in she had just divorced. Lelya got a lot of support from her native neighbour Maria, with whom she was already close friends before her divorce. Later on Maria also became the godmother of her daughter, symbolically attesting their already strong relationship. I first met them, before we were introduced as neighbours, at the residents’ assembly that was summoned for the issue of the water pollution in Nikopoli. During the discussion, Maria made reference to the issue of ‘the drug problem’. She asked for further and stricter police action in Nikopoli, claiming that the situation is out of control, which puts residents and especially the youth in danger. Maria related the drug problem to the immigrant presence in the neighbourhood. In our informal talks later on she made it explicit that it is the ‘Russians’ who cause the problems with the drugs in the neighbourhood. One day when I was having a discussion with Lelya in her apartment, she spoke out in opposition to that opinion. She said she thought her friend’s words had a racist overtone.

Come on now with this issue... aren’t there drugs elsewhere? I do not understand it... I simply think it is racism. There are drugs elsewhere and actually much more than here. Downtown there are a lot of narrow streets and there many more problems exist [γίνεται χαμός]. In Nikopoli I can walk safely at 11 o’clock fearing nothing. Would Maria do the same

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<sup>163</sup> This may relate to the lack of entertainment places in the neighbourhood.

<sup>164</sup> Possibly it is more so in the sub-neighbourhood of Efxinoupoli. As evident in the used disposable syringes one finds in some spots in the neighbourhood, the evacuated industries and empty spaces of this neighbourhood are used as hiding places by drug addicts.

elsewhere in this centre of Thessaloniki? Here in the neighbourhood there are two spots where they deal drugs, down at the bridge and up there [pointing to the north of the neighbourhood]... at least here we know where it happens.

Similar to Lelya, a few other FSU Greek residents of Nikopoli mentioned that there is indeed a very small number of FSU Greeks engaged in delinquent behaviours in the neighbourhood, but they claimed that in other areas of the city there is much more criminality. It is also noteworthy that some told me stories evidencing that the social circle of some FSU Greek residents extends to those who are involved in petty crime acts. Anastasia is a young FSU Greek woman who was living next door to the apartment I rented during my first stay in the neighbourhood. Her sister is married to a native Greek, Antonis, who is an electrician. Antonis called Anastasia when his tools were stolen from his car. In Anastasia's words:

[...] there are some of our people who are involved in petty crime but we know that those are four persons that cause all the trouble and that the rest are family people [οικογενειαρχες]. The day before yesterday, Antonis got robbed and he called me asking to help him find his stolen tools. He claimed that it was 'our people' who have robbed him. I made a phone call to find out but they told me 'forget about it. If it had been for a car, we could find out if it was stolen by our people, for such small stuff we cannot do anything'. Antonis was telling me: I am sure it's your people... he gave me a hard time [Τι τραβήξα άσε]...

Vasilis told me a similar story. One of his FSU Greek neighbours told him that if he had the slightest trouble with any of 'their people', he should let him and his cousins know. They told him that he shouldn't worry; they would take care of it. Later in our discussion Vasilis described how, a few years ago, he had had his motorbike stolen and his FSU Greek friends had volunteered to find out who did it. They told him, 'If it is stolen by our own people we will find them and we will fuck them'. They returned after two days and told him that the thieves are not 'their people'. Vasilis told me that the police had been able to find and return the motorbike in the meantime and that they confirmed that it was not stolen by FSU Greeks.

Giorgos, another native resident living in upper Nikopoli,<sup>165</sup> described a similar story. In his case his stolen motorbike was returned to him after his FSU Greek friends went into action. It is very interesting that FSU Greeks spoke about the

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<sup>165</sup> Giorgos was interviewed in the context of the GEITONIES project.

existence of a few delinquent FSU Greeks. Those people were not described as dangerous criminals, and a few FSU Greeks told me that they are able to exert a certain control over them.

Possibly, several FSU Greeks consider Nikopoli as *their* neighbourhood and are thus concerned by any potential negative behaviours by some of *their* people. A few of my informants told me they even had violent quarrels in the neighbourhood with people who attempted to sell drugs to them. Ivanko, described such an instance with some pride. Ivanko works part-time in a family business. Once, when I visited him, I noticed that the awning of his shop had been torn with a knife. I asked him how this happened. Ivanko replied:

-A guy did it and I know who he was. I know the fagot. He did it because I beat him up

-You beat him? why?

-Yes, of course I did. Do you know how many I have beaten up?

-Really but why? for what reason?

-For drugs... he is a drug dealer, an addict too but he was selling drugs too, the bitch [χοπρόσωλο], a forty-year-old man, for fuck's sake...

### **Representations of criminality: The fear of a Russian mafia**

The *vor v zakone* (вор в законе) 'criminal bound by the thief law', was a highly respected criminal who assumed a ruling and arbitrating role within the prison camps of the Soviet Union. The *vor* followed the 'code of the thieves', according to which they should forsake their family, not have family of their own, not own property, not have a legitimate job, and in no case cooperate with the authorities.<sup>166</sup> Their legacy seemed to exert an attraction for a number of young male FSU Greeks. The following account by Dimitris is illustrative:

They say that there is a *vor* in Nikopoli. This is an important tradition. We, the Russo-Pontics, we are not exactly like the Greeks, it is like this Pontic song that goes: 'I am Greek abroad and a foreigner in Greece' (see chapter 7.2, pp. 214). I mean we had some different traditions which are kept by some and it is actually good if they are kept but rightly, so that

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<sup>166</sup> Those commitments were supposed to secure their objective and fair status as judges of the prison's rules of conduct, the *Ponyatiya*, literally the notions. These were a set of symbolic acts and principles of behaviour which were strictly enforced and set the hierarchical relations within the prison. The lowest-cast inmates were subject to constant physical and psychological violence and any contact with them was not only avoided but strictly prohibited. At the other end of the spectrum, the *vor* enjoyed the admiration and respect of all inmates (Varese 2001).

they are fair, that is the important thing. There are some rules and if they are respected that is fair and right. For example, to take care of your words so as not to disturb others, this is something really important. In Russia most of the *vory* were Greeks. And you know that *vor* means thief? Actually this tradition seems to me to be Greek in essence, you know like the kleftes and Armatoli.<sup>167</sup>

Dimitris describes the *vor* legacy/culture as something that needs to be preserved by FSU Greeks; he claims it to be an FSU Greek tradition, although the claim that most *vory* were FSU Greeks is false. Interestingly he also relates it to Greek bandit groups during the Ottoman Empire, in an attempt to claim it as a quintessentially Greek tradition. At the time of my fieldwork, Dimitris had just finished secondary school. Both his father and mother are Greeks from Georgia and they had immigrated to Greece when he was very young. Dimitris had never visited Georgia since then. Most of what he knows about his country of birth and the Greeks living there is through stories by members of his family and other FSU Greeks in Greece.

After the fall of the Soviet regime a new criminal class emerged, including KGB and army veterans, former officials and bureaucrats. The criminals 'provided protection' to businesses through which they controlled a large part of the market and the means of production of the emerging post-Soviet economies. Gradually, the old code-of-honour-based *vory* became extinct, as they were integrated into the new criminal class. The latter took a more business-like approach to organized crime (see Varese, 2001). In Thessaloniki, an FSU Greek *vor* had taken over the leadership of the local criminals who originated in the former Soviet Republics. After breaking the Vor Code, he resigned from his position. The resulting power vacuum ruptured the unity of the illegal groups which became fragmented and organized into independent criminal gangs. Over the following years, power struggles between the groups led to a series of intra-gang assassinations which escalated after 2007 (Kantouris, 2008).

A number of those killings took place in busy areas and impacted on the perception of FSU migrants as connected with a local Mafia. Media representation played a crucial role. For instance, after the killing of a Georgian businessman in the middle of the day in Chalkeon street – opposite the square the migrants call the Russian square – the news coverage included film of the square showing elderly FSU Greeks and other former Soviet republic nationals

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<sup>167</sup> Greek bandit groups during the Ottoman Empire which formed the nucleus of the Greek fighting forces in the Greek war of independence and played a prominent part throughout its duration (see Koliopoulos, 1990).

playing cards and dominos, as well as residents' claims that the criminals dominate their area and that they are afraid in their everyday life.

Such media representations helped build the image of post-Soviet migrants not only as violent but also as involved in criminal activities. Natives of Nikopoli and its adjacent neighbourhoods connected the information about 'a Russian mafia' in the city, which circulated in the press, with the category of 'the Russian' or 'the Russo-Pontic' and projected this onto the local FSU Greeks. Nikopoli is perceived as a dangerous area to a large extent simply because it concentrates FSU Greeks. Several native residents believed that a considerable segment of FSU Greeks in Nikopoli engage in criminal activities such as drug trafficking, and that many FSU Greeks kept guns in their houses. At the same time, people not living there warned me that 'I should take care there', and represented Nikopoli as a no-go area. Vasilis told me he heard such stories before he moved to the area and opened his business there: 'You hear incredible stories that simply do not exist. They [other native Greeks] were telling me: if you open a business in Nikopoli, they [FSU Greeks] will sell protection [σου ζητάνε προστασία]; you know, mafia stuff. Of course nobody came and actually never has anyone stolen a single product from my shop'.

The perception of Nikopoli as a dangerous place and its characterization as a ghetto were also dominant in the schools attended by students from Nikopoli. In 2008, when I was granted access by the Greek Pedagogical institute to conduct research there, both the upper and the lower high school (Lýkio and Gymnásio, respectively) were situated outside the neighbourhood. The following discussion, which took place between sixteen-year-old students, is indicative of the students' perceptions of Nikopoli. I asked them about their knowledge and experiences of the neighbourhood. Soon the discussion focused on the supposed criminality of Nikopoli, which they related to the local FSU Greeks. Students mentioned several incidents they had heard of which in their view supported the idea that Nikopoli is a dangerous place. Natasha, who is FSU Greek, intervened:

Natasha: But I've lived there for 2.5 years and I have never heard nor seen anything strange. Basically, the only thing is that a group of guys hang out close to my house a ...

Mina: Very typical, they [FSU Greeks] always stay in groups

Natasha: Yes, they very often stay outside my house. But I know them, I mean not that we speak... but ok

[Anna interrupts to mention another incident]

Anna: If you go there further than Pick Nick [a local kebab shop] in the second street on the left [she makes an expression indicating that there is a big problem there]... I went there once with my ex. He went into a

house. I heard shouting and stuff. Later on he came out and told me ‘ Do you know why they were shouting? They were fighting over drugs’. I told him ‘Are you serious? And you left me here waiting!’

Natasha: I also live there....

Mina: Where? Do you live there! In Efxinoupoli!

Natasha: Ehh yes, I do not know Efxinoupoli... yes

Anna: Did you forget where you live?

Mina: Further than Pick-Nick!?

Natasha: Yes, but not exactly there but on the other side, a little bit further away...

In the mindset of many people, especially those not living in Nikopoli, Efxinoupoli, which is an exclusively FSU Greek area, is represented as the most dangerous area. Natasha, aware of these stereotypes, was rather hesitant to say she lived there.

In January 2009, a short while before I returned for the second phase of my research, Nikopoli was shocked when a gas station on the ring road just by Nikopoli was robbed and its fifty-year-old Albanian employee murdered in cold blood. The event and its brutality were extensively covered by the local press, as well as by the Greek mass national media. Another murder had happened in the autumn of 2008, this time in one of Nikopoli’s main streets. This murder was the result of a quarrel over an insignificant dispute over cars and the victim was an FSU Greek resident of Nikopoli. Both murders were committed by people who were not residents of Nikopoli.<sup>168</sup>

Feelings of insecurity in Nikopoli were heightened by those events. After a month in the field, I had gathered various testimonies regarding two other murders, which, according to my informants, had occurred during the previous months. It seemed like a self-fulfilling prophecy: the fears expressed by my native informants of a latent trend towards crime in Nikopoli were becoming reality.

At that time, I was being helped in my research by Vaso and Roman with whom I was also collaborating for the GEITONIES fieldwork in Nikopoli. We gathered various testimonies according to which four other murders had taken place. From the information gleaned from our discussions with Nikopoli’s residents, it

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<sup>168</sup> The offender of the second incident was arrested after a year. He was found to be a person of Armenian descent who was involved in a criminal network of drug trafficking and protection rackets.

The murder of the Albanian employee was by an Albanian criminal who was arrested shortly afterwards.

appeared that crime in Nikopoli had begun to acquire dramatic dimensions. It was odd, however, that I could not find any information about the events described to us by our informants. It appeared unlikely that six murders had taken place in the same area within the period of a few months, without any notice in the press. Also, the feeling I was getting from my day-to-day experience in the neighbourhood remained the same as before; I experienced nothing resembling the collective feeling of insecurity described by some of my informants.

Studying the descriptions our informants provided regarding the murders they said had happened, I noticed they possessed certain common characteristics. They were all placed either during the fall, or 'a few weeks ago'. They were also located in the broader area around the location where the quarrel which had in fact resulted in murder had taken place, that fall. All my informants had learned about them from acquaintances living in Nikopoli, and were convinced they were different murders. After a discussion with a policeman, a resident of Nikopoli, we were informed that no other murder had happened there except from the one over the car dispute. This same murder was being transferred in space and time, and repeated at regular intervals with a different script: settling accounts, international mafia, drugs, wanton, blind violence. The murder drifted through the conversations in the neighbourhood, leaving traces and multiplying, confirming for some of Nikopoli's residents the perception of it as a criminal area, 'a Russo-Pontic ghetto'.

The word 'ghetto', in its common-sense use, is also a metaphor which implies fear of anomie and loss of control over an area. Nikopoli's characterization as a Russo-Pontic ghetto becomes an attribute of the neighbourhood and different people, both insiders and outsiders, selectively pick up incidents or elements of the neighbourhood to confirm this characterization. Despite the fact that Nikopoli was not represented as a notorious neighbourhood in the press, it is stigmatized locally, principally due to the concentration of a large number of FSU Greeks. A few residents downplayed the events and spoke about unfounded exaggerations, but the majority was convinced that the area is characterized by excessive criminality. Maria was among them. When I met her during my second stay in the neighbourhood she was convinced that several murders had happened in Nikopoli over the past months. I told her that if this was true then things must have changed drastically in a very short time in Nikopoli, since such incidents were not taking place there before. Maria responded: 'these things also happened in the past, we just never knew about them'.

The idea that Nikopoli is an unsafe neighbourhood was opposed by FSU Greeks, but there was certainly no unified collective opposition to such images of the

neighbourhood. In fact, one of the fictitious murders that we recorded was described to us by an FSU Greek woman. A minority of FSU Greeks also held an image of Nikopoli as an area of excessive crime, especially after the incident of the murder. Dimitris told me:

When I had first come to the neighbourhood it was like ghetto with many strange guys in the cars with tint windows and so on... then it changed. With what happened lately I feared it will become a real ghetto.

When I asked them which aspects of their life in Greece they appreciated the most, the majority of FSU Greeks referred to the feeling of safety. Their experiences in the post-Soviet social environment, where violence was widespread, made them appreciate conditions in Greece in that respect. It also made some of them fear that Nikopoli might descend into a violent area due to lack of policing and its general marginalization. Several residents told me that Nikopoli was being abandoned by the state. The establishment of a police office in the neighbourhood was a common desire of both immigrant and native residents.



# Adopting and negating categories – (un)making groups and identities

## 7.1 Contesting Greekness

### Native Greeks and the ‘False Greeks’

Natives who wanted to highlight the Greekness of the immigrant population in Nikopoli employed the official terms ‘repatriates’ (*palinostoúntes*) and ‘co-ethnics’ (*homogenís*), and less commonly the corrective word ‘Greek-Pontics’ (*ellinopóntií*). They also used the word ‘refugee’, which, in Greek (*prósfygas*) evokes the experience of the 1920s refugees and constitutes a term of honour (Voutira, 2003). Calling FSU Greeks *prósfyges* positively frames their migration and highlights their rightful belonging in the nation, which is further emphasized in the compound word Greek-refugees (*Ellinoprósfyges*).<sup>169</sup>

However, they most frequently called their FSU Greek neighbours ‘Russians’, ‘Russo-phones’ and ‘Russo-Pontics’. The categories ‘Russian’ and ‘Russo-phones’ were used synonymously to refer to people of various FSU backgrounds, rather than people of Russian descent per se. The use of the word ‘Russo-Pontic’ was more ambivalent. In accordance to its literal meaning, it was used to distinguish

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<sup>169</sup>Interestingly, two of my native informants used the word Russian-refugees (*Russoprósfyges*) to the same purpose. Although literally this word does not signify any relation to a Greek lineage, it was evoked by them as a positive alternative to the word ‘Russo-Pontic’ without any intention to cast doubt on their Greekness. The Russo-Pontic label is generally avoided by the people who wish to speak positively about the FSU Greeks.

the FSU Greeks of Pontic descent from the ‘native Pontics’, the descendants of the 1920s Pontic refugees. As opposed to ‘the Russian’, it was occasionally evoked to discern the Greek from the non-Greek FSU immigrants. However, most commonly it was used similarly to the other two categories: as an all-inclusive label for the whole Russian-speaking community in the neighbourhood which expressed a doubt about their claimed Greekness. The words of Stathis are indicative:

The Russo-Pontics... of course there are different ways to refer to them and I know that the proper one is ‘*homogenís* immigrants from the FSU’. However I call them Russo-Pontics because I know that they are not Greeks. The majority are Georgian, Armenian etc., only a few of them have Greek roots and Greek consciousness.

In the dominant native perception, Greek-descent immigrants comprise a minority in Nikopoli, estimated from 5% to 20% of the total immigrant population.<sup>170</sup> These estimations reverse the actual population composition in the neighbourhood. According to the GEITONIES randomly selected sample of 102 immigrant households, Greek-descent immigrants account for more than 80 per cent of the total immigrant population in Nikopoli. The Greekness of a large segment of the FSU Greek population in Nikopoli was denied by the native residents.

Native residents doubted the Greekness of their FSU Greek neighbours with reference to their supposedly insufficient Greek language skills, their speaking Russian or other non-Greek languages in public, the fact that ‘they spend long hours drinking and chatting in the streets’, the television satellite discs in their houses, and posters and banners in the Russian language.<sup>171</sup> Phrases such as ‘if they were real Greeks, they would not be watching Russian television’, ‘...they would not choose to speak Russian’, and so on, were commonly echoed by my native contacts. These instances were not referred to as the results of acculturation or as indicative of the ties which FSU Greeks have developed with the countries in which they grew up and were socialized. Their cultural difference was thought of as expressing their supposedly ‘non-Greek consciousness’ and was

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<sup>170</sup> Only 12 out of 58 native residents, either asked in the context of the GEITONIES survey or met during my fieldwork in Nikopol, acknowledged the majority of the Russian-speaking immigrants in the neighbourhood as Greeks.

<sup>171</sup> Fewer people made reference to immigrants’ supposedly non-Greek physical characteristics to support their claims. Michalis, himself of Pontic origin, told me: ‘It is quite obvious. When you see the other guy being blond you can understand. We, Pontics, are all dark haired.’ However, since the blond immigrants in the neighbourhood comprise a negligible minority, such comments were uncommon.

taken as proof of their lack of actual Greek descent. Their Greekness was essentially challenged in racial terms.

The doubts of native Greeks about the Greekness of FSU Greeks responded to two beliefs they harboured. The first is the assumption that there is a universal Greek culture which characterizes all Greeks around the globe. The second is the conviction that a Greek who happens to have lost (aspects of) his or her Greek culture naturally feels the urge to regain it. According to this thinking, FSU Greeks who for instance ‘prefer speaking’ Russian to Greek in public cannot be Greeks.

Information about a restricted number of non-Greek immigrants who managed to acquire Greek citizenship by passing as FSU Greeks, the so-called issue of ‘illegal hellenizations’ (παράνομες ελληνοποιήσεις), had already attracted some media attention in the 1990s. However, it was most probably the alleged 2000s voting scandal (see chapter 4.2, pp. 89-91) that had contributed to popularizing the belief that this was a widespread practice. This belief was widely shared by the native residents in Nikopoli, who in many cases discussed their views about their immigrant neighbours with reference to the state policy. Tasia, a middle-aged lady working in a family business and living in old Nikopoli, told me the following in the context of a conversation about her daughter’s university entry exams:

even in university the ‘Russians’ are prioritized (*sic*)<sup>172</sup> and elsewhere they are promoted. In the public sector... They have filled the civil sector, and they are not Greeks, they are Chechens, Armenians... Turko-phones, how do they call those? [referring to the FSU Greeks from Tsalka]. The postman was here the other day. I told him, ‘you come everyday and you serve me, take a rest, let me offer you a cup of coffee’. He told me they all have identity cards with different names. They are the catastrophe of Greece if they do not leave, the state will collapse, the funds will get empty. In fact they are leaving the country and they are taking pensions from here, how long have they worked in Greece to be entitled for a pension?<sup>173</sup>

Tasia challenged the authenticity of the FSU Greek immigrants’ Greekness in order to question their entitlement to support by the state. Conversely, Fotini, a

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<sup>172</sup> Only a number of positions are reserved to foreign graduates of Greek descent, not only FSU Greek, and are given after written examinations in Greek language.

<sup>173</sup> FSU Greeks cannot transfer their pension rights from the former Soviet Union. The elderly receive a pension from the OGA, a public insurance company, which equals the minimum Greek pension.

middle-aged native Greek lady of Pontic descent also living in old Nikopoli, attested to the Greekness of her older tenants to justify their benefits:

they mentioned the word Greece and they got emotional, they even named their little girl Athena. They fully deserve [χαλάλι] the benefits they are taking in order to build their life here since they are Greeks.

Just as with the majority of native Greeks in Nikopoli, Tasia and Fotini did not question the ideology underling the state policy. The ‘moral obligation’ of the Greek state to support Greeks ‘returning home’ was not contested by them. It was its inability to prevent the inflow of ‘false Greeks’ that they condemned.

The ‘false Greeks’ figured prominently in discussions by native residents in Nikopoli about the immigrants in the neighbourhood. They formed an imagined category that accommodated the negative attitudes of the natives regarding the local immigrants without challenging the official criteria of national belonging and dominant perceptions about the supposed qualities of Greeks. As illustrated in a number of quotes in chapter 6, the alleged false Greekness of the immigrants in Nikopoli was used by native residents to justify negative attitudes about them. Conversely, their perceived aggressive, unkind, and unsociable behaviour was presented as evidence that they are not Greeks. Simplistically, the dominant idea could be articulated as follows: they are not nice neighbours so they can’t be Greek; they are not Greek and that’s why they are not nice neighbours.

The evocation of the ‘false Greek’ category not only secured the ideology of Greekness but helped reinforce it through an attribution of ‘good characteristics’ to ‘true Greek’ immigrants and bad characteristics to the ‘false Greeks’. Speaking the Pontic Greek dialect, following Greek religious or national customs, as well as fluency in Greek were all referred to as convincing evidence of an immigrant’s Greekness. Nevertheless, in everyday life, reference to the abovementioned criteria was made in a very flexible way. Native Greeks used them selectively to exclude those exhibiting behaviours not approved by them. For instance, when a person speaks the Greek Pontic dialect, this alone made him/her a repatriate from the former Soviet Union in the eyes of the natives. Proficiency in Pontic Greek is very convincing proof of an immigrant’s Greek descent since this language is not widely spoken in Greece and it is highly improbable that she/he could have learned it in Greece. But when she/he is seen (by others) speaking Russian in the public space and (as is common for male FSU Greeks) drinking beer with friends in the street, he/she is then labelled Russo-Pontic or simply Russian. The process of selective exclusion is illustrated clearly in the following account.

Maria, my neighbour during my first stay in Nikopoli, had a rather positive image about the FSU Greeks living in the immediate surroundings of her house. She had told me she has no complaints about any of her neighbours and that people are very friendly towards her. One day I met her by coincidence at an internet café situated very close to her house. She told me she was facing some problems with her internet connection. I offered to help her. When we went to her place she told me in a very upset manner:

The situation with the internet connection has caused me a lot of problems. I have to go and give my money to the Russians. I do not want to go there. I do not feel safe. Last night I was there and somebody came with an angry face. He told me to leave the computer I was using because he wanted to chat with his girlfriend.

Her 'good FSU Greek immigrant neighbours' had turned into 'Russians', or more precisely the misbehaving FSU Greeks had turned to Russian so as not harm her positive self-image about Greeks.

Similarly, Vasilis used the category of 'false Greeks' to defend his FSU Greek neighbours. Like Maria he was among the minority of natives who favoured the immigrants in Nikopoli. Owning a business in a rather central location of new Nikopoli brought him in daily contact with many residents. He was negative about the native residents in old Nikopoli. In his view they are very closed and extremely prejudiced towards their FSU Greeks neighbours whom he described as *philótimi*, helpful and honest people. He went on to explain to me that the rare negative behaviours, for which the whole immigrant community is criticized, are in fact perpetrated by the 'false Greeks'. I expressed my confusion about those 'false Greeks'. I told him that everybody is speaking about them but I had not met any, and I asked him whether he had. Vasilis replied positively, but the person he named was one whom he had just described as 'among the nicest guys in the neighbourhood'. In certain cases the process of selective exclusion led my informants into inconsistencies and contradictions. However, these were not sufficient to challenge the ideologies of Greekness that framed their perceptions of the immigrants in the neighbourhood. In the mindset of the majority of native residents, the 'false Greeks' were the bad immigrants and the 'real Greeks' the good ones.

### **The double frame of reference in the FSU Greek reception**

As mentioned in the fifth chapter, a large share of the native population in Nikopoli are descendants of the 1920s refugees. The Greekness of their violently

uprooted ancestors was also challenged at the time of their settlement. The influx of a vast population in a desperate condition during and after the ‘Asia Minor catastrophe’ aggravated the already harsh socio-economic condition of the local Greeks. The compassion with which the natives initially welcomed the refugees soon turned to open rejection and hostility. The nativist ire focused on the refugees’ distinct cultural and linguistic features. People from the native population called the refugees ‘Turkish seed’ (τουρκόσποροι), baptized in yogurt (γιαουρτοβαφτισμένοι),<sup>174</sup> and ‘Turkish born’ (τουρκομερίτες) (Mavrokordatos 1983). According to Mavrokordatos (1983) the native-refugee division in the interwar period should be treated as an ethnic one.

Hirschon (1989) points our attention to the internal regional divisions of the 1920s refugee population. She makes reference to four categories: the refugees from the Ionian coast, those from Constantinople, the Pontic refugees, and the refugees from the interior of Asia Minor. Within the refugee community, distinct stereotypes were employed for each of those four groups. For instance, the characterization ‘born in Turkey’ was reserved for those from the interior of Anatolia. No ethnographic research has been done on the interaction between the refugees and the natives, and therefore the significance of the internal division of the refugee community in their interactions with the native society is not recorded. Since the regional internal division of the refugee population was familiar to the native population, one may hypothesize that the ethnic slurs mentioned by Mavrokordatos were not addressed at the entire refugee population.<sup>175</sup> Possibly, the distinct language of the refugees from the interior of Asia Minor, and to a lesser degree that of the Pontics,<sup>176</sup> made them more vulnerable to attacks on their national identity. According to my research in Nikopoli, the native population does not make any distinction for the FSU Greeks in terms of the immigrants’ origins. That possibly marks a difference between the reception of the FSU Greeks and the 1920s refugees.

Moreover, the reception of the FSU Greeks and the 1920s refugees is clearly distinct in that the abusive epithets used for the latter do not express a complete denial of their Greekness, but rather a doubt about their cultural and racial purity. A complete denial of the refugees’ Greekness would have been in any case very difficult for the natives to maintain, given the context of their uprooting. The context of reception of the FSU Greeks who immigrated after 1990 was

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<sup>174</sup> On account of refugees’ fondness for yoghurt, a characteristic of Turkish cuisine.

<sup>175</sup> Possibly, attacks on their Greekness were not addressed at all to Constantinopolitan Greeks, due to the symbolic significance of the city for the Greek national narrative.

<sup>176</sup> The vast majority of the Greeks from the interior of Asia minor were Turkish-speaking. The majority of Pontics spoke the Greek Pontic dialect and a considerable segment spoke Turkish.

substantially different. The FSU Greek 'return' took place together with the mass undocumented immigration of the 1990s. The natives, including the descendants of the refugees, re-conceptualized their country not only as a refuge for the community of Greek descent, but also as a desired destination for non-Greek nationals. Unable or not willing to differentiate between Greek and non-Greek FSU immigrants, natives thought of a large segment of the FSU Greek population as imposters unjustly benefiting from the state provisions by passing as Greeks. The non-Greek immigrants from the former Soviet Union (i.e. Georgians, Russians, Armenians) constitute a negative frame of reference for FSU Greeks. When FSU Greeks do not meet the expectations of the native Greeks they are represented as 'false Greeks' and lumped together with them in the category of Russians and Russo-Pontics. Although the 1920s refugees were distinguished in terms of their regional origin, the FSU Greeks are caught in an arbitrary distinction between real and false Greeks.

The importance of the migration context is also highlighted by the different way that native Greeks saw the 1960s Soviet Greek immigrants (see chapter 5.2, pp. 102-107). Although in Nikopoli native residents initially called them Russians in a derogatory way and denigrated them for 'their cultural differences', they did not doubt their Greekness. Why would one immigrate to Greece, a poor country at that time, if one was not Greek?<sup>177</sup>

Contrary to this, however, native Greeks expect the post-1990s FSU Greeks to prove their Greekness against a background of a general distrust. If FSU Greeks manage to do this, they are then placed within a long national history of the co-ethnic migrations and refugee inflows that shaped the contemporary Greek state. Natives positively relate them to the 1920s refugees,<sup>178</sup> who constitute a positive frame of reference for them. It is in this context that native Greeks' characterization of FSU Greeks as refugees is meaningful (see Voutira, 2003a; 2003b).

Now, however, after almost a century, the conflictual experience of the settlement of the 1920s refugees is forgotten. The official re-narration of history, according to which the skilful 1920s refugees managed despite all odds to tame their fates and inject new blood into the old Greece (Giannakopoulos, 1992), is hard to compete with. How do FSU Greeks formulate their FSU background in such a constraining reception context? Are they aware of the denial of their Greekness by the natives and how do they respond? How do they speak about the 'false

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<sup>177</sup> An important factor in accepting the 1960 FSU Greeks as real Greeks would also have been that the majority of the 1960s FSU Greeks spoke Pontic.

<sup>178</sup> It is in that context that the characterization of FSU Greeks as refugees is meaningful.

Greeks' category? To answer these questions, in the remainder of this subchapter I will look into the ways FSU Greeks present and negotiate their Greekness and their position in Greek society.

### **FSU Greeks and the Greek state**

In our discussions, FSU Greeks were very open and did not paint a rosy image of their experiences in Greece. Most had complaints about their socio-economic situation, and they were frustrated with the Greek state which they described as inefficient, corrupt, and unsupportive of their community. The phrase 'my main problem is with the state rather than with the people' was echoed by several of my informants.

Interestingly, the state was claimed by both native and FSU Greeks to be the main generator of the problems discussed. On the one hand, native Greeks consider that it unjustly favours 'false FSU Greeks' who in their perspective have managed in large numbers to pass as FSU Greeks. On the other hand, FSU Greeks considered it responsible for their vulnerable socio-economic position in Greece. The inability of the highly educated FSU Greeks to find jobs that matched their qualifications was an experience that acquired symbolic significance within the FSU Greek community. Several FSU Greeks referred to it as a proof of the exploitation FSU Greeks are facing in 'the fatherland'.

FSU Greek people I spoke to compared their situation with the FSU Jews and FSU Germans, who in their view were more easily able to make a living after migration to Israel and Germany respectively. They told me that those two countries, especially the former, had well-organized reception plans that provided support to newcomers. They contrasted these to the state-initiated settlement plan in Thrace, of which they were very critical. Their criticism focused on the state authorities' choice of the border area and their inability to deliver what they had promised. They further claimed that the Greek state profited by misappropriating EU funds, which were intended to benefit them. Ippolit's words about his experience working as a street vendor<sup>179</sup> are indicative of the bitterness with which several FSU Greeks spoke about the Greek state.

That was the absolute embarrassment [*η απόλυτη ξεφτίλα*], we had to sell our things in the streets to get some money. I spend nights in the street to reserve our place in the open market for the coming day. I was a young

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<sup>179</sup> For this practice see chapter 4, pp. 84

guy at that time, how can you expect me to manage my studies? This is the help we got from the Greeks and the Greek State.

The FSU Greek priest of the 'Russian church' also blamed the state for the negative image FSU Greeks have acquired in Greece. He proposed that it ought to have launched a media campaign to present diversity as an enrichment of society rather than a threat. He told me that it could also have capitalized on peoples' expertise stemming from their FSU education in a way that would both have helped upgrade their socio-economic position and enhance their public image. He referred, for instance, to education on classical dance and music, which in his opinion is underdeveloped in Greece and in which many FSU Greeks are specialized. He said that the state could have opened an art academy with FSU Greek teachers and have promoted it as an FSU Greek academy.

Only two of the FSU Greeks I met in Nikopoli were positive about the Greek state. Giouras and Nikitas claimed that the Greek state as well as the local authorities are doing their utmost to support the FSU Greeks. Those two people also represented the relationship between FSU and native Greeks in a much more positive manner than the rest of my informants. Giouras is an FSU Greek in his fifties who was paid to undertake bureaucratic work for other FSU Greeks. He also acted as an informal mediator between the local community in Efxinoupoli and the Municipality of Efkarpia. Nikitas is a convenience store owner of approximately the same age. Giouras and Nikitas emigrated at the end of the 1980s from Kazakhstan; they are both of Pontic origin and speakers of the Pontic dialect.

Giouras's more positive attitude could be related to his status of a 'cultural broker' (Wolf, 1956) ; possibly, he communicated a positive image of both groups due to his mediating role between the FSU Greek residents in Efxinoupoli and the local authorities.<sup>180</sup> Nikitas was a more idiosyncratic case. In fact, his

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<sup>180</sup> I attempted to assess whether such a discourse was generally embraced by people involved in institutions that aim to facilitate inter-group communication or deal with the formal presentation of the community. In so doing I had to leave the neighbourhood space since no such institutions exist in Nikopoli. I spoke to five people, four of whom were engaged in a cultural association, and an FSU Greek employee in the Centre for the Study and Development of the Hellenic Culture of the Black Sea. Although, officially, numerous FSU Greek associations exist in Thessaloniki, it was difficult to get in contact with them. At the time of my research they were inactive or did not have visiting offices. My tentative findings, based on a very restricted number of people, suggest that the people involved with such institutions were not necessarily more positive about the state and its reception of FSU Greeks. Only one of my interviewees stated - immediately after I introduced myself - that he was not willing to reproduce a discourse about the difficulties and troubles which in his view prevailed among the FSU community. He told me he found such discussions

discourse serves as a nice example to illustrate how my informants *did not* speak. Once we were talking in his store when his friend, Konstantin, came to invite him to play cards. Nikitas has a small room next to the convenience store where friends gather to chat, play, and drink. We went there all together and continued our discussion. Nikitas introduced me to Konstantin. He was very enthusiastic about my project and very eager to add to the discussion:

Nikitas: [...] not all of deportees eventually returned to Abkhazia. Some stayed in Kazakhstan. They had built their houses, their children had married there. Other had built up fortunes [κάνανε περιουσίες]. Kazakhstan is a big country, more than three times Greece.

Konstantin: No, much bigger. It is three and a half times bigger than France so imagine it in relation to Greece. In order to cross the country you need more than two days.

Nikitas: Yes, ok that's true it was the biggest country in the former Soviet Union after Russia.

Konstantin: Of course, since it reaches up to Afghanistan, it's not only big but it has resources, mines, uranium – do you know how valuable uranium is ... like gold.

Nikitas: Yes, ok!

Konstantin: In that country there is also lake Aral. It was a huge lake. Then two rivers that fed it were redirected and the lake started shrinking. Do you know how many boats were stranded on the land?

Nikitas (in an upset manner): Manolis does not care about the history of Kazakhstan. You should tell him about the Pontics [referring to the FSU Greeks].

Me: No, those issues are really interesting too as they concern the history of FSU Greeks as well.

Nikitas: Yes, but what he tells you, you can open a book and read it, but the story of the Pontics is something we know from personal experience [ζήσαμε στο περσί μας].

Konstantin changed the subject and started narrating stories about the expulsion of Greeks to Kazakhstan. He told me that when the deportees were being transferred to Kazakhstan, at one point they started playing songs with the *kemenche*, the Pontic lyre. The Russian soldiers told them to not sing in Greek, so they started singing in Russian. He sung the song to me. Nikitas intervened again and told him to say the lyrics in Greek so that I understand. Later, another friend of Nikitas came and reminded him that they had to leave. Before leaving,

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unfruitful. To make sure we would not be discussing such issues he asked me to submit to him on paper the questions I wanted to pose.

Nikitas stressed once more to Konstantin that he should tell me stories of the Pontics and not about Russia, Kazakhstan, and the Soviet Union.

Unlike Konstantin, who was rather obedient to his censures, others were not. They teased or simply ignored him. Another time, when a friend of his, Pavlos, narrated in bitter tones his extremely negative experiences with lawyers, construction companies, and property owners, which he had undergone in his attempt to build his house, Nikitas reconsidered his positive opinion about the Greek state. Pavlos had bought an apartment in a house that was under construction. He did not pay the full amount. According to the agreement he made with the seller, he would work in the construction of the house in exchange for the remaining amount he had to pay for his apartment. When the house was built his apartment was sold to another person. Pavlos did not have official papers for his purchase. After many years in the court, Pavlos lost the case. As well as losing all his savings, Pavlos also developed serious health problems resulting from personal stress. He told me that his migration to Greece was his worst lifetime decision. Nikitas did not challenge him. He turned to me and told me ‘You see? That is the help we get here from the Greek state.’

### **Greece and Russia in the discourse of FSU Greeks**

During an interview with an elderly couple at their house in Efxinoupoli, the wife asked me, ‘Why do you Greeks do not like the Russians?’<sup>181</sup> Her husband intervened to tell her that native Greeks side with the Americans and that’s why they do not like Russians. Her question was not meant to be confrontational, but expressed a deep wonder. I asked her why she thought this, and she told me ‘because Greeks are speaking negatively about Russians’. The negative comments which the old woman had heard or heard other FSU Greeks complaining about, probably did not concern native Greeks’ images of Russia and Russians in Russia. The latter is generally positive, in contrast to dominant negative discourse about the USA and Americans (see Stephanidis, 2007). The comments in question

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<sup>181</sup> The views of FSU Greeks about Russians were generally neutral to positive whereas they were polarized for different peoples of the Caucasus. According to my fieldwork data they depended to a large extent on the particular area from which FSU Greeks originated. For instance, people from Tsalka and Abkhazia were extremely anti-Georgian and more positive about Armenians. Greeks from Opret, a village to the south-west of the city of Marneouli, as well as people who lived in big cities, had more positive attitudes about both Georgians and Armenians. Finally, as it would be expected, people of mixed origin were favourable towards their non-Greek ethnic peers. It is also interesting to note that several national stereotypes that were employed in FSU, such as ‘the cunning Armenian’, ‘the lazy Georgian’ and ‘the naïf Russian’, were also used in Greece. They were not only addressed to immigrants from those countries but also to FSU Greeks of mixed backgrounds.

most probably targeted the category of ‘Russian immigrants’, which, as explained earlier, is a generic stereotypical negative label used for the FSU immigrants.

When I started my fieldwork I expected that in their encounters with natives, FSU Greeks would attempt to build upon their common Greek descent. In that context, I anticipated that they would try to downplay those aspects of their identity that mark a difference between them and native Greeks, as recorded by Veikou (2001) for Greek Albanians. My field experience did not confirm my hypothesis. Just like Konstantin was quoted earlier, many people I spoke to told me stories or gave me information about the republics where they had lived before. They were eager to share with me their experiences in the Soviet Union. The fact that I have travelled to Russia was highly valued by the majority of my FSU Greek informants, as was the fact that during my second fieldtrip I could understand and speak some very basic Russian.

FSU Greeks are not secretive about the Russian influence in their upbringing. In my focus group at the ‘Russian church’, I asked the participants which aspects of their lives in the FSU they wished to preserve in Greece. An FSU Greek woman in her 50s replied ‘our language’, with reference to Russian, and the rest of the group intervened to say that this would happen in any case since they mostly speak in Russian in their daily life. The participants in the focus group were regular followers of the service in the ‘Russian church’. In our previous discussions, some of them spoke to me about their love for Russian culture. Their responses to my question might indicate to a certain extent their attachment to Russian culture. Yet it was also indicative of a more general trend among the FSU Greek community. As mentioned, the majority of first-generation FSU Greek immigrants speak Russian among each other. With the exceptions of Giouras and Nikitas, who insisted on replying in Greek to their friends when I was present, people switched to Greek only when they wished to include me in their discussion.

A large segment of my respondents presented the Soviet education system as superior to the Greek. They also took pride in the rich Russian culture and cherished the state support for art and its popularity among people in the former Soviet Union. Stefanos, who had studied fine arts in the former Soviet Union, told me ‘there is no national fine arts tradition in Greece... here you only have *Bouzoukia*’<sup>182</sup>. He further told me that a fine arts school close to his hometown in

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<sup>182</sup> The bouzouki is a Greek popular musical instrument. The word *bouzoukia*, the plural form of bouzouki, is also used to refer to the entertainment nightclubs where live contemporary Greek music is performed.

Russia had been founded by an FSU Greek. He implied that FSU Greeks could progress in FSU despite their minority status, but not in Greece.

Similarly to Stefanos, a number of FSU Greeks evoked a symbolically intriguing 'we'/'you' distinction between themselves, as related to a nation that is in effect a superpower, and natives in Greece. They spoke with admiration of the technological advancements achieved by the Soviet regime and the political influence of present-day Russia. Without underplaying their Greekness, they selectively referred to their experience as subjects in the former Soviet Union as a source of pride and a means to challenge the denigrating attitudes of native Greeks (see also Voutira, 2006). Rather than building on their common national descent, they asserted their difference from native Greeks to support their superiority. Although immigration signified downwards mobility for most FSU Greeks, placing them on the lower ranks of the Greek socio-economic ladder, feelings of superiority to native Greeks were widespread in their community.<sup>183</sup>

Several of my informants tried to bridge the Russian and the Greek aspects of their identity which had been made to seem incompatible by the denigrating discourse by Greeks about 'the Russians'. They did so by highlighting the commonalities between the two nations. They referred to the common religion and the role of Cyril and Methodius in developing the Russian script. Those who were more proud of their Greekness claimed that Russia owes almost everything to Greece and bitterly regretted the fact that present-day Greece has lost its cultural influence. Stefanos told me:

Why for so many years there has been no development in Greece? Because Greeks are only looking at the past and do nothing for the present. I was speaking to a Greek guy, explaining to him 'Ok the Greeks did many things in the past but what will remain from contemporary Greeks? Only the advertisements. I did not expect Greece to be like that. Everyone wants to step on the other. You should not stand out. They will help you but if you stand out they will trip you up.

In chapter 3, I described how in areas without compact Greek populations and in urban centres in the former Soviet Union the ethnic identity of Greeks was largely stripped of its cultural aspect and was based on images of classical Greece transmitted through state education. One of my informants had immigrated to Greece for study reasons after winning a scholarship that was provided to high

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<sup>183</sup> In that there is a similarity between them and the 1920s Minor Asia refugees who also presented their identity as superior to that of native Greeks. For the 1920s Minor Asia refugees case (see Hirschon 1989).

school graduates of Greek descent in the former Soviet Union. He told me that his images of Greece collided with his experiences when he came to Greece.

I had no idea what I would encounter in Greece. The image I had about Greece was based on my knowledge about ancient Greece. Now, if I leave Greece I will have a twofold perception. On the one hand, I will still think of Greece like I used to do in Russia,<sup>184</sup> through the history of ancient Greece but also Byzantium, the Greek revolution, and the Greek community in Russia. On the other hand, I will think of it according to my experiences here; a country with relaxed rhythms, which usually annoy me, smiling people and also cunning people, cunning not necessarily in a negative sense.

Other FSU Greeks told me that they expected to meet people like Socrates, Plato, or Leonidas, and were disappointed by their first-hand impressions of contemporary Greece.

Life in Greece was considered stressful and competitive, especially by those who immigrated early and did not have extended experiences of the post-Soviet era. People were also critical of interpersonal relations in Greece. They missed the unselfishness which they felt characterized interpersonal relations in their previous homelands; friendships in Greece were described as instrumental and superficial. Many FSU Greeks also lamented the deterioration of interpersonal relations within their community after migration. They felt that jealousy and competitiveness had become prominent within their community.<sup>185</sup>

FSU Greeks' criticism of social life in Greece also concerned the behaviour of the youth towards adults, which was thought of as disrespectful and impolite. They focused especially on parent-child relationships and claimed that the upbringing of children was generally better 'there'. People originating from urban centres focused on the quality of state education. People from villages focused more on traditional values transmitted through family. Especially the elderly from closed communities were critical of the excessive freedom they felt was provided to teenagers in Greece. They commented negatively on the fact that they stay out in the streets until late, that many of them smoke, and that couples kiss in public spaces. Among people from the villages, views were less uniform on gender

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<sup>184</sup> Several FSU Greeks referred to the former Soviet Union and the successor states as Russia.

<sup>185</sup> Others, however, presented the in-group jealousy as a characteristic of Greek communities also in the Soviet Union. They contrasted the FSU Greek community to the Jewish and the Armenian ones which they described as more solidarist. In-group competitiveness was presented by them as a common negative trait of Greeks worldwide.

relations. Some people favoured what they perceived as more equal relations between men and women in Greece while others complained that native Greek men were too soft and women too emancipated.

Comparing Russia to Greece, FSU Greeks did not always favour their former country. They cherished many aspects of their lives in Greece, most prominently the sense of security they told me they feel in their new homeland. They told me that human life is more valued in Greece and that people are more caring. They described social life in Greece as less violent and levels of criminality substantially lower in relation to Russia. Many of my informants also positively commented on the leisurely pace of life in Greece, saying that Greeks 'do not drink too much and that they know how to have fun'. Others valued the fact that the Greek state is less authoritarian and that you can demonstrate and protest for your rights. The state was also considered to be less corrupt, and a few of my informants told me that although the Greek welfare state is weak, it at least provides its citizens with some basic support, which is lacking in the Soviet successor states.

Several FSU Greeks criticized people from their own community as well as non-Greek immigrants from the former Soviet Union who are overly negative about Greece and Greeks. Their criticism of other FSU Greeks expressed a division in perceptions about the strategies and presentation of their group. Many FSU Greeks accused their ethnic peers of complaining too much and being socially closed. They considered this an attitude that does not help them to progress in life and which harms their collective image (cf. chapter 6.1, pp. 143). Their criticism of non-Greek immigrants was different. It was voiced from the standpoint of the Greek as towards a foreigner. When I first heard one of my FSU Greek contacts in Nikopoli blaming some of his Russian friends for being too proud and ungrateful, I was surprised. Due to the focus of my research on their relationship with other native Greeks I had lost sight of their twofold belonging: while their origin in the former Soviet Union marked the boundary between them and native Greeks, their belongingness to the Greek nation delimited their relation to the non-Greek FSU immigrants. Hence, while they defended their Soviet background to Greeks, they also defended Greece and Greeks to non-Greek immigrants.

### **Rejecting the Russo-Pontic and the Russian label**

The majority of FSU Greeks will not leave it unchallenged if they are called Russo-Pontic; they prefer, and demand, to be called Pontic or Greek instead. This is known to most native Greeks, who generally avoid addressing them as Russo-Pontics, in order to avoid confrontation. Many times, I heard my FSU Greek

informants claiming that ‘Russo-Pontics do not exist; only Pontics<sup>186</sup> and Russians do’. This is not accurate in that there are a number of FSU Greeks of mixed Russian and Pontic origin; as might be expected, those are more positive about the the Russo-Pontic label. Moreover, the literal meaning of the word ‘Russo-Pontic’ need not only be interpreted as indicating a person of mixed origin, but also as signifying a Pontic Greek from Russia or a Pontic Greek partaking of Russian culture.

Taking into account that most FSU Greeks acknowledge a Russian and/or Soviet influence in their culture and that they are proud of their difference from the rest of the Greeks, their fierce rejection of the Russo-Pontic label at first sight appears puzzling. As was also explained to me by the priest of the ‘Russian church’, who was among the minority of FSU Greeks who did not oppose the label, there is nothing inherently negative in the word itself.

I have no problem with the word ‘Russo-Pontic’. It is a word that indicates our Pontic descent and the fact that we emigrated from the former Soviet Union. Besides, we do have satellite televisions for watching Russian programs, we listen to Russian music, and we read Russian press; it is simply a name, I do not see why it should be seen as a negative word.

However, the reason why FSU Greeks do not accept the Russo-Pontic label does not concern the literal meaning of the word. They reject it because it has emerged as a stigmatizing/pejorative term.

The emergence of this label as a stigmatizing term points to the existence of a negative public discourse about FSU Greeks that has developed in parallel with and contrary to media and political representations of this same group of people.<sup>187</sup> Why and how has such a discourse developed? Although this question goes beyond the framework of my research, a few remarks can be made here. Given that the discourse on Russo-Pontics did not figure in the national press and television, it was not regularized and typified at the national level. The

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<sup>186</sup> Analogously, those who rejected the Pontic identity (see chapter 7.2), claimed that only Greeks and Russians exist.

<sup>187</sup> Indeed, the case of Nikopoli hints that the contrast is perceived as such more by the analyst than the people themselves. In the mindset of the majority of the native Greeks in Nikopol there was a clear division between the ‘false’ and the ‘true Greeks’. Their perceptions of the ‘true FSU Greeks’ were in accordance with the positive official discourse. Yet the fact remains: FSU Greeks were positively framed by politicians and media and at the same time thought of and discussed about in a negative way by native Greeks, at least in Thessaloniki.

content of this discourse differs from place to place and is not equally intense in all places at any given time.

For instance, an FSU Greek informant of mine told me that natives in the Peloponnese, where he worked when he first came to Greece, were positively predisposed towards FSU Greeks. He contrasted their attitude to that of natives in Thessaloniki, implying that native Greeks in the Peloponnese do not speak about FSU Greeks in the way that people from Thessaloniki do. It is worth noting that the Peloponnese has a limited number of FSU Greek immigrants. Similarly, Sakis, a native Greek doctor from Athens who did his studies in Thessaloniki, told me that he developed an idea of 'the Russo-Pontic' when he moved to Thessaloniki. I met Sakis outside the context of my research. When he learned the subject of my PhD he told me 'Very interesting. But really tell me, who are those FSU Greeks after all? Because you know... when one speaks of Russo-Pontics in Thessaloniki you think of mafia or something.'

In Thessaloniki a negative discourse on the Russo-Pontics seems to be quite widespread, possibly connected to the overrepresentation of FSU Greeks there. We may enquire into the reasons why such a negative discourse has developed by looking at its local articulations in a place such as in Nikopoli. In the previous chapter I provided evidence regarding how the native Greeks residents of Nikopoli negatively assessed 'the cultural difference' of FSU Greeks and 'their behaviour'. Encounters similar to those in Nikopoli would most probably have given rise to the stereotype of the Russo-Pontic. Yet it would be too simplistic to consider that the general discussion in Thessaloniki about FSU Greeks is an aggregation and a result of different local discourses on them. It is more than that. From the moment an image of a group of people coalesces, however vaguely, opinions of and experiences with 'this group of people' are explained in relation to this image.

Moreover, such an image is not only shaped through the experience of living together. It is fed by different flows of information that are used to assess such experiences and support pre-existing opinions. For instance, media references to the 'illegal hellenizations' (see chapter 4.2, pp. 89-91) mediated native Greeks' perceptions of FSU Greeks and intensified their suspicions of their supposed false Greekness. Furthermore, the official discourse on FSU Greeks might have been positive, yet the framing of migration in general and of non-Greek migration from the former Soviet Union in particular was not. Given that many native Greeks denied the Greekness of FSU Greeks, their negative views of them were related to broader discussions about a supposed 'invasion of immigrants to Greece'. It is in that context that several native Greeks accused immigrants of

‘taking the jobs of native Greeks’ and ‘threatening the social order of the country’ with their alleged engagement in criminal activities.

The native Greeks in Nikopoli not only contributed to a negative discussion about FSU Greeks in the city of Thessaloniki, but were also influenced by it. Their assessment of their FSU Greek neighbours was mediated by a diffused negative public opinion of the Russo-Pontics. It has been shown that the image of the FSU Greeks in Nikopoli as aggressive people was strong, sustained, and augmented through gossip and the spread of rumours. This image impeded contact between the two communities, since native Greeks expected FSU Greeks to react aggressively for the slightest reason. They also believed that a considerable segment of them engage in criminal activities, and several of my native contacts told me that they feel insecure in the neighbourhood.

The Russo-Pontic label not only includes the stereotype of FSU immigrants as aggressive and prone to criminality. As described earlier, depending on the context in which it is used it also expresses the latent doubt of native Greeks about the true Greek origin of FSU Greeks. It is also for that reason that they ask to be called simply Pontic or Greeks instead. Several of my informants got very emotional in describing how they feel when Greeks doubt their Greekness; as one of them said, it is ‘like being hit with a rock in the heart’. They told me that the reasons why natives deny their Greekness has to do with historical ignorance. Many FSU Greeks told me that in Greece people do not know their history, while people in the former Soviet Union and elsewhere abroad recognize them as Greeks because people are more informed about their past. This explanation was commonly accompanied by comments about native Greeks being uneducated.

### **The issue of class in FSU-native Greek relations**

Finally, the Russo-Pontic label indicates a low class standing. For most native Greeks ‘the Russo-Pontic’ is an uncivilized, uneducated, and poor person. The fact that the educational level of FSU Greeks in Thessaloniki is on average similar to or even slightly higher than that of the local native Greek population (see Labrianidis et al. 2008) is not widely known by native Greeks. Since the vast majority of FSU Greeks are employed in manual unskilled jobs, natives think of them as people with low education. The class aspect in the interaction between native and FSU Greeks did not emerge as a central one in my research in Nikopoli due to the fact that the majority of immigrant and native residents share a common working-class background. According to the data of the GEITONIES survey, FSU and native Greeks are employed in similar, mostly low-status

occupations, the only difference being that more native Greek are employed in the public sector.

There are differences in educational levels, however, with a considerably larger segment of the native Greek population, mostly elderly people, having not finished their primary education (18% in comparison to 2%) and more FSU Greeks having concluded university education, in comparison to natives in Nikopoli (30% and 16% respectively). Approximately half of both native and immigrants have finished their upper secondary education or have followed post-secondary non-tertiary education. To my question as to whether he has friends in Nikopoli, Aggelos, my neighbour during my first stay in Nikopoli, told me:

I have no contacts here. All my friends live in the centre. I will go there now and again, to go out, to play backgammon [να παίξω κανονα ταβλάκι]. Here it is... mostly Georgian-Russo-Pontics live here [εδώ όλο Γεωργιανο Ρωσοπόντιους έχει]. It is not easy to come together with them, it is not possible in fact, uneducated people, uncultivated they are more close to Turkey. Georgia, if you have a look at the map, is very close to Turkey, it could have been part of the former Soviet Union but they did not have much of a relationship with them. They speed through the neighbourhood in their cars. The other day one nearly hit me and the worst is that they also want to have the last word [Και το χειρότερο είναι ότι ζητάνε και τα ρέστα μετά από πάνω].

Aggelos, who has a basic education and works as a factory worker, appealed to culture to legitimize his view of FSU Greeks in Nikopoli as uneducated people. He argued that the quality of a person is not so much about education per se but about being cultivated, civilized; something which in his view the local FSU Greeks are not. He associated their culture with Turkey which, in line with dominant nationalistic Greek narratives, he denigrated as an uncivilized country.

The issue of education and the class background of Nikopoli's residents was raised a few times by local FSU Greeks, too. They described native Greeks in Nikopoli in a rather positive manner, as simple non-pretentious people of a working-class background. At the same time they also expressed a feeling of collective superiority due to their higher levels of education. Most commonly, however, FSU Greeks raised the issue of class in relation to their position in Greek society in large. The priest told me:

Our people [referring to FSU Greeks] climbed down the social ladder due to migration and in the eyes of the natives are people of no worth... and

you know that in the Soviet Union there were no class distinctions. This made this experience more painful. But things got better for the majority, people have their own house, a job... they are not poor like the majority of natives think. The other day they were distributing food in Efxinoupoli as if people were starving here...

Several of my informants highlighted that Greeks would not call an American of Pontic descent Americano-Pontic but rather 'a Greek from the USA'; similarly, they should be called Pontics or Greeks from Russia. They claimed that the reason behind this distinction is that Greeks from the USA are thought of as rich, and Greeks from the Soviet Union as poor.

The negative attitude of my educated and affluent Russian (non-Greek) immigrant informants against the 'Russo-Pontics' was also indicative of the negative class connotations of the Russo-Pontic label. The Russian immigrants used the term to refer to the lower-educated FSU Greeks, mostly originating from rural areas, whom they depicted as conservative and self-excluding. They claimed that the Russo-Pontics have marginal or no relation at all to Russian culture and that their Russian language skills are also poor. They further told me that they do not mix with them in everyday life. Their attempt to dissociate from them relates to their belief that 'the Russo-Pontics' give a bad name to the Russian immigrants and spoil their identity.

A Russian man in his late twenties who could physically pass as a Greek told me: 'Yes, I know that I do not look like a Russian... I have to 'fight' to not pass as a Russo-Pontic'. He and others of my informants confidently present themselves as Russians in their interactions with natives. In their case the word 'Russian' is not heard as stigmatizing. They told me they have not faced any racism, and they criticized the FSU Greeks for the bad name they have acquired.

The word 'Russian', however, has a completely different meaning when addressed to an FSU Greek by natives. Calling an FSU Greek 'Russian' has the same negative connotations as that of 'Russo-Pontic', though expressed in a more acute way. Yuri told me that an FSU Greek friend of his felt insulted when she was called Russian. Yuri, who is of mixed Russian and Greek origin, told her he could not understand why being called Russian could be taken as an insult and confessed to me that he was a bit offended by her words. His friend, who does not look like a Russian, told him that if she was called Russian because of her blue eyes she would not be offended; but she explained that calling her a 'Russian' was essentially a way to denigrate and insult her. Similarly, the priest told me that many natives call FSU Greeks 'Russians', implying that they are people without capabilities. He also told me that they insult them for watching

Russian television and speaking Russian, which has led to some of them avoiding contact with natives, developing inferiority complexes, and being ashamed to speak their mother tongue.

Interestingly, however, at the time of my research a limited number of FSU Greeks who enjoyed a better socio-economic position told me they had started using the word 'Russo-Pontic' occasionally as an identification label. Kleanthis is a lawyer who worked during his first years in Greece as a builder. One day during that period, a man passed by their construction site and asked him and his colleagues whether they were Russo-Pontic. Kleanthis became furious at having this rather chubby man emerge from a Mercedes and insult him. He started swearing at him aggressively. The man told him to calm down, and explained to him in poor Russian that he was also a Russo-Pontic. He was a descendent of Pontic refugees who arrived in Greece from Russia during the 1920. He told him that he, Kleanthis, would one day also call himself a Russo-Pontic. Kleanthis, who now enjoys a better socio-economic position, has indeed presented himself as a Russo-Pontic a few times. He told me he finds it funny how native people take a defensive and apologetic stance when he replies to their question about his origin that he is a Russo-Pontic. I was told a very similar story by Galina who is a highly educated FSU woman working in the secondary education in Greece.<sup>188</sup>

### FSU Greeks and the 'False Greeks'

Native residents' discourse on the 'false Greeks' was based on rumours and arbitrary judgments derived from FSU Greeks' public behaviour. Given the FSU Greeks' personal experiences of the process of acquisition of *homogenís* status and Greek citizenship, I had assumed that they would have more concrete knowledge about whether any fraud had taken place and if so to what extent. Responding to my questions, rather than raising this issue themselves, most of my FSU Greek informants claimed that non-Greek FSU immigrants have indeed managed to pass as Greeks and access the privileged *homogenís* status. As to whether that was a widespread practice they were divided; to my surprise, a considerable segment thought that this was indeed the case.

My discussion with Alina, an FSU Greek in her early thirties, is indicative of the information I commonly got from those FSU Greeks who thought that access to *homogenís* status by non-Greek FSU immigrants was widespread:

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<sup>188</sup> Earlier it was mentioned that the priest argued that the term 'Russo-Pontic' should not be seen as negative. Given the respect he was afforded due to his profession, he might not have experienced it as a stigmatizing term, or perhaps much less so than other FSU Greeks.

Me: I was told that there are people who accessed the *homogenís* status without being of Greek origin. Do you think that this has happened??

Alina: Of course there are many such people.

Me: Really? I have not met anyone so far.

Alina: Well, I am not surprised; they wouldn't introduce themselves to you. In fact I do not know anyone either.

Me: So, how do you know about them?

Alina: People can understand. For example, when immigrants who are known not to be Greeks by their co-villagers in the former Soviet Union acquire houses in Greece, people suspect that they have managed to do so through the state loans that are given to *homogenís*. It is almost impossible for a non-Greek immigrant to get a bank loan [...].

Me: Native residents in Nikopoli to whom I spoke told me that the majority of immigrants in their neighbourhood are 'false Greeks'. Do you think this is the case?

Alina: Well, no. The natives are mentioning something that is true when they speak about false ones, but they are proving it with false evidence. If a person does not speak Pontic it does not mean that she/he is not Greek, like natives think. As you know, some Greeks from Georgia have been speaking Turkish for example

Similarly to Alina, most of the FSU Greeks I asked did not personally know 'false Greeks'.<sup>189</sup> Those who agreed that access to the *homogenís* status by non-Greek FSU immigrants was widespread commonly relied on rumours, just like native Greeks. This made them suspicious of other FSU Greeks in their encounters.

Alina was born in Georgia to an Armenian-Russian father and a Greek-Ukrainian mother. When I asked her how she identifies ethnically she told me that she primarily relates to her Russian background due to the Russian education she had acquired. She later corrected herself, saying that she would describe herself more precisely as a Soviet person. Although she had not lived for an extended period in the Soviet Union she related better to this overarching identity because it included the diversity of her ethnic background. On another occasion, when an FSU Greek asked her about her descent Alina described herself as Greek-Armenian. She had earlier told me that her surname is Armenian and as a result people from the former Soviet Union recognize her as Armenian. Being

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<sup>189</sup> Those who did commonly showed understanding towards them; they told me that acquiring the *homogenís* status by forging documents that presented them as Greeks was the only way some people could escape the war or a very precarious socio-economic situation.

unfamiliar with Armenian culture and not speaking Armenian, she told me she does not really feel Armenian.

Alina immigrated to Greece to study, without her family, and had less extensive relations with other FSU Greek immigrants compared to most FSU Greek people. Her mixed background and her limited relations with other FSU Greeks made her a target of suspicion with respect to her 'true Greekness' by FSU Greeks. She told me that in her encounters with FSU Greeks she does not know, she is commonly asked where is she from, and then confronted with the more critical question: 'Do you speak Pontic or Turkish?' She felt that after her negative answer people would look at her a bit strangely. She told me that she has had difficulties coming to terms with such reactions. It is paradoxical that Alina, who was convinced that non-Greek FSU immigrants had managed to acquire the *homogenís* status in large numbers due to information she had acquired, was possibly thought of and referred to by other FSU Greeks as a case that proved this perception.

Ideas which FSU Greeks entertained about the existence of 'false Greeks' were based on information about corruption in the process of citizenship attribution. For a limited number of my FSU Greek informants, the category of 'false Greeks' also included people, usually of (mixed) Greek descent, who expressed low or no attachment to a Greek identity. I have argued that native residents' assessment about the truth or falseness of immigrants' Greekness was based on reasoning that assumed a linear relation between culture, consciousness, and descent. Cultural difference between them and FSU Greeks was thought of as expressing the supposedly 'non-Greek consciousness' of the latter and was taken as proof of their lack of actual Greek descent. Following this line of reasoning they excluded people who they could not or did not want to fit into their idealized image about the Greeks of the diaspora.

This simplistic relationship between culture and descent was not endorsed by FSU Greeks. Expectantly, not everybody who did not speak Greek or Pontic was suspected of being a false Greek in the FSU Greek community, nor were any of the behaviours and cultural norms singled out by the natives as characteristics of 'false Greeks' recognized as such by them. Culture alone was generally downplayed as a defining criterion of Greekness, which was usually equated with Greek descent. However, culture in relation to the issue of 'Greek consciousness' was used by a few of my informants to exclude some FSU Greeks. To my question if they personally knew any false FSU Greeks, a limited number of my informants referred to people of distant Greek descent who had told them they did not feel Greek. These would not necessarily be treated as false Greeks by native Greeks. Fr

instance, Alina, a university graduate, in all likelihood would not be suspected of being a false Greek by natives.

Concerning the official criteria of Greekness, as mentioned in chapter four, in 2001 a 'Greek consciousness test' was introduced as an extra pre-requisite in the determination of FSU Greeks' Greekness and the attribution of citizenship rights. This signified a change in the official criteria of national belonging for FSU Greeks. Although it was possibly instituted to prevent the attribution of Greek nationality to immigrants of non-Greek descent, and it was connected to the realization that the existing process was not unassailable (Voutira 2004), the law suggested that not all persons of Greek descent are worthy to be recognized as Greeks. On top of their Greek descent, they must also have 'a Greek consciousness'. In practice, however, testing Greek consciousness boiled down to examining immigrants' knowledge of the Greek customs that had developed in the Soviet Union, as well as their knowledge of basic Greek history and Greek language skills.

Kleanthis, an FSU Greek who worked in Greece as a lawyer and was also the president of an FSU Greek cultural association, was very critical of the 'Greek consciousness' test. He claimed that testing the 'Greek consciousness' of people of Greek descent is an absurdity and should be reserved only for non-Greek immigrants. To prove his point he focused on the Greek history requirements of the test. Although he accepted that some FSU Greeks might not be knowledgeable about Greek history, he claimed this should not be a reason to deny them access to Greek citizenship; not knowing the history of your nation is regrettable, but is a criticism which can be levelled at native Greeks too. In his view, if the law were consistent then it should also have called for the withdrawal of citizenship from those native Greeks who did not know Greek history. Most of my FSU Greek informants would agree with Kleanthis that the changes to citizenship attribution introduced in 2001 were a negative development. As I will describe in the following, most of them were very negative about the process of citizenship acquisition as whole.

During my second stay in Nikopoli I visited the immigration office in Thessaloniki prefecture, which at that time served as the local office responsible for naturalization. Although I had previously met an FSU Greek person who worked in the office, this acquaintance did not ease my access. Nobody would speak to me without the permission of the director, who told me that I should speak to him only after I had read the law. He wanted to limit our discussion to the formal requirements. When I posed a question about the issue of the 'false Greeks', he replied that he was writing an article on the topic which would soon

be published. He was unwilling to enter into discussion on the issue, but assured me that through his article I would become sufficiently informed.

Soon after our meeting I had to return to the Netherlands, and by the time I returned to Greece he was no longer serving in the same post. I did not manage to find his article. However, I found an interview he had given in a local newspaper, a year and a half prior to our short meeting. In this interview he claimed that 50% of the documents presented by applicants are falsified. He praised the work done by the personnel in his office and he underlined his determination to do the utmost to stop forgery. He further provided data according to which applications for naturalizations by aspiring FSU Greeks were decreasing during his administration, which he presented as an outcome of the strict monitoring performed by the office. As I will describe in the following, such information is misleading and does not provide a reliable indication about the extent to which non-Greek FSU immigrants try to pass as FSU Greeks.

My FSU Greek contacts provided me with a lot of information about the arbitrariness of the processes of citizenship acquisition for *homogenís* immigrants, and about their difficulty in acquiring the required documents determining their Greek descent. This was especially the case after the 2001 changes in the law which required certain documents to be sealed with the seal of The Hague. Since several of the states from which FSU Greeks emigrated did not, and some still do not, issue the seal of The Hague, the process became substantially more difficult and the document accreditation process could take several years. Some of my informants accused other FSU Greeks of bribing officials to speed up the process.

One of my FSU Greek acquaintances revealed to me that he had forged the birth certificate of an old FSU Greek of Pontic descent who was unable to locate this document any longer. Another of my informants told me that before the 2009 elections she had filed a request to the prime minister's office to ask for the promotion of the application of an FSU Greek friend of hers. The latter was of mixed Greek origin and had a large family (*πολύτεκνη*). Her case was promoted, and Greek citizenship gave her access to the allowance for parents with large families. This was critical due to her precarious economic situation. Besides these accounts which concerned the informal practices of FSU Greeks, I was also told numerous stories about the mistakes and inconsiderateness of native Greek bureaucrats. As Kleanthis told me:

They [the officials] invalidate people's applications for the most irrelevant reasons. When you lose your identity card and you issue a new one, right? Well, that can cause great problems because when they see different

numbers in different documents they flag your application. To give you another example, an employer makes a mistake in your application which he corrects, seals and counter-signs. The next employer sees the correction, does not accept it and invalidates the application.

Many of my informants also referred to cases whereby people who immigrated later than other members of their family were denied access to citizenship because their relatives had been registered with different names as a result of arbitrary decisions by bureaucrats about their names' transliteration into Greek. FSU Greeks who had previously run or still ran cultural associations, like Kleanthis, capitalized on their connections at the administration and their knowledge of the workings of bureaucracy to pursue citizenship applications by fellow FSU Greeks in exchange for payment.

Returning to the issue of *homogenís* status acquisition by 'false Greeks' and how common this process was, my informants who thought it only concerned a limited number of people argued that if it had been widespread then the city would not have had such sizeable FSU immigrant communities; the FSU immigrants would have accessed the *homogenís* status and through it citizenship rights.<sup>190</sup> In their opinion, this practice therefore only concerned a minimal number of people and had happened almost exclusively during the early years of migration. As example they referred to exceptional cases of non-Greek people who took over the identity of dead FSU Greek co-villagers by bribing the local authorities. Overall, I tended to accept their claims as more plausible.<sup>191</sup> Yet if this is the case, why then did several of my FSU Greek informants endorse the opposite idea?

In our first meeting, my roommate Yuri had also told me that many non-Greek FSU immigrants had acquired Greek citizenship by forging documents that said they were Greek. His perception was based on information he obtained from

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<sup>190</sup> I did meet a Georgian immigrant who had earlier attempted to access citizenship rights via FSU Greek status and failed. At the time of my fieldwork, I was told that a Georgian immigrant had to pay 4,000 euros to be smuggled to Greece and then 5,000 euros to be issued a residence permit through a white marriage. The relatively high price of those practices seems to corroborate the argument that access to the *homogenís* status was limited among non-FSU Greeks. If access to citizenship rights was easily accessible they would not turn to such costly and temporary options.

<sup>191</sup> In order for aspiring FSU immigrants to access the privileged migration status of FSU Greeks they must have both information about the existence of illegal networks that provided falsified documents and the necessary capital to afford them. The fact that the access of non-Greeks to *homogenís* status was not widespread is also corroborated by the fact the immigration to Greece during the 1990s correlates significantly with the depopulation of Greek villages in the former Soviet Union, especially in Caucasus and Central Asia, and the shrinkage of the Greek population in cities that had a significant Greek population in those areas.

other FSU Greeks and from a native Greek civil servant who was involved in the process of nationality verification. The latter had told him that in the early years of migration she had helped many non-Greek people to acquire the *homogenís* status and flee the war in Caucasus.

Since we were living together, I had the opportunity to discuss the issue with him several times after our initial discussion. The information I got from other FSU Greeks led him to question his initial perceptions. Later, Yuri met Filipos, an FSU Greek from Georgia, who claimed that he was well informed on these issues because his father held an important bureaucratic position in Georgia. Yuri explained my research to him and asked him if he would like to speak to me. He was positive. We went to his house together. Filipos told us that this process mainly concerned the Armenians. In his view, since Armenians historically had lived close to Greeks in the Ottoman Empire, they often had a distant Greek relative, or at least could 'discover' one. He further added that he did not like Armenians because they are cunning. When I asked him about Georgia he said that similar processes happened there too, through forgery of identification documents. He also added that at that time it was the Albanian immigrants who were acquiring Greek citizenship 'simply by conscripting to the Greek army' (the latter is not true since Greek citizenship attribution through voluntary conscription to the army concerns only people of Greek descent (*homogenís*)). Yuri was not persuaded by these words; he told me he felt Filipos was exaggerating 'without knowing that much after all'. I concurred.

I discerned two categories of FSU Greeks who believed that access to the *homogenís* status by non-Greek immigrants was widespread. The first category included people like Alina, who relied on information they got from other FSU Greeks. The second category included people who claimed they knew about it, usually without specifying how, and who tended to relate this practice to the supposed immoral and unscrupulous character of FSU nationals, especially the Caucasians. They claimed that Armenians, Georgians, and other Caucasian non-Greek immigrants were able to benefit from the state provisions through illegal means while FSU Greeks were victimized by the Greek state. Possibly, these FSU Greeks were tending to exaggerate the existence of false Greeks to support their negative attitudes about Caucasian immigrants and their feelings of mistreatment by state authorities.

From their perspective, it was due to the behaviour of false Greeks and non-Greek FSU immigrants that FSU Greeks have ‘acquired a bad name’.<sup>192</sup> They believed that natives do not differentiate the ‘true FSU Greeks’ and felt that they should familiarize themselves with this distinction. However, as described in the previous section, native Greeks do differentiate between ‘false and real Greeks’, though according to subjective judgments and arbitrary criteria corresponding to their idealized image of diaspora Greeks. Thus, the discourse of those FSU Greeks about the false Greeks in their interpersonal relations with native Greeks simply reinforces the pre-existing ideas of the latter.

## 7.2 Becoming Pontic

### The Pontic Greeks (*Pónti*)

As described in the second chapter, the population of the contemporary Greek nation state was shaped by two counterbalancing trends: one the one hand, forced or voluntary outflows of non-Greek populations, and on the other hand, inflows – or inclusion through territorial expansion – of populations which felt attached to and desired to be recognized as belonging to the community of Greek descent. As a result of this process, the Greek nation state came to be perceived as an ethnically homogenous entity. Nevertheless, although much of the multicultural reality of the Ottoman past was eradicated from public space and memory, the population that comprises the Modern Greek polity is still characterized by a substantial internal cultural diversity. This is reflected in the survival of a number of distinct Greek ethnocultural identities.<sup>193</sup>

Even within the territorially restricted first independent state, the Greek population was divided into a number of ethno-cultural subgroups, some with a specific spatial location (e.g. Maniat), and some without (e.g. Arvanites). Belonging to these groups was considered compatible with but subordinate to belonging to the Greek community of descent; one was firstly Greek, and then she/he could be Vlach, Sarakatsan, Tsakon, etc. The Greek ethno-cultural mosaic was gradually enriched through the territorial expansion of the state (Slavic

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<sup>192</sup> After my question, however, the majority acknowledged that it was not only non-Greek FSU immigrants that are to be blamed, but a minority among their own people which also engages in behaviour that stigmatizes their group. This issue is further elaborated in what follows.

<sup>193</sup> Even though those identities are included in an overarching Greek identity, they are not solely cultural identities. In as far their distinctiveness is defined in terms of common origin, they have an ethnic element.

speaking Greeks, Thracians), while 'new' groups (Cappadocian, Smyrniot, Pontic) came to be added with the 1920s forced population exchange. For the 1920s refugees, regional identification provided a means of orientation and adjustment, a way of creating a familiar geography out of an uncharted expanse (Hirschon, 1989). These identities crystallized through interaction with the native Greeks who were already accustomed to distinguish between Greeks in terms of regional and ethnocultural belonging. It is in this context that Pontic Greek emerged as a meaningful category and a term of self-identification.

In the course of time the refugee and indigenous ethno-cultural groups 'assimilated in the Greek mainstream by remaking it', as one could say drawing a parallel with the American case (see Alba & Nee, 2003). Several aspects that marked their difference fused and became established as parts of a common Greek culture, such as the Arvanitic folk dress *foustanella* that became the outfit of Greek ceremonial military units and the Smyrniot music that became a major influence for many contemporary Greek music styles. Other aspects, notably those relating to linguistic difference, were renounced. For the groups whose Greekness was debated, notably the Slavic-speaking Greeks, renouncing their language was forced and provisional to their inclusion in the national community. For others, such as the Arvanites, it was tactical.

Certain groups, notably the Pontic Greeks, retained a sense of separate identity whose strength and persistence in successive generations is impressive. They further preserved a number of cultural traits as characteristic of their group and which separate them from other Greeks. For the Pontics, their identity also has a diasporic dimension: being a Pontic Greek is to claim origins in 'the lost homeland of Pontos'. The perseverance of the Pontic identity is an attempt to remain faithful to their ancestral land and to assert allegiance to the past (Fann, 1991). Memories of Pontos, which unfold around a discourse of loss and survival, bind together Pontics in a common mission: to mentally keep their ancestral homeland alive. The diasporic aspect of their identity is a major reason for its enduring salience over the years.

A second reason relates to its cultural content. Pontic Greek history is linked to the main body of Greek historiography, cited as an example of the continuity of the Greek nation (Sideri, 2006). Yet it unfolds to a certain extent autonomously from the history of the modern state. Physical separation from other Greek communities led over the years to the development of a distinctive culture in Pontos, manifested in their idiosyncratic music, dances, and dialect. Their culture marks a clear border with other Greeks – something which constrained their acceptance by other Greeks at earlier phases. However, it did not pose an insuperable obstacle to their long-term acceptance in the Greek community of

descent. Pontic Greeks are Christian Orthodox, while the Pontic Greek language, although almost unintelligible to other Greeks, is still a form of the Greek language; and, indeed, it contains linguistic forms that are closer to Ancient Greek than Modern Greek. This is something in which Pontic Greeks take pride, and has been used as symbolic capital against charges of non-Greekness. In short, Pontic Greek culture is *different enough* to underpin a separate identity within the bounds of an overarching Greek identity and at the same time not *too* different to be rejected as non-Greek.<sup>194</sup>

However, the above should not be thought to imply that the establishment of Pontic as a legitimate Greek identity was an easy or swift process. Asserting their difference and establishing their identity was long struggle for the Pontic Greeks. Upon arrival in Greece, Pontics, like any other refugee group, were treated with suspicion. As Hirshon (1989) notes, they were nicknamed *auotides* (from their pronunciation of the demonstrative pronoun *a-óitos*, instead of the contemporary Greek *aftós*) while overt rejection was expressed with the derogatory term ‘Turkish seed’ (*τουρκόσποροι*) which challenged their Greekness. Popular jokes about the fictitious Pontic characters ‘Giorikas’ and ‘Kostikas’ ridiculed Pontic people. The jokes represented these characters as acting in illogical ways and reproduced negative stereotypes about Pontics in general.

The first generation experienced Pontic identity as stigmatizing, and a number of people attempted to hide their ancestry. For the second generation, growing acculturation and upward mobility was accompanied with a gradual diminishing of the negative connotations of being categorized as Pontic (Vergeti, 2000). In the meantime an active Pontic community had started to emerge.

As early as the 1930s, ethnic associations were established (‘Ευξείνου Λέσχης), ethnic periodicals were published (*Αρχαίον του Πόντου*), and stage plays were written and performed in the Pontic dialect. In the 1950s, the Virgin Mary Soumela Church in Vermio (northern Greece) was established as the religious and ethnic centre for the community in the new homeland. The church is named after the Great monastery in historic Pontos from which it hosts artifacts.<sup>195</sup> The

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<sup>194</sup> An interesting comparison may be drawn between the Arvanites and the Pontics. The Arvanite narrative about their Greekness unfolds around theories of authentic descent from the ancients preserved by westerly isolation in contrast to the supposed corruption of the ‘Anatolian Byzantine’ (Hart, 1999). The Greekness of Arvanites, whose modern history is intertwined with that of the Modern Greek state, was never seriously doubted. However, there was also no serious attempt from their community at preserving their language; being an Albanian dialect it deviates from the norm of Greeks speaking Greek. Their linguistic specificity is downplayed and even renounced in recent generations.

<sup>195</sup> These were transferred to Greece in 1930.

15<sup>th</sup> August procession for the dormition of the Virgin Mary serves as a commemoration of Pontos and as an ethnic gathering.

The 60s and 70s saw a proliferation of cultural clubs which aimed to disseminate Pontic customs. These were in addition to the already existing community institutions and provided a platform for cultural activities and the maintaining of solidarity among Pontics in Greece. Second- and third-generation Pontics became familiar with the histories, geographies, and customs of the life of their forebears in Pontos without having ever visited the place. Yet gradually the Pontic culture became stripped of its substance as ‘a way of life’ (Vergeti, 2000) and became the ground of a symbolic identity. This is expressed and practiced primarily through Pontic music and dance, and less so through Pontic dialect, theatre, or cuisine.

During the 1980s, second- and third-generation Pontic intellectuals attempted to politicize the Pontic Greek identity. This endeavour went hand in hand with a growing interest in the history of Pontic Hellenism and resulted in a substantial output of publications, as well as the establishment of the Centre of Pontic Studies. In addition, the International Pontic Congress was inaugurated, this being a periodic event bringing together worldwide Pontic associations and transnational Pontic organizations. The scope of action of the Pontic community was extended into the global arena and the goals set by the Pontic intellectuals were adopted by cultural associations throughout Greece and the diaspora (Voutira, 2006).

One key outcome of the political mobilization during that decade was the introduction of the issue of the Pontic ‘genocide’ by the Turks (see appendix I.4, pp. 246). Unlike the Armenians, who had begun their worldwide campaign immediately after the mass exterminations in 1915, the Pontic Greeks introduced the issue of their genocide by the Turks (1914–1922) some sixty years later (Voutira, 2006). At the national level, after active lobbying and significant pressure from Congress representatives, the Greek Parliament unanimously recognized May 19 as the day of National Commemoration of the Pontic Greek genocide (Voutira, 2006). It should be noted that Pontic associations and their federations had grown as interest groups in domestic policy, and were capable of exerting significant political influence (Deltsou, 2009).

In the international arena, Pontic associations further extended the scope of their lobbying activity, promoting their diasporic project of getting the Pontic genocide recognized (Voutira, 2006). They also became concerned with Pontic-speaking Muslims in Turkey and their cultural rights. Exhibiting a paternalistic mentality, Pontic associations portrayed them as dormant Greeks or forced Muslims, and

acted as self-proclaimed protectors for such groups. Attempts were made to engage Greek government action in that direction (Baltsiotis, 2009).

During the 1980s, in the context of their wider political mobilization and diasporic organization, Pontic associations developed contacts with Greek associations in the FSU. Pontic associations were the first to show solidarity towards the Greek Diaspora in the Soviet Union. It should be noted that some members of the two communities were bound by kinship ties. Such ties were particularly common among FSU Greeks who had relocated to the Caucasus from Pontos at the time of the 1920s forced population exchange. In that turbulent period many families were divided between Greece and the former Soviet Union. In addition, in the period from 1922 until 1933, 27,000 people emigrated from the Soviet Union to Greece, leaving behind members of their families. The majority of my Pontic FSU Greek informants had at least a distant relative in Greece.

The native Pontic associations showed solidarity by attesting sameness in ancestry and attempting to help FSU Greeks organise politically. As mentioned in chapter 3, through their mobilization they effectively pointed out to the Greek state authorities their moral duties towards a forgotten and much afflicted twig of the Greek family tree; these same associations were later recognized by governmental officials as relevant actors in the implementation and design of policy towards the FSU Greeks (see Vergeti, 1998).

The rhetoric of the Pontic associations, which treated the Greek diaspora in the former Soviet Union as a Pontic diaspora, was unofficially adopted by the authorities. Although in official state language FSU Greeks are referred to as Greek-descent people from the former Soviet Union, politicians in parliamentary discussions, public talks, and interviews commonly refer to them as the Pontics from the former Soviet Union. The same holds for media and academic publications. The existence of non-Pontic Greeks in the former Soviet Union is ignored and the Greek diaspora is commonly referred to as the Pontic diaspora. The prevalence of this discourse had repercussions for the collective perception in Greece of FSU Greeks. This is reflected even in the stigmatizing label 'Russo-Pontic'. Etymologically, this word does not refer to Greeks from Russia (or people of mixed Russian-Greek descent), but to rather to Pontics from 'Russia' (or people of mixed Russian-Pontic descent). The vast majority of Greeks, including myself before I started this research, are unaware that not all people from the FSU Greek diaspora originate from Pontos (see chapter 3.1).

The following anecdote is indicative of the dominance of this perception even among state bureaucrats, and its reproduction by them. When FSU Greeks

acquired Greek citizenship, they were given the option either to change their surname back to its Greek form if it had been Russified, or to choose the surname of their Greek ancestors where they were the offspring of mixed marriages. Ivan, who had a Ukrainian surname from his father, wished to register himself with the surname of his Greek mother. His mother's surname is not Pontic – Pontic surnames can be identified by the ending *-edes* or *-ades*. Ivan described the bureaucrat as a strict man. He told me that he looked him in the eye and asked him 'are you a Greek?' 'Yes' Ivan responded. 'Ok' he said. 'So, which name do you want to keep'. Ivan expressed his desire to keep his mothers name.

To Ivan's surprise, the bureaucrat replied that this was not possible. Since Ivan was not an adult (he was seventeen at that time), the state clerk said, he needed to bring in a number of new documents in order to change his name. Ivan objected, saying that his mother's name could be checked on the basis of the papers he already had. The bureaucrat, however, precluded this option. Instead he proposed an arbitrary name that sounded like his Ukrainian one, ending in *-edes* to signify Pontic descent, and unlike his mother's name. Ivan told me: 'I feared that maybe he would reject my application, so I accepted it and now I am stuck with this surname.' Orestis Aggelides (2000), originating from a Turkic speaking village in Tsalka also provides some interesting information in this regard. In his book, he writes that the officers in the Greek embassy in Moscow were asking FSU Greek immigrants to change the ending of their name to *-edes* (2000: 18). For that reason his family changed its name to Aggelides from Aggelov. Nevertheless, after doing some research into their family history they found out that their original family name was Aggelou and not Aggelides.

### **Native and FSU Pontics in Nikopoli**

Pontos had not been a marker of identification in the former Soviet Union. People of Greek descent were brought up to think of themselves as Greeks within the Soviet nationalities model. They called themselves *Romii* or *Urum*, depending on whether they spoke Turkic or Greek languages, or used *Greki*, their formal Russian ethnonym. FSU Greeks were familiarized with the Pontic identity as a separate, albeit Greek identity when they immigrated to Greece or when they came in contact with native Greeks in the former Soviet Union (see also Popov 2000; Voutira, 2006). Several of my informants told me that they became aware of 'their' regional Pontic ethnocultural identity and were extensively informed about 'their' Pontic history when they met other Greeks in the historic homeland. In the words of one of them:

We did not know what Pontii means there [in the FSU]. Everybody was Greek... we did not know those differences. We called ourselves Romioi. Only here in Greece we learned that there are different Greeks like Cretans, Thracians etc. Here we learned that we are called *Pontii*.

The adoption of the Pontic identity by FSU Greeks after migration has been very widespread. This is a multilayered process which I will describe in more detail in the following sections of this chapter. For my present analysis regarding the influence of Ponticness in the relations which developed in Nikopoli, it suffices to comment that the Pontic identity was also endorsed by the vast majority of FSU Greeks in the neighbourhood.

Nikopoli, despite its majority Pontic population, was not perceived or described (neither by residents nor by non-residents) as a 'Pontic neighbourhood' at the time of my fieldwork.<sup>196</sup> Moreover, extended relationships between FSU Pontics and native Pontics had not developed. Members of two communities living in the neighbourhood are not bound with kinship ties, excepting a very few cases of 1960s Soviet Greeks who lived in the *réma* and residents of Efxinoupoli. Gioura, an FSU Greek informant of Pontic descent in his thirties, commented:

We do not know each other... we do not have much contact. Maybe their parents or grandparents speak Pontic. We also learned to speak Pontic through our parents, I do not know the language perfectly but I can speak it. But the fact that we are both of Pontic origin does not mean that we are the same. We know that we have common roots but they came earlier to Greece. During the massacre in Turkey, some people went to Russia and others to Greece. I think most went to Russia, I am not sure. In any case others came here and were socialized here. As a result we are not the same.

In a similar manner, most my native Pontic informants told me they had not personally met many FSU Greek people of Pontic descent from Nikopoli.

Different habits regarding spending free time and the use of public space have contributed in preventing the development of close relations. Also important is the segregation of the two communities and the lack of local institutions that could bring them into contact (see chapter 6.1). In this period, Nikopoli was also characterized by a lack of community associations. Old Nikopoli's neighbourhood assembly no longer ran, while the neighbourhood association in Efxinoupoli was

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<sup>196</sup> That is despite the presence of the monument to Pontic Hellenism in Efxinoupoli and a number of shops and cafes with Pontic character or names owned both by natives and immigrants.

short-lived (see chapter 5.2, pp. 114). Moreover, at the time of my research there was only one active cultural association, the one established by the native Pontics from the village of Nikopoli. This association started strictly as a 'village association'. By hosting classes of Pontic dance and music it extended its membership to people who were not closely connected with the village. However, only a limited number of FSU Greek children joined the native Pontics in the dance lessons. Not many FSU Greeks in the upper neighbourhood knew that the association existed.

Those structural and cultural characteristics could partly explain the lack of interaction and the limited number of interpersonal friendships that have developed between FSU and native Pontics. Yet the attitudes of the native Pontic residents towards their FSU Greek neighbours have also played a role.

Taking into account the common origin which 'native' Pontics share with a large segment of the FSU Greek immigrants, as well as the political activity of their associations in favour of the Greek Diaspora, one could expect native Pontics to be positive towards FSU Greeks. My fieldwork data did not confirm this hypothesis. Several of my native Pontic informants acknowledged the Greekness of FSU Greeks in the neighbourhood and sympathized with their experience in Greece. They further praised their strong family ties and their hard-working ethos, which they presented as characteristics of Pontic people. Nevertheless, there were also several native Pontics who were convinced that only a small minority of them were real Pontics, and who were extremely negative towards them. The president of the local Pontic association, and Yannis, the owner of a local *kafenío* with a Pontic character,<sup>197</sup> exemplify this polarity. On the one hand the president was positive about the immigrants and estimated that Pontics numbered up to 80% or 90% among them. On the other hand, Yannis claimed that Pontics formed a maximum of 20% of the immigrant population and used very strong negative words to express his opinion about the rest.

Overall, the discourse of native Pontics in Nikopoli did not differ substantially from that of the rest of the native residents. It was in line with the dominant trend of relating opinions about the immigrants to their (lack of) Greekness. The difference was in the degree to which that was done. On the one hand, native Pontics *consistently* explained their views about FSU Greeks with reference to the (non) Pontic descent of the latter. On the other hand, not all non-Pontic natives made the distinction between 'real' and 'false' Greeks. A few of them even expressed themselves negatively about FSU Greeks while acknowledging their

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<sup>197</sup> Posters for performances of Pontic music were displayed in the windows of the *kafenío* while photos of Pontic artists were displayed inside and the Pontic map was painted on one of the walls.

Greekness or Ponticness. To the contrary, native Pontics who were negative about FSU Greeks *always* explained that they were not referring to the ‘real Pontics’ (read: real Greeks).

Non-Pontic natives appeared more distanced from FSU Greeks while Pontic natives felt the need to either defend them, or deny their Ponticness and dissociate from them. For instance, Michalis told me:

Pontics are nice people. The reason why the Pontics from Russia are a bit difficult is because they were calling them Russo-Pontics. What made them reserved and negative is the attitude of others here in Greece.

To the contrary, Takis was convinced that the ‘difficult’ ones are not Pontics:

Some of the people who live in this area, not the Pontics – I am a Pontic too, my grandfather had come from Pontos in 1922 – but the Armenians, the Georgians and the Chechens, they came from several remote uncivilized villages and they do not have the same mentality with us here.

Finally, rather than speaking vaguely about Russo-Pontics or Russians, like the other native Greeks, native Pontics distinguished between ‘good Pontics’ and ‘bad Caucasian peoples’. Georgians, who form a sizeable immigrant group in Thessaloniki, were singled out in a particularly unfavourable manner.

To a certain extent, those particularities in the discourse of native Pontics can be seen as attempts to prevent their identity from being spoilt by association with the stigmatized Russo-Pontic label. For instance, one of my native Pontic informants, who ‘revealed’ to me that his family had immigrated to Greece from Russia in the 1930s, added that it is not necessary for me to take a note of that. This is an exceptional but indicative case. He did not want to make public that his ancestors had also come from Russia, in order to avoid association with the FSU Greeks. The immigration of the FSU Greeks and their treatment by the dominant groups might have awakened memories of native Pontics’ struggle to have their identity accepted by other Greeks. Two encounters during my fieldwork demonstrated to me that, although they are an extremely small minority, some native Greeks still doubted the Greekness of Pontic people.

Giorgos is not a resident of Nikopoli but he used to visit the neighbourhood on Thursdays for the open market. I met him in a shop in Nikopoli owned by a friend of his. I was speaking to the owner of the shop about the relations with people in the neighbourhood and he intervened to lump FSU and native Pontics together. In his opinion they are no different; they are both non-Greek people, or

more precisely descendants of Hellenized non-Greek populations, or so he claimed. Giorgos attempted to prove his point with reference to the physical characteristics of Pontic people, which he described as non-Greek, and their music and dances, which he claimed to be more similar to those of the Zulu people than to the Greeks. A similar opinion was expressed to me by Takis, a person I knew independently of my research, in a social occasion outside the research field. The opinions of Takis and Giorgos were not taken very seriously by the other people present. However, they can be seen as remnants of ideas which were more widespread in recent history. Waltraud Kokot (personal communication, 9 September 2009), who carried out ethnographic research in the early 1980s in Touba, a district in East Thessaloniki, recorded that the Greekness of Pontic people was doubted by a considerable segment of local populations.

Avoiding association with a stigmatized identity and safeguarding their Greekness are aspects that have influenced native Pontics' discourse on FSU Greeks as well as their relations with them. However they were not the sole determinants for FSU Greeks' exclusion from the Pontic category; the denial of their Ponticness by several Pontic natives should not be seen as solely tactical. Cultural differences between immigrants and natives played an equally significant role in shaping perceptions of each other. Especially in the local context of Nikopoli where interpersonal relations were limited, such differences tended to be overemphasized by the superficial interactions in the public space. In fact, it was those cultural differences that raised the doubts about the Ponticness of the immigrants, who were then excluded collectively from the Pontic group to protect their identity from being spoilt by association with them.

Language usage by FSU Greeks in public space was a major issue that shaped native Pontics' perceptions of FSU Greeks as not being Pontics and thus as not Greeks either. It should be noted that a minority of third-generation native Pontic Greeks speak Pontic, and almost none speaks the language in public spaces. However, given the widespread suspicion about the Greekness of the FSU Greeks, speaking Pontic was expected of them in order to prove their Ponticness and through that their Greekness.

As mentioned earlier, the Pontic language was not widely spoken in the public space of Nikopoli: Russian dominated in discussions among FSU Greeks adults while the Pontic language was mostly spoken in Efxinoupoli, where native residents barely ever go. The Turkish-speaking FSU Greeks, who form a large segment of the immigrant population in the neighbourhood, also played a significant role in representations about the origin of the immigrants. Even though approximately one third of the FSU Greek population in Nikopoli speaks

Turkish, which is equal to the population that speaks Pontic, native residents were more exposed to Turkish since the majority of the Turkish-speaking FSU Greeks were living in lower parts of the neighbourhood where native Greeks lived too.

Older generations of descendants of 1920s refugees, notably the Pontics, are aware of the diffusion of the Turkish language among the Greek populations in Asia Minor. Many 1920s refugees spoke Turkish either as part of being bilingual in Greek or Turkish, or as their mother tongue. Those people were familiar with the language; they could recognize it and some of them even knew how to speak it<sup>198</sup>. However, the majority of native Greeks cannot recognize the language, and even if they could, they would not categorize its speakers as Pontic. The large presence of Turkish-speaking FSU Greeks in the neighbourhood was an important reason why the Ponticness of FSU Greeks was widely doubted in Nikopoli.

### **The Turkophone FSU Greeks**

Shifting our attention to the FSU Greeks, and in particular their relation to the Pontic identity and their perceptions of the native Pontics, the Turkish-speaking Greeks form a very interesting case that merits separate analysis. Describing the origins of the Greek Diaspora on the eve of the Russian Empire in chapter 3, I discerned three categories. First, the Marioupol Greeks together with the late eighteenth century immigrants who settled in the north-west Black Sea area in present day Ukraine; second, the Pontic-speaking Greeks who immigrated or were forced to leave from different areas of the Pontic lands in successive waves from the mid nineteenth century until the 1920s; and third, the Turkish-speaking Greeks who fled from north-eastern Asia Minor primarily in the early nineteenth century. For simplicity I will refer to the latter group as Turkophone FSU Greeks. Having said that, it needs to be remembered that a sizeable segment of the Marioupol Greeks also spoke Turkic (Tatar) dialects (see chapter 3.2). Moreover, it should be clarified that the language of the Turkophone FSU Greeks is a central Anatolian Turkic dialect that differs from the contemporary Turkish language.

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<sup>198</sup> Here it should be recalled that the language that the Turkophone FSU Greek speaks is a Turkic dialect from Eastern Anatolia that differs substantially from contemporary Turkish and other dialects spoken by Greeks in Anatolia.

Since Marioupol Greeks form a very small segment of Nikopoli's FSU Greek population,<sup>199</sup> I was not able to assess their positioning in relation to the Pontic identity. Kaurinkoski, who did research in Athens, recorded that Marioupol Greeks develop contacts with Pontic associations in Greece but at the same time remain 'attached to their "community" of origin as well as to their own ethnic subculture, in Marioupol [...]' (2008, p. 80). Although no explicit reference is made to their identification, it can be ascertained that they have not adopted the external categorization of 'the Pontic Greek'. According to my data in Nikopoli, the position of Turkophone FSU Greeks was much more ambivalent. This connects with their closer relation to Pontos as a geographical, historical, and cultural category (see chapter 3.1).

In a context of widespread distrust about the Greek origin of the FSU immigrants, Turkophone FSU Greeks found it difficult to prove their Greekness even in their interpersonal relations with native Greeks. Their effort was impeded by their mother tongue, which, according to the ideologies of Greekness, appeared incompatible with their nationality and the dominant native perception of all FSU Greeks as being of Pontic origin. The fact that they or their ancestors did not speak Pontic, and the fact that some of them did not identify as Pontics, appeared suspicious to natives. Lelya, my Turkophone FSU Greek neighbour from Tetrisq' aro, Georgia told me:

You say you are Greek and you hear people commenting 'ok, ok we know we have all become Greeks now'. I wish I were Armenian so that I did not have to face all this suspicion about my descent' [...] I do not feel Pontic. I am a Greek. That's what I say and then they start commenting. I do not say anything anymore; I do not care what they think of me. But I cannot understand them. Is it possible for an Armenian to claim that she is a Greek? This is impossible. You are what you are and what you are is what you like. Can you lie about it?

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<sup>199</sup> In Nikopoli, the presence of Marioupol Greeks is negligible. I only met one Marioupol woman in the Russian church, and she was not a resident of the neighbourhood. Also negligible was the presence of (the descendants of) the political refugees who had primarily immigrated in the 1980s. I only met one Russian person whose wife was a descendant of a political refugee. The Turkophone and Pontic-speaking FSU Greeks are present in comparable numbers: Efxinoupoli hosts more Pontic-speaking FSU Greeks and the lower part of the neighbourhood more Turkophone FSU Greeks. The local population composition mirrors that of Thessaloniki. The Turkophone FSU Greeks, being a smaller community in the former Soviet Union, comprise a clear minority in the overall immigrant population. However, they form a sizable segment in Thessaloniki where they are overrepresented. The population of Marioupol Greeks and other members of the Greek diaspora in Ukraine is the least sizable in the overall FSU Greek population as well as in that of Thessaloniki. Their immigration was much less intense in comparison to that of the other two categories (see chapter 3.3).

In the early years of migration, before the introduction of the *homogenis* card, the inability of some Turkish-speaking Greeks to prove their Greekness had resulted in their deportation from the country. When I met Odiseas, his tattoo on his left arm caught my eye. It said: *грек* – Russian for ‘Greek’. Odiseas told me he did it with the help of a friend when he was a teenager. Odiseas was born in a village in Tsalka District in 1972 and first immigrated to Greece in 1993 to avoid fighting the war in Abkhazia. He immigrated with a tourist visa and overstayed for two-and-a-half years. He worked as a seasonal worker in different places in Greece, covering temporary needs in agriculture and tourism. On the 1st of January 1996, while on Kos island, he was stopped by the police and asked for his identification papers. He was put in jail and a few days later deported to Moscow. Odiseas spoke Russian as well as Turkish and only a little Greek. The police officers were not convinced that he was of Greek origin, which would have absolved him from deportation.

Similarly to Lelya, Odiseas identified as Greek rather than Pontic. He explained to me that he is not Pontic since neither he nor his ancestors spoke Pontic. Tsalka, the district from which he originated, is a mountainous area to the west of Tbilisi in Georgia, where Greek populations formed the local majority before their emigration after the 1990s. The vast majority of the approximately 30,000 Greeks living there were Turkophone, originating from the wider Erzurum area. Turkophone Greeks had also settled in other areas in central-south Georgia, such as the Dmanisi, Tetrisq’ aro, and Marneuli regions, and others immigrated to Tbilisi as well as Stavroupol and Krasnodar Krai in Russia at later times. Yet until the late 1990s Tsalka remained their major concentration. In Tsalka there were a few villages such as Koubat and Neo Charaba, Santa and Tarson whose residents spoke Pontic Greek<sup>200</sup> (Tsatsanidis 1999). The division between Romii and Urum, that is Pontic-speaking and Turkish-speaking Greeks, was already a meaningful one to Odiseas in Tsalka District. Language marked one’s belonging in one of those categories. In Greece, Odiseas got acquainted with the Pontic category and re-categorized the Romii as Pontic Greeks.

Socrates Aggelidis, an historian and linguist originating from a Turkic-speaking village in Tsalka and author of several books on the Greek Diaspora in the former Soviet Union, distinguished the Turkophone Greeks from the Pontic Greeks by origin rather than by language alone. I met him at the Centre for the Study and Development of Greek Culture in the Black Sea Region, where he worked. In our personal communication he told me that the Turkophones are not Pontic but

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<sup>200</sup> The population of villages such as Livad also originated in ‘Pontic’ areas (Aggelides 2000) but they assimilated to the local linguistic Turkic idiom.

Anatolian Greeks, since in his opinion the area they originate from is not part of the historic Pontic land. He implied that the construction of the Turkophones as Pontics is a-historic and impedes their acceptance by other FSU Greeks. His son, Orestis, had made this more explicit in his book (2000) in which he further criticizes actual FSU Pontics for being too proud of their Pontic origin and argues for the primacy of the national identity over the regional one. He also criticizes the state for imposing Pontic identity on a large segment of the FSU Greek population who are not 'real' Pontic Greeks.

The Turkophone Greeks had a marginal position in the former Soviet Union. Their Greekness was doubted not only by Pontic-speaking FSU Greeks but by Georgians too. Interestingly, the latter did not react negatively to those Greeks who spoke only Russian (Sideri, 2006). The following account from Galina, who originates from a Pontic-speaking village in Tsalka, is indicative.

The Turkophones were not highly esteemed in Georgia. Georgia is also a country that borders with Turkey and the Georgians were also occupied by the Turks. They would nickname them 'Turkish seeds'. For that reason the Turkophones who lived among Georgians, for instance in Tbilisi, learned Russian very well and did not speak Turkish at all. I did not know that my husband could speak Turkish when we first met, he never spoke the language, I only learned that much later [...]

Galina also elaborated on relations between the Pontic- and Turkish-speaking communities in the Tsalka area:

There were tensions between the Pontic- and Turkish-speaking villages in Tsalka. If one of us called them Turks they would become furious and violent, this was something they could not stand. There were a lot of contests between the villages, which continued here in cases culminating in fights [...] In Greece we [the Pontic speakers] felt that finally we had the upper hand because in Tsalka they were the majority. [...] On their side, they possibly thought that in Greece they would be accepted at last but here it was even worse. Possibly that is the reason why they are more isolated from the rest and they stay on their own.

The Turkophone Greeks were the dominant group in Tsalka, and their language, *bizim dil* (our language), as they call it, the local lingua franca.<sup>201</sup> However, outside Tsalka it was experienced as collective shame. It expressed (or exposed)

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<sup>201</sup> Some of my Pontic-speaking Greek informants told me that local Turkophones had mocked them for their language in Tsalka.

their relationship with, or more precisely their earlier submission to, a detestable 'other'. The following collective myth is evoked by them to resolve the perceived paradox of 'being Greek and speaking Turkish' and to reply to charges of non-Greekness. In the Ottoman Empire, they say, they were forced to choose between keeping their language or their religion.<sup>202</sup> Choosing to keep their religion was claimed by them to have been a wise decision because it allowed them to save their Greekness in a hostile and oppressive environment.<sup>203</sup> Their collective myth aimed to demonstrate to other Greeks that language was not so important in keeping one's Greekness. As their myth indicates, religious traditions have been particularly important as markers and symbols of Greekness for the Turkophone FSU Greeks. At the same time, people from Tsalka also tended to give to their children ancient Greek names as a means to emphasize their Greekness (see also Voutira, 2004).

Identification with their village or town of origin in the former Soviet Union remains strong among FSU Greek immigrants. Further, and despite the inter-village contestations, those from Tsalka also embrace a common Tsalkan identity; Tsalkans form a distinct group within the FSU Greek community in Greece. During the early years of migration this was also reflected in marriage politics. Marrying within the community was sought after by the Tsalkans, while other FSU Greeks resisted intermarriage with them. Both practices are gradually becoming much less common, as part of a general trend towards the diminishing of internal differences within the FSU Greek community; I return to this later in this chapter.

Tsalkans are praised by a small minority of FSU Greeks for being solidaristic to each other as well as hardworking and practical people. However, as mentioned, the majority speak negatively about them and dissociate from them. Tsalkans were stigmatized by a considerable segment of my FSU Greek informants as savage/uncivilized people, and seen as phallogractic and conservative by FSU Greek women in particular. Moreover, several of my informants claimed that they are not real Greeks. A limited number of FSU Greeks even scapegoat them, together with the 'fake Greeks' and non-Greek FSU nationals, blaming them for the negative image which FSU Greeks have acquired in Greece.

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<sup>202</sup> Interestingly, a similar myth is narrated by the Marioupol Urums as an explanation of their Turkic mother tongue.

<sup>203</sup> Building further on this myth, one of my informants from Tsalka told me that she does not trust that the local Pontic-speaking Greeks are real Christians, 'except if they recently converted back to Orthodox Christianity'.

Such negative representations target the Turkophones. Due to their overrepresentation in the area, the Tsalkan label is used for outsiders in Thessaloniki as a synonym for the Turkophone FSU Greeks.<sup>204</sup> On their side, Tsalkans identify strongly with their area of origin and maintain close relations with other Tsalkans. Tsalkan men claim to be the bravest and the strongest of the FSU Greeks. In our discussions they also made reference to a survey done during the Soviet Union period which, according to what they told me, found that the people of Tsalka 'were the most educated in Georgia'.

### **Becoming Pontic**

Rejection of the Pontic identity was not only expressed by several of my Turkophone FSU Greek informants but by a minority of my Pontic-speaking FSU Greek informants, too. As mentioned, Pontos had not been a marker of identification for any of the groups of the FSU Greek diaspora, including the Pontic speakers. The words of Galina are indicative:

I would prefer it if they called us Romii. It would have been better. I had not heard the word 'Pontic' before. What does it mean to be a Pontic? Ok, I do speak the Pontic language but I did not know that this language is called like that. In the village we had Pontic music and dances such as Kotchari [a Pontic dance] but I could only dance the basic steps. As far as music is concerned I cannot listen to more than two, three songs I get tired by the sound of the lyre. In Tbilisi we were listening to the songs of Theodorakis [a well-known Greek composer and songwriter] with my husband.

Soviet Pontics who had been living outside their place of origin in the former Soviet Union, and who had distanced themselves from the social norms and traditions practiced by Soviet Pontic communities, were less connected to the Pontic identity in Greece. Ponticness is practised through different cultural forms such as Pontic music and dance, the Pontic dialect, and Pontic culinary tastes. Not possessing those 'ethnic competences' made them feel less comfortable with it. Most importantly, FSU Greeks such as Galina, who were knowledgeable about contemporary Greek culture and history but had also a high socio-economic status, could directly claim a Greek identity. They did not have to highlight their Pontic descent to prove their Greekness.

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<sup>204</sup> The existence of small Turkophone FSU Greek communities in other areas in Georgia, such as Gkoumeret, Opret, and Tsints'qaro are much less well known, if known at all, among other FSU Greeks and natives.

A second factor that to a certain extent influenced the embracing of the Pontic identity by Soviet Pontics was the time of arrival of their ancestors in the former Soviet Union. Soviet Pontics whose descendants had fled Eastern Pontos in the aftermath of the First World War were more prone to relate to their Pontic identity in Greece as compared to descendants of nineteenth-century immigrants who were commonly more alienated from the history of their forefathers in Pontos.

Looking at the overall picture, however, the findings of my qualitative research indicate that the Pontic-speaking FSU Greeks who endorsed the Pontic identity formed a clear majority. This is further corroborated by data from the GEITONIES survey; 8 out of 10 identified as Pontics and only 2 out of 10 as Greeks. Interestingly, a sizeable segment of the Turkophone FSU Greeks also identified as Pontics. According to the GEITONIES data set it seems that they are the majority: 6 out of 10 Turkophone FSU Greeks residents in Nikopoli identified as Pontics and 4 out of 10 as Greeks. The Pontic identity was even more popular among the younger generations who were not included in the GEITONIES sample.<sup>205</sup> Young Turkophone FSU Greeks learn the Pontic dances in FSU Greek feasts and are informed about the history of Pontos by other FSU Greeks and from books. They also participate in the commemorations of the Virgin Mary Soumela church and proudly identify as Pontics. Building on this, one may reasonably expect that in the coming years the Pontic identity will become clearly dominant also among Turkophone FSU Greeks. At the level of collective representations, the general associations of the FSU Greeks of Tsalka and that of the Turkophone village Avranlo are officially self-defined as Pontic and they are members of the Greek federation of Pontic associations.<sup>206</sup>

As the case of the Turkophone Greeks proves, identification with the Pontic identity is not a direct function of FSU Greeks' descent and culture, defined as fixed categories. Existing perceptions of common descent and cultural affinity facilitated (and their lack impeded) the feeling of belonging yet they were not necessary prerequisites. Barth has illustrated that ethnic identity is not a nebulous expression of culture but rather a matter of the social organization of cultural difference. Through interaction, certain cultural practices come to mark the boundary and as such they acquire symbolic significance for the self-ascription and other-ascription of identities (1969). Cultural practices that symbolically mark ethnic belonging may be adopted, appropriated, and reconstructed. Descent is also much less fixed than we usually tend to think. It is a matter of subjective

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<sup>205</sup> An age limit of 25 years applied.

<sup>206</sup> Moreover, the owners of the website [www.tsalka.gr](http://www.tsalka.gr) describe their history as part of the Pontic history.

presentation of the placement of one's immediate reference group within given historical categories. There are discursive limitations on the degree to which such presentations may be accepted externally. Yet given the dominant native perception of the 'real FSU' Greeks as being exclusively Pontics, for the Turkophone FSU Greeks identifying as Pontics simply amounts to presenting their ancestors, the Christian Orthodox population of the Erzurum region, as part of the Pontic people.

If one accepts that feelings of belongingness can be discursively supported through particular presentations of the past and be practiced through the engagement with (symbolic) cultural activities that mark ethnic group boundaries, then the focus of the research ought to concern uncovering what makes people adopt or subconsciously internalize an identity. This requires an exploration of the dynamics within the interactional field (Barth, 1969), as well as a thorough analysis of the meanings possessed by the labels that are used to mark identities (Jenkins, 2008).

It has been shown that after immigration to Greece, and in interaction with the dominant society, FSU Greeks had to completely reposition their sense of belonging. They had to make sense of their selves and reframe their affiliations in relation to certain labels which were externally imposed. The content of such labels may be continuously reconstructed, yet at a given point in time they carry particular meanings and legacies. They are not empty vessels to which one can freely attribute any content. It is those embedded meanings that make them appealing or foreign to individuals and groups.

Having said that, the diasporic dimension of the Pontic identity seems to be an important reason for its internalization by FSU Greeks. FSU Greeks can easily situate their personal and collective history within that of the Pontic people. Through this process they acquire symbolic tools to reassess and re-narrate their past within the Greek historiography, to make sense of and negotiate their position within the Greek nation and to put forward claims and expectations for the future. The Pontic identity involves and expresses feelings of separation and loss, as well as memories of collective suffering with reference to the tragic history of the massacres and the violent uprooting of Pontic people in the 1920s. It further includes experiences of social marginality and the denial of recognition which Pontic people faced in their attempt to rebuild their homes in Greece. The lyrics of the following Pontic song, which is particularly popular among FSU Greeks, is a vivid illustration of such discourses:

*I built five houses and I had to desert them all  
I am a refugee from the cradle, my lord I will go mad  
Houses I left behind between torrents and the banks of the river  
wells made of marble, water like my tears  
And now I am thirsty here and I have no water to drink  
I am ashamed to ask for it to wet my mouth  
I am looking for you my homeland, like the cursed one  
In foreign lands I am a Greek and in Greece a foreigner*  
(Ch. Antoniadis 1997, my translation)

Several of my informants have been immigrants three or four times, and three generations of their family had experienced forced uprootings, deportations, and immigrations to places including Anatolia, the Caucasus, Central Asia, Russia, Ukraine, Greece, and Western Europe. By endorsing the Pontic identity, such personal and family experiences of displacement are placed within and understood as part of the history of Pontic people. In this context, and in a loose and symbolic interpretation of the term 'genocide', several of my informants renamed the deportation of FSU Greeks to Central Asia a second 'genocide' of the Pontic people.<sup>207</sup> Reference was also made to the alleged fate of Pontic people who, as they told me, are doomed to wander endlessly until they eventually return to Pontos. Moreover, the last line of the song – 'In foreign lands I am a Greek and in Greece a foreigner' – was echoed by several of my informants. It was cited as an accurate account of their marginal status both in the former Soviet Union and in Greece.

Another aspect of the Pontic identity which relate to its diasporic dimension is trust in the adaptive skills and the hard-working ethos of Pontic people: the certainty that 'no matter the difficulties, Pontic people will make it'. Such perceptions are supported through selective references. For instance Kalamaria, a former refugee district of Thessaloniki that primarily concentrated Pontic people and developed into one of the most well-off neighbourhoods in the city, is cited as an example of the virtues of the Pontic people. Reference to Kalamaria was also made by my FSU Greek informants. As one of them told me, 'Our people will make it. They call us Russo-Pontic but in a few years they will not dare to. Older generation Pontics transformed Kalamaria from a swamp to what it is today, and the same will happen with us'. Many more referred to the economic attainments of FSU Greeks in central Asia, where FSU Greeks had to build their lives up again after displacement, but also in other places in the FSU where they formed

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<sup>207</sup> One of my informants even told me he thinks that immigration to Greece was the third genocide of the Pontic people.

small minorities. These instances were recounted as evidence of the entrepreneurial and persistent character of Pontics.

Alongside the diasporic dimension of the Pontic identity there is one more crucial aspect that complements the meaning attributed to it by FSU Greeks; Ponticness signifies their cultural distance from the imagined homeland as well as the native population (Popov, 2010). Although FSU Greeks departed from Russia as Greeks, after settlement in the historic homeland they discovered their cultural difference from native Greeks who relabelled them as Russo-Pontics, new refugees, Pontics, returnees, etc. The Pontic identity was selected as a self-identification that indicated their felt experience of otherness as opposed to native Greeks but at the same time allowed their inclusion into Greek society.

### *Éllines and póntii – naschi and t'iméteron*

One day I was transcribing my interviews at my apartment in Nikopoli when someone knocked at my door. It was an old FSU Greek man. He could speak no Pontic and only a little Greek. Given my poor knowledge of Russian, we entered into a short discussion half in Greek, half in Russian. He asked for a person whose name I could not recognize. To help me understand to whom he was referring, he gave me the following description: a Pontic person at his age who was supposed to live on this floor. He emphasized the word *Pontic* (Πόντιος). He did not refer to a *homogenís*, a refugee, a returnee, and of course not to a Russo-Pontic as a native would have done; nor did he use the word Greek. The person he was searching for was my next door neighbour, a Turkophone old man from Tsalka.

It was this incident that made me realize that most FSU Greeks introduce themselves as Pontics to native Greeks as a response to and rejection of the stigmatizing categorization of Russo-Pontics, as well as a way to distinguish themselves from them. In their discourse, the Pontic identity is contrasted to the category of *Ellin* (Έλληνας) or *Éllinas* (Ελληνας), Greek – or, more precisely Hellene – in Russian and Greek respectively. The latter terms are used to refer to native Greeks, while the word 'Pontic' is reserved as a label to denote their otherness in the native Greek society.

FSU Greeks were Greeks in the former Soviet Union and the Soviet successor states and became Pontics in Greece. This is illustrated in a graphic way by the following story I was told one day when I was dining with an FSU Greek couple and their relatives. My hosts told me: 'A friend of ours called a native Greek employer to ask for work. When the employer asked him if he is Greek [*Éllinas*],

he replied ‘no, I am Pontic’. My hosts burst into laughter for what he thought was a big blunder. In his attempt to describe his origin and to differentiate himself from the native Greek employer, their friend had replied as if he was not Greek. The terms *Éllinas* and Pontic are used to denote a ‘we/you’ distinction, but can be confusing if used out of context. Calling themselves Pontics is sufficient for FSU Greeks to assert their Grekness, since Pontics are Greeks too. However, presenting themselves as Pontics but not Greeks (*Éllines*) is tantamount to accepting what they are fiercely fighting against.

FSU Greeks self-identify as Pontics to designate membership of the FSU Greek community in Greece.<sup>208</sup> They use the term ‘Pontic’ without much reference to the native Pontic population. I came to understand this after failing several times to make myself clear when I asked my FSU Greek informants about their relation with Pontics in Greece. Having in mind the native conceptualization of the term ‘Pontic’, I meant to ask about their relations with *native Pontics* in Greece. However, my informants started elaborating on the deterioration of personal relations within the FSU Greek community in Greece. According to their understanding of the term ‘Pontic’, they thought I was asking them about their relations with other FSU Greek immigrants. My ethnocentric and fixed understanding of what it means to be Pontic in the context of the native society initially blinded me to their usage of the term.

Apart from the Pontic label, FSU Greeks also used the Russian word *naschi* (наши) and the Greek word *i dikí mas* (οι δικοί μας), which both mean ‘our people’, to express their sense of community in Greece. In the GEITONIES survey, a limited number of FSU Greeks (n = 25) answered the following questions: ‘do you use the word *naschi* to refer to a social group in Greece?’, and, if yes, ‘to whom are you referring to with it?’. Only 2 respondents included both native and Soviet Pontic people in the ‘our people’ reference group while 6 people clarified that with the term they only refer to Pontics (i.e. Greeks) from the former Soviet Union. Three persons responded they use it for subcategories of the FSU Greek diaspora, namely the Turkophone Greeks, the Greeks from Tsalka, and the Greeks from Sokhumi; 1 person used it for all Caucasian people; and 1 person for all immigrants living in Greece.

Interestingly, the majority of respondents (11 out of 25) said they use the term with reference to all FSU nationals. After immigration to the historic homeland, FSU Greeks found themselves sharing a minority position with nationalities that formed the majority groups in their respective republics in the former Soviet

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<sup>208</sup> With the exception of those who are prejudiced towards the Tsalkan Greeks and exclude them from this categorization.

Union. In opposition to the dominant native group, the FSU 'others' were transformed into 'our people' in Greece. It is interesting to note that this sense of group-ness had developed without the existence of close interpersonal relations between Greek and non-Greek FSU immigrants and did not correspond to the FSU Greeks' self-identifications. More specifically, only a small minority of FSU Greeks, usually offspring of mixed marriages or persons who had strongly embraced the state ideology in the former Soviet Union, identified as 'Soviet persons' (советский человек). The majority emphatically distinguished themselves from other FSU nationals and several were also very prejudiced towards them, especially towards 'the Caucasians' (see chapter 6, pp. 155-157). According to the data of the GEITONIES project, only 5 out of the 91 FSU Greek respondents in Nikopoli described themselves as Soviet persons. As far as interpersonal relations are concerned, the GEITONIES data set revealed that the largest share (75%) of FSU Greeks' 'close social networks'<sup>209</sup> exclusively comprised other FSU Greek people. Non-Greek FSU immigrants were considerably less represented in the intimate social networks of FSU Greeks also as compared to native Greeks.<sup>210</sup>

Feelings of group-ness with non-Greek FSU immigrants were based on their common minority status. The cultural aspects that separated FSU from native Greeks, as well as their low class standing, bound them together with non-Greek FSU immigrants. This togetherness was also an actual experience within a number of institutions that structured FSU Greeks' community life. For instance the 'Russian church' in Efxinoupoli not only attracted FSU Greeks but other former Soviet Union nationals too. Native Greeks barely ever visited the church, especially after the building of the church in Nikopoli. Concerts with Russian pop stars, which are organized at Christmas or Easter by FSU Greek owners of big wedding halls, attract not only FSU Greeks but other former Soviet Union nationals too. The same went for entertainment spaces like the 'Russian' club Sabient, as well as for certain activities organized by FSU Greeks such as theatre and beauty contests. Finally, both FSU Greek and other former Soviet Union immigrants are customers of the same shops which stock 'Russian' products.

Marriage practices are another interesting instance of how the FSU 'others' turned into 'our people' in Greece. Unfortunately, I was not allowed access to the

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<sup>209</sup> Respondents were asked to give information regarding the most important people in their social network in terms of spending free time, confidentiality, and help. They were asked to give information for up to two persons for each category and they were also given the option to include up to two more important persons not included in the other categories. In total they could give information about a maximum of eight persons.

<sup>210</sup> Only 6 out of 85 respondents included non-Greek FSU immigrants in their close social network whereas 16 respondents included native Greeks.

marriage archives of the parish of Stavroupoli and Neapoli which could have provided me with a statistically valid measure of mixed marriages involving FSU Greeks in Thessaloniki.<sup>211</sup> However, according to what my informants told me it appears that the fierce rejection of intermarriage with non-Greeks that prevailed within several closed FSU Greek communities in the former Soviet Union was gradually reduced in Greece. Anastasia, an FSU Greek woman in her early twenties from a Greek village in Adjara, told me that the main reason why her family left their village in the mid 1990s was the heavy depopulation of the local Greek population. Her parents feared that she and her sister would end up marrying Georgians. In Greece, Anastasia's sister married a native Greek and Anastasia married an FSU Greek whom she later divorced. In their case immigration to Greece did prevent mixed marriage with non-Greeks. However, for several FSU Greek men it transpired to be the reason why they turned to non-Greek partners.

Due to the stereotype of the violent and repressive Russo-Pontic and their low socio-economic class, many were treated as less desirable partners by native Greek women. Moreover, among several FSU Greeks who embraced patriarchal marriage norms, intermarriage with women from successor Soviet countries, especially those in the Caucasus, even became preferred. Those FSU Greeks represented native Greek women as excessively emancipated and not good housewives.<sup>212</sup> In comparison, Caucasian women, who tended to keep a strict moral code that regulated gender relations in marriage in the Caucasus, were viewed more positively. This code prescribed values such as devotion to the domestic realm, deference to the husband, modesty in public behaviour, and premarital virginity. The latter was very important for some FSU Greek men originating in Caucasus. Although traditional norms about marriage were swiftly changing intergenerationally, at the time of my research a considerable number of first and one-and-a-half generation FSU Greek men originating in Caucasus would only marry a women who was a virgin. For that reason, several had turned to arranged marriages with women from the former Soviet Union. Given that

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<sup>211</sup> This parish includes the largest segment of the FSU Greek population in Thessaloniki. Although I was kindly provided access to the archives of the church in Efxinoupoli, I did not analyse those data since they would be biased towards FSU Greek-FSU national marriages. Many more such mixed marriages are held there due to the fact that the Russian language is used in the liturgy. At the same time, I did not attempt to access the archive of the other church in Nikopoli, though for the opposite reason. My sample would be significantly biased towards native Greek-FSU Greek marriages. As far as the GEITONIES data set is concerned, unfortunately there was no information about the origin of the partner, and the country of birth cannot be used as a proxy.

<sup>212</sup> Representations about native Greek men by FSU Greek women were more mixed. In comparison to FSU Greek and Caucasian men they were though of being softer and less strict, which was treated as a positive thing by most of my informants. Nevertheless, they were also negatively represented for their habit of developing long relationships before marriage.

FSU Greek communities in Georgia and Armenia are disappearing, they mostly turned to Georgia and Armenian, or to Russian women who rejected sex before marriage.

### **The immigrant-native divide**

Returning to the issue of the relations between FSU Greeks and native Pontics in Nikopoli, the common cultural practices that connected the two communities – such as language, belief in a common origin, and their common identification as Pontics – had not provided for strong feelings of groupness at the time of my research in Nikopoli. Concerning their relations with native Pontics in general, my informants did tell me they are more attached to native Pontics than to other Greeks. They also told me that native Pontics in general tended to show solidarity and friendship towards them when they got to know that they are *t'iméteron* (ours, one of us) – a term used by Pontic people to denote membership in the group. However, that happened only on isolated occasions.<sup>213</sup> To give an example, Ivan told me that he had been involved in a car crash which was resolved in a peaceful manner because the driver of the other car was a native Pontic.<sup>214</sup>

It is possible that within local settings with characteristics unlike those in Nikopoli, as well as within certain institutions, strong relations and feelings of groupness might have developed between the two communities. However, my data indicate that beyond the official discourses of formal associations, a general sense of belonging to a common group was not widespread at the time of my research. It seems to have been prevented by the immigrant–native divide that separated the two communities.

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<sup>213</sup> In my question as to whether they were helped by native Pontics in their settlement in Greece, my informants told me that several people were helpful during the first year, but that this did not necessarily have to do with whether they were Pontic. One of my informants even specified that native Pontics were both the best and the worst.

<sup>214</sup> I heard a few more such stories but the most exceptional one was narrated from the perspective of a native Pontic. I include it here despite the risk that it might feed stereotypes of FSU Greeks being engaged with criminal activities. Xenia, a native Pontic friend of mine, worked for a short period as a secretary in a car rental company. One day a gang of four young men entered the place and asked for the owner. Xenia was alone. They started searching the place and in one of the drawers discovered a gun. Pointing to the gun, they told Xenia to inform her boss that 'this won't save him' and that he had to return their money soon or they would destroy the shop and take the company's cars. A few days later they came again. Xenia, hearing one of them say something in Pontic, asked if they were Pontics. They replied positively. It Christmas time. They started singing Pontic carols altogether. They told Xenia she should not worry and that no matter what happened she would be in no danger.

For instance, the fact that local native and Soviet Pontics had similar occupations did not mean that they also had similar everyday experiences, needs, and concerns. Native Pontics are an established group in Thessaloniki while FSU Greeks are in the process of building their life there. It is very common for FSU Greek adolescents to work during the summer to contribute to the family income, while this is exceptionally rare for native Greek adolescents even of working-class families. The issue of home was also an issue that separated the two groups. Almost all of my FSU Greek informants were in debts after having bought a house, usually via state loans, or were in a continuous process of trying to finalize their *afthéreta* homes. The majority of my Pontic informants had much more secure housing trajectories (see chapter 5.2). At the same time, a considerable number of my FSU Greek informants also had to deal with issues that related to citizenship acquisition or family reunification, while most of them had relatives abroad.

Such differences are also reflected in the activities of FSU and native Pontic associations. The latter are more engaged with cultural reproduction. They offer dance and music lessons (language), organize festivals and excursions and actively participate in activities for the recognition of the 'Pontic genocide'. At the time of my research the FSU Greek associations were disappearing due to cuts in funding, especially after the closing of the General Secretariat for returning *homogenís* from the former Soviet Union. In order to avoid the costs of rent, most of them did not maintain offices and existed only on paper. Presidents and board members who continued to be active were also involved in local politics or were absorbed by other native Pontic associations, and pursued bureaucratic issues for fellow FSU Greeks in order to support their income. At earlier times, when funding was available, the FSU Greek associations were mostly engaged in helping people who were in urgent financial need, and they managed small budgets that were made available for the aid of the FSU Greek community. Some of them also organized a few excursions and language courses. A member of an association that was still active at the time of my research told me about their differences from native Pontic associations.

We take part in the activities of the federation. We put commemoration wreaths in the national celebrations of 25<sup>th</sup> March and 28<sup>th</sup> October as well on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May, when we Pontics honour the victims of the Pontic genocide. It is simply that the associations of the natives have different problems and needs and for that we have to function differently. They cannot understand our needs. Our people are in more need of help for everyday issues. Some of them do not even know the language that well. They have problems that native Pontics cannot understand.

In 2009 I was present in the commemoration activities for the ‘Pontic genocide’. In the evening there were public talks given by the major, the prefect, representatives of all major political parties, from the local Armenian community, and the minister of justice of the state of South Australia (where in that year the Pontic genocide was recognized). The public included many Pontic people, the majority of native background, and representatives of most of the Pontic associations of northern Greece. A big banner by an FSU Greek association stood out from the rest. It read: ‘The Pontic *homogenis*<sup>215</sup> have experienced for the past eighteen years their humiliation and the “genocide” of their Greek consciousness.’ The number eighteen was written on a patch stuck on a banner. Apparently this was an old banner that the FSU Greeks had used also in older commemorations and demonstrations. The years may have passed but they seemed to have the same worries, which did not touch the native Pontic Greeks so strongly.

### Hybridity and purity

A final dimension of the immigrant-native divide that seems to separate native from FSU Pontics relates to cultural issues. Such differences also pertain to Pontic customs. Music, literature, and theatre traditions were better preserved in Greece due to the workings of local Pontic associations. However, there are several customs which were dying out in Greece, but which are still practiced by FSU Pontics. One such case is the commemoration of the dead that takes place on the day of the celebration of the Apostle Thomas, the Thomas Sunday (Η Κυριακή του Θωμά). On that day FSU Greeks tend to visit their family grave and spend the day drinking and eating there as if the dead members of their family are together with them.<sup>216</sup> Another custom is that of the Kurban, the animal sacrifice to a saint in the event of an importance personal and family occasion such as marriage. Kurban is also practised by Soviet Pontics in Soumela church on the old Calendar procession for the dormition of Virgin Mary on the 28<sup>th</sup> of

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<sup>215</sup> It is interesting that in order to differentiate themselves from native Pontics they used the term *homogenis*. As mentioned, this term as deployed in everyday language by native Greeks to refer to the FSU Greeks as a short version of the official term ‘*homogenis* returnees from the former Soviet Union. Its usage next to the word ‘Pontic’, however, does not make much sense as a way to distinguish native from Soviet Pontics. Literally it means, ‘Pontic people of the same descent’.

<sup>216</sup> Several FSU Greeks also found exhumation, which is practiced in Greece, alien. Once human remains reach a certain age (one to three years) they are disinterred, washed with wine, perfumed, and placed in a small ossuary of wood or metal, inscribed with the name of the departed, and placed in a room. In certain Pontic villages where there was plenty of space, no exhumation was practiced. The same held for several communities of FSU Greek in the Former Soviet Union too.

August. The practice involves the blood sacrifice of lambs to Virgin Mary in the courtyard of the church. People who participate in the ceremonial sacrifice mark the sign of the cross on their forehead with blood of the sanctified slaughter and join the procession. Similar customs are practised in Lesbos Island and Thrace on different religious celebrations, but no longer by native Pontics (Georgoudi 1979).

Much more substantial differences than those relating to the preservation of Pontic customs concern the influence of the larger societies within which FSU and native Pontics were embedded. During my fieldwork I was able to assess the multiplicity of cultural differences between FSU and native Greeks. In chapter 6 I referred to the issues of spending free time and usage of public space. In earlier sections of the present subchapter I focused on the language differences which made native Pontics doubt the Ponticness of FSU Greeks in Nikopoli. Here, I provide instances that point to cultural distinctions between Soviet and native Pontics with regards entertainment.

Wedding feasts are major occasions of entertainment and socialization for FSU Greeks, especially the first generation who do not frequent taverns or bars. Celebrations are very open and the number of guests can run into the hundreds; as a result many FSU Greeks are invited to several wedding feasts each year. Obviously, the cost of organizing such an event is very high, including among other things paying for the venue, food, drinks, and the band. Overall, however, it can turn a profit for the family due to the custom of guests offering money to the newly married couple. A family friend or relative serves as a cashier and donations are made officially. Names are registered so that equivalent amounts of money can be given to future marriages of members of the donating family.

I was present at two wedding feasts. The first one was for a marriage of an FSU Pontic woman to a native Pontic man, and the second for the marriage between an FSU Greek man and a Russian woman. In both feasts a toastmaster led the celebration. Toasts were made in Greek in the first wedding and in Russian in the second. The presence of the toastmaster derives from the Georgian culture of the *tamada*. The *tamada* is a person chosen to orchestrate all feasts save the most informal. He is a respected and usually elderly person who knows most of the guests and is recognized as being eloquent, intelligent, sharp, and able to hold his drink. Symbolically, the *tamada* bridges the gap between past, present, and future. Practically, he guides the company through a series of toasts which call for downing a glass of alcohol. Sipping and drinking out of order is not allowed (Goldstein, 1999). Often the *tamada's* words are echoed by others in the gathering in a sort of oratory contest. Several FSU Greeks from Georgia maintain the tradition of the *tamada*.

In both wedding feasts where I was present, Pontic music and dances played a very prominent position in the music program. Guest of all ages danced in big concentric circles for several hours. In the first feast the *tamada* made reference several times to the virtues of the Pontic people and the brotherhood of Pontics. The native Greek groom was also of Pontic descent. However, Pontic was not the only music played. For instance, when the bride entered the hall the band played a Shalakho tune to which the bride danced what they told me is the dance of the bride. Salakho is an Armenian dance. After the dance of the bride a number of Caucasian songs were played. In the other wedding the lezginka was also danced: this is a virtuoso dance with quick precise steps including falling to the knees and leaping up quickly. This dance derives its name from the Lezgin people in Caucasus and is very popular in Georgian and the Russian Caucasus. Russian disco as well as Russian romantic songs were also played, alongside contemporary Greek pop music and American dance music. The food offered included Caucasian and Russian dishes, such as shaslik, Caviar, and Russian sweets, while people were offered vodka or Greek white wine as drinks. As an informant told me, the choice of food in the wedding feast serves to remind them of 'home'.

I made similar observations regarding the multiplicity of music and dance traditions embraced by FSU Greeks at a party organized at a local cafeteria in Nikopoli owned by an FSU Greek. A Pontic band performed live and FSU Greeks danced, captivated by the ecstatic rhythm of the Pontic music. Equally cheerful was their later reaction to Russian disco and romantic Russian songs. Those observations made me understand Gioras's words, which I quoted earlier, that 'the fact that we are both of Pontic origin does not mean that we are the same.'

Such cultural differences become apparent not only in mixed marriages but also in the ethnic gatherings in Soumela church. The most significant difference relates to religion and results in a complete separation between members of the Soviet Pontic community and native Pontics: specifically, a segment of the FSU Greek population adheres to the Julian Calendar, which is the official calendar of the Russian Church, and not to the Gregorian Calendar which is adopted by the Greek Church. As a result, several FSU Pontics celebrate the dormition of the Virgin Mary on a different day (the 28<sup>th</sup> instead of the 15<sup>th</sup>). On that day they also practise the custom of Kurban.

I have been present in the Soumela church for both occasions, on the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup> August 2009. Many Soviet Pontics visited the church for the procession on the 15<sup>th</sup> and, like many native Pontics, camped overnight in tents. Groups of people partied in separate campsites and there was not much interaction between the two groups, except for the night feast on the eve of the procession. Campsites

were also rather separated spatially, with more FSU Pontics camping in peripheral places in the woods, while natives stayed closer to the church.

Although Pontic music dominated, FSU Pontics also played Russian disco or Caucasian music and Greeks played contemporary pop music. Differences prevailed also in relation to language. Searching in online Pontic forums I was informed that three years earlier the use of Turkish language by Tsalkan FSU Greeks had led to an internal conflict between Pontic-speaking FSU Greeks and Tsalkans. A group of Tsalkan people had been playing loud music with Turkish lyrics from a car that was parked in the vicinity of the church. This caused a controversy. It was taken as an insult to the place by other FSU Pontics. According to descriptions in the forum, the dispute culminated in a fight which expressed the internal divisions among FSU Pontics (Pontos forum, 2006).

# Conclusion

Immigrants and natives are thought of as opposing categories in relation to their belongingness to the nation-state in which they cohabit. Although the centrality of ideologies of national belonging in structuring immigrant-native relations is generally acknowledged in the literature (see Favel, 2003), limited research has been done on how those ideologies are experienced and negotiated in everyday life. My study set out to enquire into this issue by focusing on a rather exceptional case of migration, namely that of people who have always lived outside the borders of the nation, but who are nonetheless regarded as co-nationals. It is an ethnography of the relationship between two categories of residents in Nikopoli, a neighbourhood in Thessaloniki, Greece – one comprising Greeks born and raised in the country, the other also being of Greek descent, but having immigrated from countries formerly belonging to the Soviet Union and lacking any roots within the borders of the Greek state.

In sharp contrast with the presentation of FSU Greek migrants by politicians and the media as fellow nationals coming home, my findings in Nikopoli indicated that most native residents entertained a prejudicial image about their FSU Greek neighbours, whose Greekness they doubted. This contrast points to the complexity of the role played by ideologies of national belonging in everyday life. To account for this complexity, I developed a theoretical framework that draws from Elias and Scotson's established and outsider model (1994/1965), Hage's notion of practical nationality (2000), and Blumer's (1958) theory on race prejudice. In view of this theory I formulated two questions which structured the analysis presented in the previous chapters, and which I will answer here: How do FSU and native Greeks, both considered to be groups that belong to the nation, experience national belonging in everyday life in Nikopoli? How can we explain the fact that native Greeks doubt the Greekness of the FSU Greeks, and what would one expect the reaction of the latter to be?

## 8.1 Outlining and explaining the figuration of Nikopoli

### The historical background

Successive Greek governments have treated Greeks abroad, the *homogénia*, as a resource with which to pursue the goals of the Greek state ('the national centre'). Greece and the *homogénia* are bound together in a mutually recognized solidaristic relationship. The *homogenís* are expected to act for the benefit of the 'national centre', while the Greek state is perceived as having a moral obligation towards them (see chapter 2). Within this larger scheme, the case of the Greeks in the Soviet Union is an intriguing and rather exceptional case. Soviet Greeks remained enclosed within the sealed borders of the Soviet Union,<sup>217</sup> with very limited contact with 'the historic homeland' and largely forgotten by it. The East-West divide separated Greece from this segment of the *homogénia*.

However, the situation changed drastically in the late 1980s when FSU Greeks started migrating to Greece from the disintegrating Soviet Union (chapter 3). In that period, voices about the moral duty of 'the fatherland' towards a forgotten and much afflicted twig of the Greek family tree, originally expressed by Pontic associations, gradually became stronger in Greece. Governmental officials conceptualized this migration as an asset for the state (chapter 4). They addressed an official invitation to FSU Greeks to take up permanent residence 'in the fatherland' and organized a repatriation policy plan. This plan aimed at their settlement in the rural areas of the north-eastern geographical department of Thrace, home to the Greek Muslim minority. It was expected that the presence of the FSU Greeks in rural Thrace would economically revitalize the area, as well as alter its religious and ethnic composition. The policy was inspired by the 1923 rural refugee settlement, which is collectively perceived as a success (Voutira, 2003b). It was also designed with a particular image of the newcomers in mind. FSU Greeks were expected to accept difficult living conditions in the border regions.

The expectations of the policy makers were not met. The settlement plan failed, due to a lack of employment opportunities in the area, the inability of the Greek state to carry out the plan efficiently, and most importantly because the newcomers did not consider rural Thrace an appealing destination. They preferred to settle in the big cities. They were also not willing to tolerate difficult and makeshift conditions before they were provided with what they were

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<sup>217</sup> With the exception of the small-scale migrations in the 1930s and 1960s.

promised. Although the Greek governments gradually reconsidered the policy goal of inviting FSU Greeks, the right of the latter to settle in Greece was not questioned. Nor was the obligation of the state to offer them what was, in comparison to non-Greek immigrants, a privileged reception. FSU Greeks remained officially welcome in 'the fatherland' should they aspire to 'return' to it. According to ideologies of Greekness that conceive the nation as a trans-territorial community defined by descent and the Greek state as a refuge of this community, FSU Greeks belong to Greece as much as its native population does. However, the experiences of their day-to-day interactions with native Greeks in Nikopoli seem to challenge this presumption.

### **FSU and native Greeks in Nikopoli**

Native Greeks developed negative attitudes towards their FSU Greek neighbours in Nikopoli against a background of limited interpersonal interaction between the members of the two communities. Their attitudes were mostly inferred from stories heard from others, usually concerning the FSU Greek's alleged aggressiveness and delinquent behaviour, or were supported with reference to how they saw them use the neighbourhood's public spaces. The urban space of Nikopoli partly accounts for the limited interaction between FSU and native Greeks (see chapter 6, pp. 121-122). Interaction was further constrained by diverging attitudes towards leisure and out-of-house activities. FSU Greeks made extensive use of the public space of the neighbourhood while the natives preferred to frequent local cafeterias and *tavernas* or spent their leisure time outside the neighbourhood altogether.

Many native Greeks criticized the FSU Greeks' extensive use of public space, and especially their habit of drinking in the street. They viewed this practice as an indication of alcohol problems rather than a social practice, and related it to their views of people from Russia as heavy drinkers. Moreover, they passed negative comments on the leisure shacks built by FSU Greeks in different places in the neighbourhood. From the perspective of the natives, these shacks aggravated the already degraded built environment of Nikopoli and were an indication of what they perceived as the refusal of their FSU Greek neighbours to adapt. Native Greeks felt that they were separated from FSU Greeks by a cultural gap. In their view it was this gap, and what they claimed to be the FSU Greeks' sullen attitude and lack of manners, that prevented their intermingling. Such views were expressed by the majority of older native residents but also by a considerable segment of those who had settled in the neighbourhood at the same time as, or even after, the majority of the local FSU Greek population.

Native residents were also critical about FSU Greeks speaking Russian and other non-Greek languages. It made them doubt their Greekness. Their mistrust was further fed by the satellite discs on the balconies of the apartments and the rooftops of houses of FSU Greeks, the Russian newspapers in local convenience stores and kiosks, and the posts and banners in Russian on a few of the shop fronts. In their opinion, most of the immigrants in the neighbourhood claiming Greek descent aren't Greeks at all.

The native residents mostly called FSU Greeks 'Russo-Pontics', 'Russo-phones', or simply 'Russians'. The words 'Russians' and 'Russo-phones' were used synonymously as generic labels to refer to people of various FSU nationalities rather than Russians per se. 'The Russo-Pontic' is a rather dubious label. As opposed to 'the Russian', it was occasionally evoked (in a positive manner) to discern the Greek from the non-Greek FSU immigrants. However, most commonly it was used as an all-inclusive label for the whole Russian-speaking community in the neighbourhood in expressing doubt about their Greekness.

The Russo-Pontic label is also widely used by native Greeks outside the neighbourhood. It was originally employed as a term to distinguish the Pontics who immigrated from the former Soviet Union from the 'native-Pontics' who settled in the country with the 1920s forced population exchange. However, the label gradually acquired a pejorative meaning. Depending on the context in which it is used, it may signify a low class standing and indicate doubt about the Greekness of the categorized. Furthermore, in its more common usage, it embodies the stereotypes of the FSU immigrants' alleged aggressiveness and criminality.

The assessment of native Greeks of their FSU Greek neighbours was mediated by this negative public opinion of the Russo-Pontics. For instance, the image of the FSU Greeks in Nikopoli as aggressive people was strong, sustained, and augmented through gossip and the spread of rumours. This image impeded contact between the two communities, since native Greeks expected FSU Greeks to react aggressively for minimal reasons. Native Greeks also believed that some FSU Greeks engaged in criminal activities such as drug trafficking and that many keep guns in their houses. Several of my native contacts told me that they feel insecure in the neighbourhood.

Nikopoli had not attracted much media attention and was not represented as a notorious district by local and national media (see chapter 5, pp. 95). However, several native residents characterized their neighbourhood as an unsafe area because of the many FSU Greeks living there. In my talks with people living in adjacent areas, I noted that such ideas were widespread there too. Natives of

Nikopoli and its adjacent neighbourhoods connected information about ‘a Russian mafia’ in the city, widely circulated in the press, with the category of ‘the Russian’ or ‘the Russo-Pontic’, and projected this onto the local FSU Greeks. Such ideas were particularly widespread during my second fieldtrip, which took place a short while after two murders had happened in Nikopoli.

Contrary to the rather strong views that most of the native residents held of their FSU Greek neighbours, the latter hardly expressed any opinion about the native Greeks living in Nikopoli. When explicitly asked, they would either mention that they do not know any natives from Nikopoli or that they only have formal relations (τυπικές σχέσεις) with a limited number of people. They generally described those relations as friendly. From my conversations with FSU Greeks I concluded that they were not aware of the negative views expressed by a considerable segment of the native residents in Nikopoli. Nevertheless, their rather neutral attitude towards their native neighbours did not reflect their opinions about Greece and native Greeks in general. They were very aware of, and vexed about, the negative way native Greeks talk about the Russians or the Russo-Pontics in Thessaloniki. It was just that they did not connect such a negative discourse to the locals in Nikopoli.

Moreover, they were very outspoken and critical about their reception by the Greek state. Migration to the fatherland did not provide FSU Greeks with the easy and socio-economically secure living conditions they expected to find in Greece. On the contrary, the majority of FSU Greeks found themselves working in insecure and poorly rewarded jobs that did not match their skills and educational backgrounds. FSU Greeks expressed feelings of bitterness towards their historic homeland for their precarious socio-economic situation. Their disillusionment was particularly acute due to their earlier idealised perceptions of a ‘return to the fatherland’.

Concerning their attitudes about native Greeks, at the time of my research FSU Greeks could be roughly divided in two groups: those who were also critical towards their own community, claiming that ‘their people’ are partly or mostly responsible for the unfavourable image native Greeks attributed to them, and those who put all the blame on native Greeks, accusing them collectively of arrogant and disrespectful behaviour. The division reflected a polarization within the FSU Greek immigrant population over what should be their strategies in Greece and over different reactions to native accusations about the supposed extended criminality within their community and their alleged aggressive attitude. For instance, concerning their being stereotyped as aggressive, several FSU Greeks turn it on its head by claiming instead that native Greeks are weak. Some would even use their negative reputation to put native Greeks at a disadvantage in their

interaction. They boasted that several native Greeks feared them. However, others were critical of such behaviour and seemed to some extent to have internalized the native accusations of FSU Greeks as being aggressive and more commonly involved in criminal activities.

The more negative group of FSU Greeks claimed that natives are soft, lazy, and ignorant and criticized extended relationships with them as signs of assimilation. Negative experiences of interaction with native Greeks and most importantly in-group discussions reproducing such experiences re-activated their strong minority culture in Greece and mobilized attitudes of resistance 'to become like them'. They also mobilized a deep belief in the potentials of their community and feelings that 'we will make it based on our own resources and soon we will be better off than them'. Most of my FSU Greek respondents were critical of such attitudes. They claimed that these lock them in an unprofitable contestation with the natives and do not help their community progress in Greece.

Yet despite their differences, all FSU Greeks fiercely opposed the Russo-Pontic label; they favoured being called 'Pontic' or 'Greek', and indeed demanded this. This was because the label directly questioned the privileges conferred on their repatriate status, and also because it set them apart and assigned them once more a subordinated minority status. Underlying the decision of virtually all FSU Greeks to migrate to the fatherland was the expectation that there they would eventually be able 'to live among co-ethnics and be accepted by their own people'. Although they soon downscaled the initial high hopes for economic betterment 'in the West', that did not mean that they were also willing to tolerate disrespectful attitudes from the native society that put them in an inferior social position. Being called Russo-Pontics or simply Russians was completely unacceptable to them and they did not leave slurs on their origin unchallenged.

Without underplaying their Greekness, FSU Greeks selectively referred to their experience as subjects under the former Soviet Union as a source of pride and a means to challenge the degrading attitudes of native Greeks towards them. Rather than positing themselves as candidate members of the nation and seeking acceptance by renouncing their Soviet past, FSU Greeks asserted their difference in order to underline their superiority. In that context they claimed they are more Greek than the natives, since they had kept their nationality despite the persecutions endured in the former Soviet Union.

## From 'culture' to 'perceptions of culture'

FSU Greeks in Nikopoli did not hide the influence of their upbringing in the former Soviet Union, and nor were they willing to change their habits if those appeared foreign to native Greeks. They saw no reason to do so, despite the fact that native Greeks expected them to act in that way. Drinking beers on the street with friends, watching Russian television, speaking in Russian, and building leisure shacks were not meant to be public statements but were practices aimed at rebuilding the past in the present. It was the natives who viewed those practices as provocative and disrespectful, as evidence of a lack of willingness 'to integrate' and of the FSU Greeks' supposedly false Greek descent.

To fully grasp the dynamics of their relation in Nikopoli we need to shift our attention from *culture*, as the embodied social knowledge and habitual dispositions of people, to *perceptions of culture*, as a signifier of belongingness (Sewell, 1999).<sup>218</sup> The relationship between FSU and native Greeks, as with any immigrant-native relationship, is not a matter of cultural adaptation per se but one that is embedded in a power configuration. This configuration unfolds through a contest over defining the nation and who belongs to it. In this context natives attribute symbolic significance to certain cultural practices which they view as preconditions for the acceptance of immigrants as part of the national community.

As described in chapter one, native populations ascribe a dominant position to themselves due to their ability to present themselves as standing for what immigrants have to become in order to gain national recognition. They view immigrants as candidate members of the nation, and they ask them to prove their belongingness by attesting the *practical nationality* they have accumulated (chapter 1 p.14). Native Greeks placed FSU Greeks, like other immigrants, in the category of the national outsiders. So categorized, they expected them to show their willingness to fit in and demonstrate their practical nationality. A comparison between the views of the natives in Nikopoli regarding the local FSU Greeks and their views regarding the local Albanians is illuminating of their expectations.

Generally, native residents in Nikopoli told me they had good relationships with their Albanians neighbours, whom they described as peaceful, hard working, and

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<sup>218</sup> That is not to deny the existence of actual differences in behaviour between them, nor to deny the significance of such differences in their encounters (see chapter 6.1). What I mean to suggest is that the relation between the two groups was not solely mediated by such observable cultural differences.

'causing no problems' in the neighbourhood. Taking into account that the undocumented Albanian migration was framed in media and policy discourse as a threat and that 'the Albanian' had nationally emerged as a heavily stigmatized category, the contrast between their perceptions of their FSU Greek and their Albanian neighbours appears paradoxical. This paradox is solved once one considers the behaviour of the two groups in Nikopoli. The Albanian immigrants appeared willing to adopt 'native' social behaviours in Nikopoli. Keeping a low profile and having developed personal relations with some native residents, they managed to build a favourable image for their group at the neighbourhood level despite the prejudiced views of native Greeks about their ethnicity.

Their attitude was in stark contrast to that of the FSU Greeks who did not feel that to be accepted they have to abide by the native rules of conduct. FSU Greeks came to Greece as equal members of the nation and felt they had nothing to prove. Being assigned different positions from the outset, FSU Greek and Albanian immigrants were striving for different goals. Albanian immigrants were trying to lead a peaceful life against the background of their stigmatized ethnic identity while the FSU Greeks were aiming at equality with the rest of the Greeks (Pratsinakis forthcoming).

### **Established or outsider nationals? The local and the overarching figuration**

It is hard to tell which group is the dominant one in Nikopoli. Natives claimed such a status by questioning the behaviour of the immigrants. They held that their ways are the norm by which others have to abide. However, the FSU Greeks did not act accordingly. The negative attitude of the native Greeks towards the FSU Greeks may be partly understood as a spin-off from their disappointment at their inability to discipline them according to the dominant norms of conduct.

Native Greeks in Nikopoli suspected the local FSU Greek population of consisting in large measure of 'false Greeks'. Cultural difference was thought of as expressing the supposedly 'non-Greek consciousness' of FSU Greeks and was taken as proof of their lack of actual Greek descent. The 'false Greeks' formed an imagined category that accommodated the negative attitudes of the natives about the local FSU Greeks without challenging either the official criteria of national belongingness or the dominant perceptions about the qualities of Greekness. These were important for the self-image of the native residents. Their claimed collective charisma (Elias 1998; Elias & Scotson 1994) depended on it.

Native residents used the alleged false Greekness of FSU Greeks in Nikopoli to justify their negative attitudes about them, and adduced their perceived

aggressive, associable behaviour as evidence of them not being Greeks. Simplistically, the dominant idea can be articulated as follows: they are not nice neighbours so they can't be Greek/they are not Greek, that's why they are not nice neighbours. Through a selective attribution of 'good characteristics' to 'true Greek' immigrants and bad characteristics to 'false Greeks', the evocation of the 'false Greek' category not only secured the ideologies of Greekness and native Greeks' collective charismatic beliefs but even helped reinforce them.

On their part, FSU Greeks did not claim a dominant position in the neighbourhood by questioning the behaviour of others. Yet they did act as an established group; they appeared to be leading a life in Nikopoli according to their own norms, completely unaffected by how local native Greeks expected them to behave. Aided by their numerical dominance in the neighbourhood, FSU Greeks were capable of developing their own institutions. As Lieberon (1961) has illustrated, immigrant-native relations critically depend on each population's ability to maintain or to develop a social order that is compatible with its ways of life prior to contact.

However, Nikopoli is a special case due to the concentration of the FSU Greeks there. It is an FSU Greek island within a native Greek sea. Outside the neighbourhood, many FSU Greeks had different experiences. Several of my informants described situations in which they felt the need to defend or legitimate their deviance from native norms and felt embarrassed about their origin in the Soviet Union or their inability to speak proper Greek. Although to a lesser degree than other immigrant categories, FSU Greeks are affected by native judgments in the different fields of social life. The mere existence of the prejudicial category of the Russo-Pontic and the fact that FSU Greeks feel the need to react to it proves that despite their official inclusion by the state and their favourable depiction in the media, they are not yet part of the established group.

That said it should be noted that there is a crucial difference between them and the rest of the immigrants. Although FSU Greeks are asked, just like other immigrants, to attest their practical nationality, it is not for the same reasons. For other immigrants, attesting their practical nationality entails them showing their willingness to fit in. For FSU Greeks, attesting their practical nationality is a necessary step to dissociate from the category of the Russo-Pontic and the 'false Greek' and come to live according to the dominant expectations of them *being* Greeks. When this is done successfully it has a different effect. It results in them demonstrating the national essence they are supposed to embody. By proving their Greekness they immediately become respected Greeks, equals among others. Possibly the most common way to achieve this status is by displaying their Ponticness.

## Practical nationality and the Pontic identity

After immigration to Greece, FSU Greeks altered their sense of belonging. Although they departed from Russia as Greeks, after settlement in the historic homeland they discovered their cultural difference from native Greeks who relabelled them Russo-Pontics, Russians, *homogenís*, new refugees, returnees, Pontics, etc. FSU Greeks had to make sense of their selves and reframe their affiliations in relation to those labels. The content of such labels may be continuously reconstructed and renegotiated, yet at a given point in time they carry particular meanings and legacies. They are not empty vessels to which one can freely attribute any content at all (see Jenkins, 2008). It is those embedded meanings that make them appealing or foreign.

Most FSU Greeks commonly introduce themselves to native Greeks as ‘Pontic’. They do this as a response to and a rejection of the stigmatizing categorization of ‘the Russo-Pontic’. It is also a way to distinguish themselves from native Greeks. Presenting one’s Pontic identity indicates a felt experience of otherness in opposition to native Greeks but at the same time allows one’s inclusion in the Greek nation and native society. In the discourse of FSU Greeks, the Pontic identity is contrasted to the category of *Ellin* (ΈΛΛΗΝ) or *Éllinas* (Έλληνας): ‘Greek’, or more precisely ‘Hellene’, in Russian and Greek respectively. They use the latter terms for native Greeks and reserve the word ‘Pontic’ as a label to designate membership of the FSU Greek community in Greece. The Pontic identity is used without much reference to the native Pontic population.<sup>219</sup>

Interestingly, not everybody endorsed the Pontic identity to an equal degree. Indeed, a minority of FSU Greeks flatly rejected it. They preferred the overarching Greek identity. FSU Greeks of Pontic descent who had distanced themselves from the social norms and traditions practiced by FSU Pontic communities appeared less connected to the Pontic identity in Greece. Ponticness is practised through different types of cultural manifestations, such as Pontic music and dance, the Pontic dialect, and Pontic culinary tastes. Bearing an identity, one is expected to perform it. Not possessing those ‘ethnic competences’ made them feel less comfortable with their Pontic identity. Most importantly, FSU Greeks who also had a high socio-economic status and/or were knowledgeable of contemporary Greek culture and history and were proficient in

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<sup>219</sup> Moreover, despite the cooperation between native Pontics and FSU Greeks at the level of associations, in Nikopoli the relations between members of the two communities were not found to be substantially more positive than relations between non-Pontics and FSU Greeks (see chapter 7, pp. 201-206).

Modern Greek language could directly claim a Greek identity. They did not have to highlight their Pontic descent to prove their Greekness.

At the other end of the spectrum, the subgroup of FSU Greeks who found it most difficult to prove their Greekness and gain national recognition were the Turkophone FSU Greeks, especially those of low class standing. The existence of negative images about 'the Russo-Pontic' and false Greeks in the city of Thessaloniki constrained the acceptance of FSU Greeks in native society and put them at risk of facing discriminatory and prejudiced behaviour. However, in their interpersonal relations with natives, most were able to prove their Greekness and dissociate themselves from those negative images. For the lower-class Turkophone FSU Greeks, however, gaining acceptance was difficult even in their interpersonal relations with Greeks. Their effort was impeded by their mother tongue, which according to the ideologies of Greekness is incompatible with their nationality.

It was further constrained by the dominant native perception of all 'real FSU Greeks' as being of Pontic origin (see chapter 7, pp. 200). The existence of non-Pontic Greeks in the former Soviet Union is ignored and the Greek diaspora there is commonly referred to as the 'Pontic diaspora'. The prevalence of this discourse had repercussions for the collective perception/imaginary in Greece. The vast majority of Greeks think of 'real' FSU Greeks as Pontics. Such ideas were also strengthened by the widespread endorsement of the Pontic identity by the FSU Greeks themselves. The idiosyncratic culture of the Turkophone FSU Greeks, which differs from purified constructions of 'the Pontic culture', and the fact that neither they nor their ancestors speak Pontic, appears suspicious to natives. As a result many experience their Greekness as a burden in their interaction with natives. Rather than facilitating their acceptance in Greek society it poses problems.

### **Identification, performativity, and the intersections of class and ethnicity**

Three points need to be highlighted from the above analysis of the FSU Greeks' endorsement (or rejection) of the Pontic identity. The first is that identifications are always produced through the interaction of ongoing processes of internal and external definition (Jenkins, 2008). That is, they are determined through a dialectic interplay between the self-definitions by the people who claim an identity and the external categorizations imposed on them by reference groups. Internal and external definitions cannot be understood in isolation; each is implicated in the other.

The second point builds theoretically on the previous one; it sets out from the basic premise that self-identifications presuppose an audience and a shared framework of meaning between those who claim the identity and those to whom they address their claim (Jenkins 2008, pp. 55). People claim identities to position themselves in relation to others. Yet claiming an identity is not enough; one has also to perform it (Goffman, 2002). People need to be convincing in their claims of belongingness. The validation of their performance by others is crucial in their gaining recognition as bearers of the claimed identity.

However, not all validations are of equal significance. Powerful individuals are able to make their judgments count and thus to affect the legitimacy of other persons' claims to an identity. Immigrants do judge the performance of natives in terms of their national identity and whether it complies with the qualities attributed to it. Nonetheless, their judgment commonly has limited effect. It is constrained by their power deficit in comparison to natives. In my case study, FSU Greeks questioned the Greekness of certain native Greeks in relation to how they assessed them perform a Greek identity; however they were not able to *challenge* their Greekness.

The third point, which is largely implicit in my analysis above and thus in need of further explication, concerns the significance of class in immigrant-native relations. Immigrant-native relations are not only mediated by ethnicity but by class as well. The demands by natives that immigrants comply with the native rules of conduct and demonstrate *practical nationality* is expressed in a much more pressing way for lower-class immigrants. It is those immigrants who appear more threatening to natives.<sup>220</sup> Moreover, even if questioned regarding their belongingness, higher-class immigrants are more powerful in countering the accusations expressed by native citizens. Their higher-class background to a certain extent provides them with protection against native judgement. This protection, however, cannot be assessed in isolation but only in relation to how their ethnic background is valued by native society in the first place.

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<sup>220</sup> Building on Blumer's work on prejudice as a sense of group position, one may frame a hypothesis as to the reasons why lower-class immigrants appear more threatening to native populations. As described in the introduction to this book, Blumer treated prejudice as an emotional recoiling in the face of perceived threats to the established group's perceived entitlement to either exclusive or prior rights in important areas of life. Thinking along those lines, we may propose that native populations think of poorer people as more likely to challenge their prerogatives, due to their more precarious situation. Such views may be accompanied by perceptions about the supposed inclination of poorer people towards crime. Further research is needed in that direction to test this hypothesis and/or the development of alternative explanations.

National narratives and histories commonly contain information about particular 'others' as well as stereotypical views about different countries from which immigrants come from. Moreover, migration policies, which are designed with the aim of pursuing the interests of the state, differentiate between immigrant categories. They confer labels, construct statuses, and create expectations. National media circulate information about immigrants who are evaluated according to the perceived interests of the state. These flows of information impact on people's perceptions of immigrant groups.

Flows of information and experiences of actual interaction shape the public images of immigrant and ethnic categories. The severity with which native judgment is addressed towards an immigrant category is a direct function of the public image of that immigrant category at a given time. The stock of practical nationality of immigrants, together with their socio-economic status, determines their vulnerability to such judgment and their symbolic capacity to challenge it.

It has been mentioned that the more well-to-do Russian immigrants appeared to be better received by native Greeks in their everyday interactions, as compared to a sub-segment of FSU Greeks who are of lower class standing and who found it difficult to prove their Greekness. The higher socio-economic status of the former seems to protect them from native judgement. FSU Greeks of higher socio-economic status, however, were in a more powerful position. Being of actual Greek descent and able to prove it, they not only enjoyed the recognition of native Greeks but they could make them adopt an apologetic and defensive stance for not being respectful towards other Greeks (chapter 7, p.169).

At the other end of the spectrum, Albanian immigrants had to actively attest their practical nationality in an attempt to show – against native perceptions – that they do not differ from native Greeks. They renegotiated their identity as individuals, in some cases contrasting themselves to 'the bad Albanians'. The devaluation of their national background and the stigmatization of their collective identity were experienced as a burden in their everyday life.

Equally constraining were negative images of 'the Russo-Pontic' for lower class standing Turkophone FSU Greeks. Their difference from Albanian immigrants, however, is that Turkophone FSU Greeks came to Greece as Greeks with high expectations of a life in homeland. They were not willing to adopt social behaviours that would be better accepted by native Greeks; they thought of such

an attitude as submissive. Their reaction to denigrating attitudes by native Greeks was to engage in confrontation with them<sup>221</sup>.

## 8.2 Contesting national belonging: Immigrant–native relations as an established–outsider figuration

Elias treated the Winston Parva case as an ‘empirical paradigm’ to be tested, enlarged, and if necessary revised by enquiries into more complex figurations. He claimed that such an exercise would help ‘understand better the structural characteristics they [the figurations] have in common and the reasons why, under different conditions, they function and develop upon different lines’ (Elias & Scotson 1994: xvii). Focusing on a local established–outsider figuration, yet one that resulted from *international* rather than internal migration, my study presents a step in that direction by turning our attention to the function and significance of ideologies of national belonging.

According to Elias and Scotson, the conditions of the power imbalance in Winston Parva were rooted in the established group’s social cohesion, which in turn resulted from its oldness. The ability of the established to control flows of communication permitted them to construct and maintain a positive collective identity and to stigmatize the newcomers. Upon their settlement in Winston Parva, the newcomers were strangers to each other. Moreover, they did not form a social category for the older residents. The newcomers were constructed as an ‘out-group’ in the neighbourhood by the older residents who in turn defined their own collective identity to a large extent in opposition to them. Focusing on these characteristics, Elias and Scotson presented the structure of the Winston Parva figuration as if it could be sufficiently studied within the confines of the neighbourhood. Their explanation is weakened by their failing to note that the Winston Parva figuration is part of an overarching figuration (see chapter 1, pp. 12–15).

The United Kingdom was and still is a hierarchical society in which ideas about respectful and disrespectful behaviour shape people’s perceptions of each other. The established in Winston Parva cultivated their ‘group-charisma’ through identification with the more well-off older residents in the neighbourhood, ,

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<sup>221</sup> According to Tajfel and Turner’s (1986) categorization on group reactions to a threatened identity, the Albanians appear to be endorsing the individual mobility path whereas the Turkophone Soviet Greeks that of the social competition.

aiming to reduce the distance between themselves and middle and upper class people living in, or in the immediate surroundings of Winston Parva. Elias and Scotson rightly pointed to the fact that the ability of the dominant group to maintain an established position in the neighbourhood was not due to (actual) class differences from the outsiders. However, the established were able to legitimize their presumed superiority – in their own eyes and in the eyes of the outsiders – by successfully claiming their belonging to a superior class. Similarly, in my study native Greeks were able to ascribe to themselves an established status through a self-proclaimed privileged connection to ‘the nation’. The conditions of the power imbalance in established–outsider figurations are not only rooted in differences in social cohesion. They are also constructed and maintained by the ability of the established group to present itself as standing for what the others have to become in order to gain recognition.

Stressing the need to look beyond the local setting and aiming to highlight the significance of ideologies of belongingness in established–outsider figurations, this study proposed a theoretical framework that explores how immigrant–native relations unfold through a contestation over defining the nation and who belongs to it. According to this theoretical framework, immigrants are turned into outsiders as soon as they cross national borders and start building their life abroad, away from their previous ‘national home’. In most cases they lack citizenship, which formally attests their outsider position and blocks them from equal participation in the ‘host’ society. Their outsider’s status is also experienced in their everyday interactions with members of the native society. Even if citizenship rights are acquired this does not necessarily bring about their acknowledgment as equal members of the national community by the established – those citizens who consider themselves as representing the national core group (Hage 2000). As the present study has illustrated, being acknowledged as equal nationals in their daily lives is troublesome even for those who migrate as *de facto* and *de jure* co-nationals.

The established natives assume a managerial role in relation to what they imagine as ‘their nation’. They feel they have the right to decide ‘how things work here’ and ‘who should get what’. The arrival of immigrants is perceived as ruining their cultural intimacy (Herzfeld, 2005) and challenging their exclusive control over ‘their’ place (see Blumer, 1958). Newcomers are seen to be entering what they conceive as their collective private space and they feel they have to discipline them according to the ‘rules of the house’. They ask them to prove their belongingness by attesting the *practical nationality* they have accumulated. Disciplining or excluding them is necessary in keeping their status as the masters ‘in their own nation’.

Natives ascribe an established position to themselves, due to their ability to present themselves as the norm by which immigrants have to abide. Rather than attesting their practical nationality to valorise their nationhood, they present it as the manifestation of 'the national essence' they embody. Claiming legitimacy from national ideologies that conceive of a 'national people' with common origins and a distinct culture and history, they present their national belongingness as something that is rightfully conferred to them by birth.

This idea of a 'national people' is a historical construct and as such its content is an object of struggle. In time, through processes of boundary shifts, groups of people who would earlier be considered as outsiders enter the erstwhile exclusive national club and are bequeathed the privilege of automatic national membership. However, those are long-term processes that span more than one generation. In the short run, immigrants usually have limited abilities to alter the ideologies of national belonging to their advantage. As a result, their behaviour is judged by the degree of their compliance with the native norms and their frame of reference commonly comprises other groups with which they compete for national recognition.

Immigrants are endowed with different material and symbolical resources that help them resist the pressure exerted by the native society. The findings of my ethnographic research indicate that those resources are dependent on their economic and occupational situation and their cultural traits, as well as how their national and ethnic background is valued by native society. The case of Nikopoli also highlights that the level of power of immigrants further depends on their collective ability to reconstruct or bring their institutions with them. However, this ability is limited. In many social settings, most immigrants, even those who are officially defined as members of the nation, are put in a disadvantaged position, having to defend or legitimate their perceived deviance from native norms.

Assimilation theory has been rightly criticized for assuming the stand-point of the nation state (Wimmer & Schiller 2002; Favel 2003; Waldinger, 2003). It presents immigrants as embodying 'incompatible cultures' posing challenges to the alleged cultural homogeneity and the social cohesion of 'native societies'. Transnationalism was represented as a superior alternative (Schiller et al. 1992; Faist, 2000), a step towards overcoming the 'container model' of society that methodological nationalism has imposed on the sociology of migration (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002). However, in their attempt to go beyond the nation state, scholars of transnationalism have tended to overemphasize immigrants' capacity for self-determination. Immigrants are not picking and choosing from among multiple cultures and identities in a voluntaristic manner, free of external forces.

The degree to which nations comprise societies and cultures needs to be problematized and assessed empirically. Yet what can be hardly contested is the fact that national societies exist in the mindsets of people. Nations and ideologies of national belonging comprise what Douglas has named a *thought world* (1986) and what Foucault has termed *regimes of truth* (1980).<sup>222</sup> They constitute authoritatively interlocked ideas which shape people's thinking and model their interactions. Thus, rather than assuming the nationalistic standpoint (see assimilation), or ignoring it as if it did not matter (see transnationalism), we should reflect on its hegemonic power in our analyses. It is only in this way that we can uncover and problematize the power dynamics structuring immigrant-native relations.

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<sup>222</sup> Compare also with Bourdieu's conceptualization of doxa (1977).



# Appendix

## Appendix I

### I. 1 Open questions asked in the context of the GEITONIES survey

Questions asked to native residents:

Do you have relations with people from your neighbourhood?

How would you describe those relationships?

How do you view the relations between different categories of people in the neighbourhood?

Do you have relations with the immigrants in the neighbourhood?

How would describe those relations?

What is your opinion about the immigrants in the neighbourhood?

Which are the immigrant groups that live in your neighbourhood?

How many of the immigrants in the neighbourhood are of Greek descent?

Questions asked to FSU Greek residents:

How would you describe your relation with native Greeks when you first came to Greece?

Have they changed in time?

In what ways and why do you think this has happened?

Do you have relations with people from your neighbourhood?

How would you describe those relationships?

How would you describe your relation with the native Greeks in the neighbourhood?

Which aspect of your life in the FSU would you wish to retain in Greece and which aspects of your life in Greece do you appreciate the most?

Which groups would you include in the word *наши* in Greece and which groups did you include in the FSU with the same word?

## I. 2 The Pontic exodus

In 1914, the Ottoman Empire entered WW I on the side of the Axis powers and a general call of conscription, including to non-Muslim *millet*s, was issued for the first time in the history of the Empire.<sup>223</sup> After the heavy defeat by the Russian army in Sacramis, Christian soldiers were disarmed and sent to labour battalions (*amele taburu*) in the interior of Anatolia. Forced to work in inhuman conditions, resulting in heavy casualties, several Pontics defected. They returned to Pontos, joining brigands in the mountains and other draft defectors, who had escaped conscription, to avoid arrest; guerrilla bands gradually organized in the West Pontic Mountains. The Ottoman authorities took violent reprisals against members of the Greek communities, demanding the surrender of the draft defectors (Samouilides 2002). West Pontos became a theatre of violence between irregular Muslim and Christian armed bands with many victims among the civilians of both religions (Marantzidis, 2001). The tragic events culminated in massacres and deportations of Orthodox Pontic civilians.

In East Pontos conditions were different. Russian troops conquered Trabzon in 1916 and for two years political power passed into the hands of a provisional government in which Metropolitite Chrisanthos, the Orthodox religious leader of the city, played a key role (A. Karpozilos, 2002, p. 138). Russians were secretly providing arms to the Pontic guerrilla fighters in the west whom they used as a counterplot. However, after the outbreak of the October revolution the Russian troops started withdrawing and Ottoman irregulars attacked the city. A large proportion of the Orthodox population of East Pontos took refuge in Russia. In February 1918 the Russian troops evacuated the city which was recaptured by the Ottomans. With the 17 October truce an amnesty was provided to the area of Pontos.

Peace lasted only for a short period. Mustafa Kemal renounced the authority of the sultan, formed the Turkish National Movement and reorganized the Turkish army under his leadership. The Greek government opted for a diplomatic solution of 'the Pontic' issue and proposed its integration in a Ponto-Armenian Federation. Chrysanthos negotiated the possibility of an autonomous Pontic state with equality between Christians and Muslims and a Ponto-Armenian Federation. An agreement was achieved with the Armenians but the plans did not last long after the fall of the new Armenian state.

In the meantime, Greek-Pontic populations once more organized in guerilla bands and irregular and regular Turkish forces attacked them. A new deadly fight arose followed by massacres, arson attacks, and deportations of Pontic Greek civilians. In 1921, a large segment of the political and intellectual elite of the Pontic Greek community was murdered after summary trials under accusation of propaganda for the creation of an independent Pontic Greek state. Such plans were pursued in coordination with members of the Pontic Diaspora. In August 1922, the Greek army was defeated and in November the first ship with Pontic-Greek refugees left for the imagined motherland. Until 1924,

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<sup>223</sup> It should be noted that non-Muslims became obliged to serve the Ottoman army only after the Hatt-ı Hümayun reforms in 1856.

Pontic-Greeks gathered in refugee camps in Istanbul or remained in the mountains trying to reach Greece by any means and any route. Organized evacuation eventually took place in 1924 after the signing of the Lausanne treaty. The remaining populations were transferred to Greece.

As mentioned in the main text, Pontic Greeks completely deserted their ancestral home, fleeing to Russia or being permanently expelled to Greece as part of the population exchange of the Lausanne convention. Tens of thousands of Pontic Greeks perished as victims of the labour battalions, deportation, massacres, diseases and hardships on their way to Russia and Greece or in the guerrilla battles (Samouilidis, 2002, p. 230).<sup>224</sup> Of the remaining population more than 200,000 fled to Greece and approximately 85,000 (Hassiotis 1997), primarily from East Pontos, fled to Russia. The decimated Pontic Orthodoxy was divided between two new homelands.

### I. 3 The contested issue of the Pontic genocide

Pontic associations and researchers of Pontic origin count the number of those who perished in the tragic period 1912-1922 as up to 353,000 people. This is probably a miscalculation based on an overestimated original population. The Orthodox Greek population in wider Pontos (i.e., Sivas, Trabzon, Kastamonou) was approximately 477,000 in 1912, according to the Greek Patriarchate statistics, or approximately 467,000 in 1910, according to the Ottoman official statistics (Pentzopoulos 2002: 30). The survivors of the catastrophe include the 182,169 Pontic refugees in Greece and part of the 47,091 refugees who were registered as originating from Caucasus (a part of this population concerned people who had settled in Caucasus in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, before the turbulent period of 1912-1922 (see for example Xanthopoulou 2000; Hassiotis 2006)). At the same time, Hassiotis estimates that approximately 85,800 Pontic Greeks took refuge in Russia, excluding those who were displaced in Kars. Nevertheless, even these data need to be read with caution. According to Vergeti (2000), more Pontic Greeks arrived in Greece and registered as Asia Minor or Thracian Greeks. For the Caucasian refugee population, it is not clear whether it concerns the Greeks who took refuge in Kars, and thus should be added to the surviving Pontic population, or is part of the 85,800 people - mentioned in Hassiotis to have fled in Russia - and thus should be subtracted from them. Finally, the Patriarchate and Ottoman censuses are also contested as accurate sources for the calculation of Greek population in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Pentzopoulos, 2002).

Despite the lack of precise data, the undisputable fact remains that Pontic Greeks experienced a tragic mass destruction; tens of thousands perished (Samouilides, 2002). Whether their tragedy may be called a genocide is not a question about numbers. It directly concerns the concept of genocide itself. In the absence of a theory of genocide the editor of the *Journal of Genocide Research* recommends caution in its usage (as cited

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<sup>224</sup> In this turbulent period approximately 25% of the total Ottoman populations perished (Marantzidis 2001).

in Voutira, 2006). The Greek genocide has been recognized by the International Association of Genocide scholars but it is doubted by others including Mazower (2001). Valentino (2005) claims that when conflict between Greece and Turkey erupted between 1919-1923, the new Turkish regime decided on the 'cleansing' of the remaining Greek population but the death toll was probably lessened by the refugee's ability to flee to Greece and the eventual international supervision of the population transfer (pp. 289). It is interesting to note that the Pontic genocide is also contested within Greece, by the supporters of the 'Greek genocide'. According to their thesis, defining the Pontian experience as an exclusive, isolated, and distinct event reduces the genocide to only northern Asia Minor, ultimately shrinking the actual number of Greek genocide victims throughout the whole of the Ottoman Empire (see <http://www.pontiangenocide.com>). In 1998 the Greek government, excepting the Pontic genocide, affirmed the genocide of Greeks in Asia Minor as a whole and designated 14 September a day of commemoration.

#### **I.4 Emigration from Tsalka**

According to Agtzidis, emigration from Tsalka, similar to the rest of the Greek communities in Central Georgia, was not intense during the early years (1991). In the late Soviet period, Tsalka was one of the most productive agricultural regions of Georgia with a high standard of living. However, after the collapse of the USSR, the local economy disintegrated; the Soviet internal market broke down and the roads and railway links fell into disrepair (Wheatly, 2009).

Due to continuous state neglect, infrastructural problems became alarming and living standards plummeted. Growingly people were relying on a low cash economy while the continuous deterioration of transport links made it unprofitable to sell their agricultural products in Tbilisi or Marneuli (Wheatley, 2006, pp.6). In such conditions the prospect of emigration to Greece (as well as to Russia) was increasingly seen as viable alternative to the stagnant socio-economic situation the Greek populations were faced with. Emigration increased in the early 1990s and continued at a steady pace. Between 1989 and 2002 the Greek population of Tsalka fell by 80% to mere a 4,589 people (Trier & Turasvili, 2006:61). Greeks ceased to be the majority in a largely 'Greek area'.

At the same time, Tsalka witnessed a substantial arrival of ecologically displaced populations and economic migrants who were attracted by the availability of work in the construction of the oil pipeline known as BTC (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan). The majority of the newcomers, Georgian in background, illegally occupied the houses which had had been abandoned by Greeks. However, rights over land were tied to official proof of house ownership; the house titles were associated with land from the former collective farms that the owners had acquired. Even those newcomers who had bought rather than squatted the local houses did so unofficially, thus having no rights over land (Whitley 2006). The Greek emigrants had entrusted their property to relatives, or to Greek and in some cases Armenian neighbours (Trier & Turasvili, 2006). As a result the remaining Greek families possessed, either themselves, or on behalf of their relatives or neighbours, most of the former collective farm land and leased it to the immigrant families. This kind of arrangement caused discontent among newcomers (Trier & Turasvili, 2006:36).

The situation soon became unstable and conflict-prone, aggravated further by the fact that newcomers and established residents had little limited capacity to communicate, considering that the majority of the newly-arrived rural Georgians could not speak Russian. The latter had hitherto been the main language of inter-ethnic communication between the Greek, Armenian, and Azeri populations which comprised 95% of the local population. The communication barrier between newcomers and established groups, combined with the lack of any kind of state regulation, led to tension exacerbated by the land shortage and a perception by many of the older inhabitants that the newcomers were favoured for work on the BTC pipeline (Wheatly, 2009).

Tensions between Greeks and Georgians in Tsalka became common. In 1999 the Georgian government was forced to send troops to Tsalka after a quarrel between a Georgian and an ethnic Greek led to armed clashes that left two people dead (Liklikadze 2006). Clashes intensified in the following years and reached a peak in early 2005 contributing to the decision of more Greeks to leave the area. As a result of continuous out migration the situation of the remaining Greek population had become very vulnerable and severe. According to the World Council of Greeks Abroad (2005), from 2003 to 2005 eight ethnic Greeks had been murdered in the Tsalka district. The Georgian Ombudsman reported that 'the Greek population [...] is the most undefended, since in Tsalka district there remain those mainly of advanced age ... Criminal groups exploit this situation and mainly rob the Greek population' (Wheatly, 2006, pp.14).

By 2006 the number of Greeks had fallen to around 1,500, comprised largely by the elderly. At that time, interethnic conflict had largely decreased due to intervention by the Georgian and the Greek state. However, the Greek presence in Tsalka had practically vanished. Relative deprivation may not be the only cause for the self-feeding character of emigration.<sup>225</sup> In ethnically mixed communities during periods of political instability, extended emigration might lead to shifts in local power relations making it more difficult for the remaining population to stay, hence inducing further migration.

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<sup>225</sup> Relative deprivation refers to the process whereby non-immigrant populations become increasingly prone to immigrate when economic disparities grow at the local level due to remittance and other money flows from migrants.

## Appendix II

Table I. National, ethnic and religious minorities in Greece in 1928

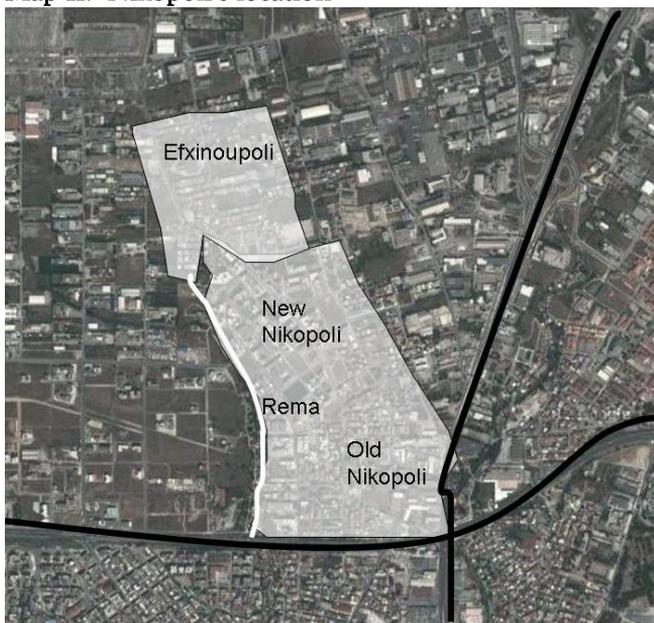
<i>Minority</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
1. Turks	Turkish	Moslem	86,506	1.39
2. Slavo-Macedonians	Slavo-Macedonian	Orthodox	81,844	1.32
3. Chams	Albanian	Moslem	18,598	0.30
4. Sephardic Jews	Ladino	Jewish	63,000	1.02
5. Armenians	Armenian	Orthodox	31,038	0.50
6. Koutsovlachs	Koutsovlach	Orthodox	19,679	0.32
7. Pomaks	Bulgarian	Moslem	16,755	0.27
8. Greek Catholics	Greek	Catholic	27,747	0.45
9. Greek Jews	Greek	Jewish	9,090	0.15
10. Other <sup>a</sup>	Miscellaneous		30,685	0.49
TOTAL MINORITIES			<u>384,942</u>	<u>6.20</u>
Orthodox Greeks <sup>b</sup>			5,819,742	93.80
TOTAL POPULATION			<u>6,204,684</u>	<u>100.00</u>

Source, Mavrogoratos 1983

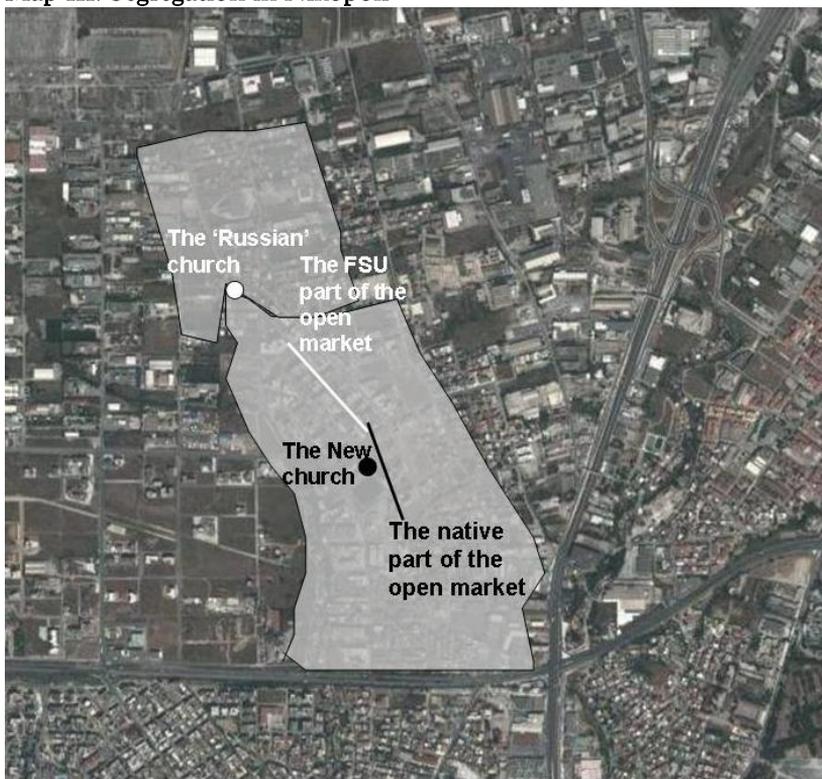
Map I. The founding of Marioupol and the first migrations to the north



Map II. Nikopoli's location



Map III. Segregation in Nikopoli



The Old Nikopoli and the Réma



*A house in old Nikopoli*



*Houses in old Nikopoli*



*Shops and houses in old Nikopoli*



*The torrent (réma)*



*The road to the Réma area*



*Houses in the Réma area*



*A general view of Efxinoupoli*



*Children building their house in Efxinoupoli*



*A garden in communal land in Efxinoupoli*



*Houses in Efxinoupoli*



*The monument of the Pontic people in Efxinoupoli*



*The boxing club in Efxinoupoli*



*The high voltage pylons next to houses in Efxinoupoli*



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## New Nikopoli



*A Typical road in New Nikopoli*



*The open market*



*Cars parked in unused space in New Nikopoli*



*The shack of the grannies before its destruction by the Municipality*



*After its destruction: 'saving the property'*



*Reclaiming space back*



*Another leisure shack*



*A street gathering in Nikopoli*



*A FSU restaurant in New Nikopoli*



*A romantic Roma couple passing through New Nikopoli*

Photos: Manolis Pratsinakis, Flip Lindo, Stratis Voyatzis

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# Summary

Immigrants and natives are thought of as opposing categories in relation to their belongingness to the nation-state in which they cohabit. Although the centrality of ideologies of national belonging in structuring immigrant–native relations is generally acknowledged in the literature limited research has been done on how those ideologies are experienced and negotiated in everyday life. My study enquires into this issue by focusing on a rather exceptional case of migration, namely that of people who have always lived outside the borders of the nation, but who are nonetheless regarded as co-nationals. It is an ethnography of the relationship between two categories of residents in Nikopoli, a neighbourhood in Thessaloniki, Greece – one comprising Greeks born and raised in the country, the other also being of Greek descent, but having immigrated from countries formerly belonging to the Soviet Union and lacking any roots within the borders of the Greek state.

The largest part of the Greek diaspora in the former Soviet Union originates from Anatolia, notably in Pontos, a geographical area stretching across the eastern half of the southern coastal regions of the Black Sea. Successive immigration flows from this area to the Caucasus started from the late eighteenth century, and continued up to the early twentieth century. The immigrants were attracted by economic privileges granted by Tsarist Russia and/or were forced to leave the Ottoman Empire as a result of Russo-Turkish wars. The last major flight took place at the end of World War I, during the Greco-Turkish war. At that time, the Greeks from Pontos completely deserted their ancestral homeland. They either joined older generations of immigrants in the Caucasus, or, similarly to the rest of the Greek population of Asia Minor, fled to Greece as part of the 1920s forced population exchange between Greece and Turkey.

Soviet Greeks remained enclosed within the sealed borders of the Soviet Union, with very limited contact with ‘the historic homeland’. However, the situation changed drastically in the late 1980s when FSU (Former Soviet Union) Greeks started migrating to Greece from the disintegrating Soviet Union. Government officials conceptualized this migration as an asset for the state. They addressed an official invitation to FSU Greeks to take up permanent residence ‘in the fatherland’ and

organized a repatriation policy plan. This plan aimed at their settlement in the rural areas of the north-eastern geographical department of Thrace, home to the Greek Muslim minority. It was expected that the presence of the FSU Greeks in rural Thrace would economically revitalize the area, as well as alter its religious and ethnic composition.

The expectations of the policy makers were not met. The settlement plan failed, due to a lack of employment opportunities in the area, the inability of the Greek state to carry out the plan efficiently, and most importantly because the newcomers did not consider rural Thrace an appealing destination. They preferred to settle in the big cities. Although the Greek governments gradually reconsidered the policy goal of inviting FSU Greeks, the right of the latter to settle in Greece was not questioned. Nor was the obligation of the state to offer them what was, in comparison to non-Greek immigrants, a privileged reception. FSU Greeks remained officially welcome in 'the fatherland' should they aspire to 'return' to it. According to ideologies of Greekness that conceive the Greek nation as a trans-territorial community defined by descent and the Greek state as a refuge of this community, FSU Greeks belong to Greece as much as its native population does. However, the experiences of their day-to-day interactions with native Greeks seem to challenge this presumption.

In Nikopoli, native Greeks developed negative attitudes towards their FSU Greek neighbours against a background of limited interpersonal with them. The urban space of the neighbourhood partly accounts for the limited interaction between FSU and native Greeks. Nikopoli is a working-class neighbourhood on the margins of Thessaloniki with a majority FSU Greek population. FSU Greeks built the settlement of Efxinoupoli in the 1990s, without official authorization, approximately 600 meters to the north of old Nikopoli. Thirty years earlier, internal immigrants from the surroundings of Thessaloniki had built old Nikopoli in similar fashion. The two areas were physically separated by wasteland. They were eventually joined during the 2000s through the hasty development of the middle part of Nikopoli. This part of the neighbourhood mostly attracted FSU Greeks, although a considerable number of natives also moved there; yet interaction remained limited, hampered by the lack of a neighbourhood centre and of local institutions that could have stimulated social life and induced interaction. Interaction was further constrained by diverging attitudes towards leisure and out-of-house activities. FSU Greeks made extensive use of the public space of the neighbourhood, while the natives preferred to frequent in local cafeterias and taverns or spent their leisure time outside the neighbourhood altogether.

Native Greek's negative attitudes about the FSU Greeks in Nikopoli were mostly inferred from stories heard from others, usually concerning the FSU Greek's alleged aggressiveness and delinquent behaviour, or were supported with reference to how they saw them use the neighbourhood's public spaces. Many native Greeks criticized the FSU Greeks' habit of drinking in the street. Moreover, they passed negative

comments on the leisure shacks FSU Greeks erected in proximity to their homes and also further afield, in the plentiful free space of the neighbourhood. These unauthorized constructions, made from all kinds of material (wood, sheet iron, cardboard), brought together the elderly FSU Greeks, who spend much of their days there. From the perspective of the natives, these shacks aggravated the already degraded built environment of Nikopoli and were an indication of what they perceived as the refusal of their FSU Greek neighbours to adapt.

Most native Greeks felt that they were separated from FSU Greeks by a cultural gap. In their view it was this gap, and what they claimed to be the FSU Greeks' sullen attitude and lack of manners, that prevented their intermingling. Many native residents were also critical about FSU Greeks speaking Russian and other non-Greek languages. It made them doubt their Greekness. The dispersion of the Greek diaspora in the former Soviet Union, its lack of any institutional organization, and the importance of the Russian language as a vehicle for social mobility, had contributed to the gradual loss of the mother tongue of most FSU Greeks. Moreover a considerable segment of the Greek populations in the former Soviet Union spoke Turkic languages. Although the vast majority of FSU Greek migrants have learned Modern Greek (with the exception of a few of the elderly), their Russian language skills are usually more developed than their Greek and Russian is their preferred language of communication with peers.

In the opinion of native Greeks in Nikopoli, most of the immigrants in the neighbourhood claiming Greek descent aren't Greeks at all. The native residents mostly called FSU Greek in Nikopoli 'Russo-Pontics', 'Russo-phones', or simply 'Russians'. The words 'Russians' and 'Russo-phones' were used synonymously as generic labels to refer to people of various FSU nationalities rather than Russians per se. 'The Russo-Pontic' is a rather dubious label. As opposed to 'the Russian', it was occasionally evoked (in a positive manner) to discern the Greek from the non-Greek FSU immigrants. However, most commonly it was used as an all-inclusive label for the whole Russian-speaking community in the neighbourhood in expressing doubt about their Greekness.

The Russo-Pontic label is also widely used by native Greeks outside the neighbourhood. It was originally employed as a term to distinguish the Pontics who immigrated from the former Soviet Union from the 'native-Pontics' who settled in the country with the 1920s forced population exchange between Turkey and Greece. However, the label gradually acquired a pejorative meaning. Depending on the context in which it is used, it may signify a low class standing and indicate doubt about the Greekness of the categorized. Furthermore, in its more common usage, it embodies the stereotypes of the FSU immigrants' alleged aggressiveness and criminality.

The assessment of native Greeks of their FSU Greek neighbours was mediated by this negative public opinion of the Russo-Pontics. The image of the FSU Greeks in Nikopoli as aggressive people was strong, sustained, and augmented through gossip and the spread of rumours. This image impeded contact between the two communities, since native Greeks expected FSU Greeks to react aggressively for minimal reasons. Nikopoli had not attracted much media attention and was not represented as a notorious district by local and national media. However, several native residents characterized their neighbourhood as an unsafe area because of the many FSU Greeks living there. In my talks with people living in adjacent areas, I noted that such ideas were widespread there too. Natives of Nikopoli and its adjacent neighbourhoods connected information about 'a Russian mafia' in the city, widely circulated in the press, with the category of 'the Russian' or 'the Russo-Pontic', and projected this onto the local FSU Greeks.

The negative attitudes of a large segment of native residents in Nikopoli about their FSU Greek neighbours, whose Greekness they questioned, were in contrast to the positive presentations of FSU Greeks by politicians and the media as fellow nationals coming home. This contrast points to the complex role played by ideologies of national belonging in immigrant-native figurations. To account for this complexity, I developed a theoretical framework that draws from Elias and Scotson's established and outsider model (1994/1965) and Hage's notion of practical nationality (2000), and used this to explore how immigrant-native relations unfold through a contestation over defining the nation and who belongs to it.

According to this theoretical framework, immigrants are turned into outsiders as soon as they cross national borders and start building their life abroad, away from their previous 'national home'. In most cases they lack citizenship, which formally attests their outsider position and blocks them from equal participation in the 'host' society. Their outsider's status is also experienced in their everyday interactions with members of the native society. Even if citizenship rights are acquired this does not necessarily bring about their acknowledgment as equal members of the national community by the established - those citizens who consider themselves as representing the national core group.

The established natives assume a managerial role in relation to what they imagine as 'their nation'. They feel they have the right to decide 'how things work here' and 'who should get what'. The arrival of immigrants is perceived as ruining their cultural intimacy (Herzfeld, 2005) and challenging their exclusive control over 'their' place (see Blumer, 1958). Newcomers are seen to be entering what they conceive as their collective private space and they feel they have to discipline them according to the 'rules of the house'. Natives ascribe an established position to themselves, due to their ability to present themselves as the norm by which immigrants have to abide. They ask immigrants to prove their belongingness by attesting the *practical nationality* they have accumulated, i.e. the sum of nationally sanctified and valued

social and physical cultural styles and dispositions they have accumulated (Hage, 2000). Disciplining or excluding them is necessary for keeping their status as the masters 'in their own nation'. In view of this theory, how should we assess the negative views of native Greeks in Nikopoli about their FSU Greek neighbours and how can we explain the fact that they doubt their Greekness? What would one expect the reaction of the Soviet Greeks to be?

Contrary to the rather strong views that most of the native residents held regarding their FSU Greek neighbours, the latter hardly expressed any opinion about the native Greeks in Nikopoli. When explicitly asked, they would comment either that they do not know any natives from Nikopoli or that they only have formal relations with a limited number of people. They generally described those relations as friendly. From my conversations with FSU Greeks I concluded that they were not aware of the negative views expressed by a considerable segment of the native residents in Nikopoli. Nevertheless, their rather neutral attitude towards their native neighbours did not reflect their opinions about Greece and native Greeks in general. They were very aware of, and vexed about, the negative way native Greeks talk about the Russians or the Russo-Pontics in Thessaloniki. It was just that they did not connect such a negative discourse with the locals in Nikopoli.

Moreover, they were very outspoken and critical about their reception by the Greek state. Migration to the fatherland had not provided FSU Greeks with the easy and socio-economically secure living conditions they expected to find in Greece. On the contrary, the majority of FSU Greeks found themselves working in insecure and poorly rewarded jobs that did not match their skills and educational backgrounds. FSU Greeks expressed feelings of bitterness towards their historic homeland for their precarious socio-economic situation. Their disillusionment was particularly acute due to their earlier idealized perceptions of a 'return to the fatherland'.

Concerning their attitudes about native Greeks, at the time of my research FSU Greeks could be roughly divided in two groups: those who were also critical towards their own community, claiming that 'their people' are partly or mostly responsible for the unfavourable image native Greeks attributed to them, and those who put all the blame on native Greeks, accusing them collectively of arrogant and disrespectful behaviour. The division reflected a polarization within the FSU Greek immigrant population over what should be their strategies in Greece and over different reactions to native accusations about the supposed extended criminality within their community and their alleged aggressive attitude.

The more negative group of FSU Greeks claimed that natives are soft, lazy, and ignorant and criticized extended relationships with them as signs of assimilation. Negative experiences of interaction with native Greeks and most importantly in-group discussions reproducing such experiences re-activated their strong minority culture in Greece and mobilized attitudes of resistance 'to become like them'. Most

of my FSU Greek respondents were critical of such attitudes. They claimed that these lock them in an unprofitable contestation with the natives and do not help their community progress in Greece.

Yet despite their differences, all FSU Greeks fiercely opposed the Russo-Pontic label; they favoured being called 'Pontic' or 'Greek', and indeed demanded this. This was because the label directly questioned the privileges conferred on their repatriate status, and also because it set them apart and assigned them once more a subordinated minority status. Underlying the decision of virtually all FSU Greeks to migrate to the fatherland was the expectation that there they would eventually be able 'to live among co-ethnics and be accepted by their own people'. Although they soon downscaled the initial high hopes for economic betterment 'in the West', that did not mean that they were also willing to tolerate disrespectful attitudes from the native society that put them in an inferior social position. Being called Russo-Pontics or simply Russians was completely unacceptable to them and they did not leave slurs on their origin unchallenged.

Without underplaying their Greekness, FSU Greeks selectively referred to their experience as subjects under the former Soviet Union as a source of pride and a means to challenge the degrading attitudes of native Greeks towards them. Rather than positing themselves as candidate members of the nation and seeking acceptance by renouncing their Soviet past, FSU Greeks asserted their difference in order to underline their superiority. In that context they claimed they are more Greek than the natives, since they had kept their nationality despite the persecutions endured in the former Soviet Union.

FSU Greeks in Nikopoli did not hide the influence of their upbringing in the former Soviet Union, and nor were they willing to change their habits if those appeared foreign to native Greeks. They saw no reason to do so, despite the fact that native Greeks expected them to act in that way. Drinking beers on the street with friends, watching Russian television, speaking in Russian, and building leisure shacks were not meant to be public statements but were practices aimed at rebuilding the past in the present. It was the natives who viewed those practices as provocative and disrespectful, as evidence of a lack of willingness 'to integrate' and of the FSU Greeks' supposedly false Greek descent. Native Greeks placed FSU Greeks, like other immigrants, in the category of the national outsiders. So categorized, they expected them to show their willingness to fit in and demonstrate their practical nationality.

It is hard to tell which group is the dominant one in Nikopoli. Natives claimed such a status by questioning the behaviour of the immigrants. They held that their ways are the norm by which others have to abide. However, the FSU Greeks did not act accordingly. The negative attitude of the native Greeks towards the FSU Greeks may be partly understood as a spin-off from their disappointment at their inability to discipline them according to the dominant norms of conduct.

Native Greeks in Nikopoli suspected the local FSU Greek population of consisting in large measure of 'false Greeks', i.e. non-Greeks immigrants who acquired their papers through fraud. Cultural difference was thought of as expressing the supposedly 'non-Greek consciousness' of FSU Greeks and was taken as proof of their lack of actual Greek descent. The 'false Greeks' formed an imagined category that accommodated the negative attitudes of the natives about the local FSU Greeks without challenging either the official criteria of national belongingness or the dominant perceptions about the qualities of Greekness. These were important for the self-image of the native residents. Their claimed collective charisma (Elias, 1998; Elias & Scotson 1994) depended on them.

Native residents used the alleged false Greekness of FSU Greeks in Nikopoli to justify their negative attitudes about them. Simplistically, the dominant idea can be articulated as follows: they are not nice neighbours so they can't be Greek/they are not Greek, that's why they are not nice neighbours. Through a selective attribution of 'good characteristics' to 'true Greek' immigrants and bad characteristics to 'false Greeks', the evocation of the 'false Greek' category not only secured the ideologies of Greekness and native Greeks' collective charismatic beliefs but even helped reinforce them.

On their part, FSU Greeks did not claim a dominant position in the neighbourhood by questioning the behaviour of others. Yet they did act as an established group; they appeared to be leading a life in Nikopoli according to their own norms, completely unaffected by how local native Greeks expected them to behave. Aided by their numerical dominance in the neighbourhood, FSU Greeks were capable of developing their own institutions.

However, Nikopoli is a special case due to the concentration of the FSU Greeks there. It is an FSU Greek island within a native Greek sea. Outside the neighbourhood, many FSU Greeks had different experiences. Several of my informants described situations in which they felt the need to defend or legitimate their deviance from native norms and felt embarrassed about their origin in the Soviet Union or their inability to speak proper Greek. Although to a lesser degree than other immigrant categories, FSU Greeks are affected by native judgments in the different fields of social life. The mere existence of the prejudicial category of the Russo-Pontic and the fact that FSU Greeks feel the need to react to it proves that despite their official inclusion by the state and their favourable depiction in the media, they do not yet number among established nationals.

The idea of a 'national people' is a historical construct and as such its content is an object of struggle. In time, through processes of boundary shifts, groups of people who would earlier be considered as outsiders enter the erstwhile exclusive national club. However, those are long-term processes that span more than one generation. In

the short run, immigrants usually have limited abilities to alter the ideologies of national belonging to their advantage. As a result, their behaviour is judged by the degree of their compliance with the native norms and their frame of reference commonly comprises other groups with which they compete for national recognition. Immigrants are endowed with different material and symbolical resources that help them resist the pressure exerted by the native society. However, this ability is limited. In many social settings, most immigrants, even those who are officially defined as members of the nation, are put in a disadvantaged position, having to defend or legitimate their perceived deviance from native norms.

Assimilation theory has been rightly criticized for assuming the stand-point of the nation state (Wimmer & Schiller 2002; Favel 2003; Waldinger, 2003). It presents immigrants as embodying 'incompatible cultures' posing challenges to the alleged cultural homogeneity and the social cohesion of 'native societies'. Transnationalism was represented as a superior alternative (Schiller et al. 1992; Faist, 2000), a step towards overcoming the 'container model' of society that methodological nationalism has imposed on the sociology of migration (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002). However, in their attempt to go beyond the nation state, scholars of transnationalism have tended to overemphasize immigrants' capacity for self-determination. Immigrants are not picking and choosing from among multiple cultures and identities in a voluntaristic manner, free of external forces.

The degree to which nations comprise societies and cultures needs to be problematized and assessed empirically. Yet what can be hardly contested is the fact that national societies exist in the mindsets of people. Nations and ideologies of national belonging comprise what Douglas has named a *thought world* (1986). They constitute authoritatively interlocked ideas which shape people's thinking and model their interactions. Thus, rather than assuming the nationalistic standpoint, or ignoring it as if it did not matter we should reflect on its hegemonic power in our analyses. It is only in this way that we can uncover and problematize the power dynamics structuring immigrant-native relations.

# Samenvatting

Ingezetenen van de natiestaat worden, in termen van behoren tot de natie, ingedeeld in twee tegenover elkaar staande categorieën: zij met een inheemse en zij met een immigratie-achtergrond. Ofschoon de betekenis van ideologieën van nationale binding algemeen wordt erkend in de literatuur, is tot op heden nog maar weinig onderzoek gedaan naar de rol van deze ideologieën in het dagelijks leven. Mijn studie richt zich op deze kwestie middels een onderzoek naar een nogal uitzonderlijk geval van migratie, namelijk die van mensen die altijd buiten de grenzen van de natie hebben geleefd, maar niettemin worden beschouwd als ertoe behorend. Dit is een etnografie over de omgang tussen inwoners van Nikopoli, een buurt in Thessaloniki, Griekenland – enerzijds Grieken die geboren en getogen zijn in Griekenland (in het vervolg inheemse Grieken genoemd), anderzijds de inwoners die eveneens van Griekse afkomst zijn, maar gekomen zijn uit landen die vroeger behoorden tot de Sovjet Unie, en geen wortels hebben binnen de grenzen van de Griekse staat (hierna VSU-Grieken te noemen).

Het grootste deel van de Griekse diaspora in de voormalige Sovjet Unie komt oorspronkelijk uit Anatolië, en vooral uit Pontus, een landstreek gevormd door het oostelijk deel van de zuidkust van de Zwarte Zee en het bijbehorende, in grote mate bergachtige achterland. Opeenvolgende migratiestromen vanuit dit gebied naar Rusland waren laat in de achttiende eeuw begonnen en hadden zich voortgezet tot in het begin van de twintigste eeuw. De immigranten werden aangetrokken door privileges die de Tsaar aan christenen verleende als zij zich in de nieuw ingelijfde gebieden in de Kaukasus zouden vestigen. Bovendien werden christenen ten tijde van de Russisch-Turkse oorlogen gedwongen het Ottomaanse Rijk te verlaten. In de jaren twintig van de vorige eeuw werden, als gevolg van de Grieks-Turkse oorlog, alle Grieken gedwongen hun voorouderlijke geboortegrond in Pontus te verlaten. Zij vertrokken naar de Sovjet Unie, of – in het kader van een per verdrag afgedwongen bevolkingsuitwisseling – naar Griekenland.

De Grieken in de Sovjet Unie (SU) bleven binnen de grenzen van de SU, met beperkte mogelijkheden tot contact met het ‘historische vaderland’, totdat de SU op het einde van de jaren tachtig uit elkaar viel. Toen begonnen zij naar Griekenland te migreren. De Griekse overheid vatte de komst van Grieken uit de voormalige SU op als een verrijking voor Griekenland. Zij nodigde VSU-Grieken officieel uit om ‘te

repatriëren naar het vaderland' en stelde een beleidsplan op om 'de terugkeer' in goede banen te leiden. Het plan behelsde hun vestiging in de agrarische gebieden van Thracië, het Noordoostelijk deel van Griekenland en thuis van de Griekse Moslingemeenschap. De aanwezigheid van VSU-Grieken in landelijk Thracië zou naar verwachting de streek economisch nieuwe kracht geven, en daarnaast de religieuze en etnische samenstelling van de bevolking veranderen. Het plan was bedacht met een bepaald beeld van de nieuwkomers voor ogen; van VSU-Grieken werd gedacht dat zij de moeilijke levensomstandigheden in de grensregio's zouden aanvaarden.

Deze verwachtingen kwamen niet uit. Het vestigingsbeleid mislukte vanwege het lokale gebrek aan werkgelegenheid, het onvermogen van de Griekse overheid om de plannen efficiënt uit te voeren, en – het meest belangrijk van al – omdat de nieuwkomers het Thracische platteland geen aantrekkelijke bestemming achtten. Zij kozen ervoor zich in de grote steden te vestigen. Ook waren zij niet bereid om moeilijke en geïmproviseerde omstandigheden te aanvaarden voordat zij kregen wat hun was beloofd. Ofschoon opeenvolgende Griekse regeringen geleidelijk afstapten van het uitnodigingsbeleid voor VSU-Grieken, bleef hun vestiging in Griekenland een onbetwistbaar recht. Even onweersproken bleef de plicht van de overheid hun een in vergelijking met niet-Griekse immigranten bevoorrechte ontvangst te bereiden. VSU-Grieken bleven officieel welkom in 'het vaderland' mochten zij ernaar willen 'terugkeren'. Volgens de ideologie van Grieksheid die de Griekse natie definieert als een trans-territoriale gemeenschap gekenmerkt door afstamming en de Griekse staat als een toevluchtsoord voor deze gemeenschap, behoren VSU-Grieken in dezelfde mate tot Griekenland als haar inheems-Griekse bevolking. Niettemin lijken de ervaringen van de dagelijkse omgang tussen inheemse en VSU-Grieken niet overeen te stemmen met deze veronderstelling.

In Nikopoli ontwikkelden Inheemse Grieken een negatieve houding ten opzichte van hun VSU-Griekse burens terwijl de interpersoonlijke omgang tussen leden van de twee gemeenschappen beperkt bleef. De stedelijke ruimte van Nikopoli, een volksbuurt aan de rand van Thessaloniki met een meerderheid aan VSU-Griekse inwoners, is gedeeltelijk debet aan het gebrek aan interactie tussen inheemse en VSU-Grieken. VSU-Grieken bouwden Efxinoupoli in de jaren negentig van de vorige eeuw zo'n zeshonderd meter ten noorden van het oude Nikopoli, zonder daarvoor formele toestemming te hebben gekregen. Dertig jaar eerder hadden interne migranten uit de wijdere omgeving van Thessaloniki het oude Nikopoli op eenzelfde manier gebouwd. De twee buurtjes waren fysiek van elkaar gescheiden door een strook land dat aanvankelijk onbebouwd bleef. Uiteindelijk ontstond het huidige Nikopoli aan het begin van deze eeuw doordat aannemers de ontwikkeling van het onbebouwde middendeel haastig ter hand namen. Dit deel van Nikopoli trok voornamelijk VSU-Grieken aan maar ook een flink aantal inheemse Grieken; niettemin bleef de omgang tussen leden van deze groepen beperkt, omdat zij belemmerd werd door het ontbreken van een buurthuis en andere lokale instellingen die deze interactie hadden

kunnen bevorderen. Zij werd ook geremd door verschillen in gebruiken met betrekking tot besteding van vrijetijd en activiteiten buitenshuis. SVU-Grieken maakten uitgebreid gebruik van de openbare ruimte van de buurt, terwijl inheemse Grieken de voorkeur gaven aan lokale cafés en taveernes, of hun vrijetijd buiten de buurt plachten door te brengen.

De negatieve opvattingen van inheemse Grieken in Nikopoli over hun VSU-Griekse buurtgenoten konden meestal worden herleid tot verhalen die ze van anderen hadden gehoord. Deze verhalen betroffen gewoonlijk de vermeende agressiviteit en het vermeende delinquente gedrag van VSU-Grieken, of werden onderbouwd met eigen observaties van hoe VSU-Grieken de openbare ruimte in de buurt gebruikten. Veel inheemse Grieken waren kritisch over de gewoonte van VSU-Grieken om op straat te drinken. Daarnaast leverden zij negatief commentaar op de recreatieve keetjes die VSU-Grieken hadden gebouwd in de nabije omgeving van hun huizen en ook wat verder ervan af, in de ruimschoots voorhanden zijnde onbebouwde ruimte van de buurt. In en rond deze informele bouwsels - gemaakt van allerlei soorten materiaal (hout, plaatstaal, triplex, hardboard) - kwamen de oudere VSU-Grieken bij elkaar en brachten er een groot deel van hun dag door. De inheemse Grieken vonden dat deze keten de toch al verloederde openbare ruimte van Nikopoli nog verder verslechterden. Zij beschouwden dit fenomeen als een bevestiging van hun opinie dat hun VSU-Griekse burens weigerden zich aan te passen.

De meeste inheemse Grieken waren van mening dat ze van VSU-Grieken waren afgescheiden door een culturele kloof. Naar hun idee was het deze kloof, en de in hun ogen stuurse en eigenzinnige houding van VSU-Grieken inclusief hun gebrek aan manieren, die de onderlinge omgang in de weg stonden. Veel inheemse Grieken waren ook kritisch over het feit dat zij VSU-Grieken Russisch, en andere niet-Griekse talen hoorden spreken. Hierdoor twijfelden zij aan hun Grieksheid. De verstrooiing van de Grieken in de verschillende gebieden van de SU, het gebrek aan organisatie van de Griekse diaspora, en het belang van Russisch als een vehikel voor sociale stijging droegen bij aan het geleidelijke verlies van de moedertaal in het geval van der meeste VSU-Grieken. Daarbij komt dat een aanzienlijk deel van de VSU-Grieken Turkse talen sprak. Ofschoon VSU-Grieken (met uitzondering van enkele ouderen) het Nieuwgrieks hebben geleerd, is hun vaardigheid in het Russisch beter ontwikkeld en is dit de taal die zij bij voorkeur onderling spreken.

Volgens de inheemse Grieken van Nikopoli zijn de meeste immigranten in de buurt die zich voorstaan op hun Griekse herkomst helemaal geen Grieken. De inheemse-Griekse bewoners noemen de VSU-Grieken in Nikopoli 'Rossopóntii' (Russische Pontiërs), 'Rossófoni' (Russisch sprekenden), of eenvoudigweg 'Róssi' (Russen). De laatste twee labels werden gebruikt als synoniemen en verwijzen naar alle mogelijke nationaliteiten binnen het gebied van de VSU, en niet alleen naar Russen als zodanig. Het Russisch-Pontische etiket is een twijfelachtig label. In plaats van 'de Rus' werd het soms gebruikt (in positieve zin) om Griekse van niet-Griekse VSU-

immigranten te onderscheiden. Gewoonlijk werd het echter gebruikt als een algemene aanduiding voor de gehele Russisch sprekende populatie in de buurt, wanneer men zijn twijfel wilde uiten over haar Grieksheid.

Ook buiten Nikopoli gebruiken inheemse Grieken het Russisch-Pontische etiket. Oorspronkelijk werd het gebruikt om de Pontiërs afkomstig uit de VSU te onderscheiden van de 'inheemse Pontiërs' die naar Griekenland kwamen vanwege de bevolkingsuitwisseling van de jaren twintig van de vorige eeuw. Langzamerhand kreeg het label echter een ongunstige betekenis. Afhankelijk van de context waarin het wordt gebruikt, duidt het op een lage maatschappelijke positie, of wijst het op twijfels over de Grieksheid van de gelabelde persoon of groep. Bovenal is het verbonden met de stereotyperingen van VSU-immigranten als agressievelingen en criminelen.

De beoordeling door inheemse Grieken van hun VSU-Griekse burens was beïnvloed door deze algemene negatieve publieke opinie over de Russische Pontiërs. Het beeld van VSU-Grieken in Nikopoli als agressieve mensen werd versterkt en bevestigd door roddel en de verspreiding van geruchten. Het belemmerde het contact tussen de twee gemeenschappen, aangezien inheemse Grieken verwachtten dat hun FSU-buurtgenoten agressief zouden reageren bij het minste of geringste. Nikopoli stond nauwelijks in de aandacht van de media als een beruchte of gevaarlijke wijk. Niettemin omschreven verscheidene inheemse inwoners hun wijk als onveilig vanwege de vele FSU-Griekse bewoners. Uit mijn gesprekken met mensen uit de aangrenzende wijken kon ik opmaken dat zulke ideeën daar ook leefden. Inheemse Grieken in Nikopoli en de wijken eromheen verbonden zelf de media-aandacht voor de 'Russische maffia' in Thessaloniki met hun begrip van 'de Rus' of 'de Russische Pontiër' en projecteerden dat vervolgens op de lokale FSU-Grieken.

De lokale negatieve opvattingen over de FSU-Griekse burens en de twijfel over hun Grieksheid stonden in contrast tot de positieve betogen van politici over VSU-Grieken, en hun positieve behandeling in de media, als terugkerende landgenoten. Dit contrast wijst op de complexe rol van ideologieën over het behoren tot de natie in figuraties van inheemsen en immigranten. Om die complexiteit te begrijpen, heb ik een theoretisch kader ontwikkeld gebaseerd op het model van gevestigden en buitenstaanders van Elias en Scotson (1994/1965) en de notie van Hage met betrekking tot praktische nationaliteit (2000). Dit kader maakt het mogelijk relaties tussen inheemsen en migranten te onderzoeken en hoe deze zich lokaal ontwikkelen middels een strijd over de definitie van de natie en de bepaling wie er toe behoort en wie niet.

Immigranten worden buitenstaanders op het moment dat zij in het land van bestemming aankomen en daar een leven proberen op te bouwen. Het ontbreekt hen aan formele burgerschapsrechten, wat hun status van buitenstaander onderstreept en hen verhindert om op basis van gelijkheid mee te doen in de 'ontvangende' samenleving. Zij ervaren hun buitenstaanderstatus ook in hun dagelijkse omgang met

mensen van de inheemse samenleving. Zelfs als zij burgerschapsrechten weten te verkrijgen betekent dit niet noodzakelijkerwijs dat de gevestigden – zij die zichzelf beschouwen als vertegenwoordigers van de natie – hen erkennen en herkennen als gelijkwaardige leden van de nationale gemeenschap.

De gevestigden claimen de rol van leidinggevend in wat zij beschouwen als ‘hun natie’. Zij voelen dat zij het recht hebben om te bepalen ‘hoe de dingen hier werken’ en ‘wie wat krijgt’. De vestiging van migranten wordt ervaren als het verpesten van hun *culturele intimiteit* (Herzfeld 2005) en het betwisten van hun alleenrecht te bepalen hoe de zaken ‘bij hen thuis’ worden geregeld (Blumer 1958). Naar hun idee betreden nieuwkomers hun gezamenlijke privésfeer en zij voelen dat zij daarom het recht hebben hen te disciplineren volgens ‘de huisregels’. Oorspronkelijke inwoners zien zichzelf als gevestigd ook omdat zij in staat zijn zichzelf als de belichaming van de nationale norm te presenteren waaraan immigranten zich hebben aan te passen. Zij eisen van immigranten aan te tonen in hoeverre zij behoren tot de natie door te laten zien hoeveel *praktische nationaliteit* zij hebben verworven, dat wil zeggen, waar zij scoren op de meetlat van het geheel van gewaardeerde en geheiligde sociale en culturele stijlen en disposities (Hage 2000). Het disciplineren en buitensluiten van immigranten is bovenal noodzakelijk om de status van de gevestigden te garanderen als ‘heren in hun eigen natie’. Hoe kunnen we vanuit dit theoretisch perspectief het negatieve beeld van inheems-Griekse in Nikopoli dat zij hebben over hun VSU-Griekse burens begrijpen en verklaren waarom zij de Griekse identiteit van hun burens betwijfelen? En welke reactie verwachten we van de VSU-Griekse?

Niettegenstaande de geprononceerde opvattingen die de inheems-Griekse inwoners van Nikopoli hadden over hun VSU-Griekse burens, hadden deze laatsten nauwelijks iets te zeggen over de inheemse Grieken in de wijk. Wanneer ik er naar vroeg, zeiden zij dat zij geen inheemse Grieken in de wijk kenden, of zij noemden slechts formele relaties met een beperkt aantal mensen. Deze omschreven zij in het algemeen als vriendelijk. Uit mijn gesprekken met VSU-Grieken heb ik opgemaakt dat zij zich niet bewust zijn van de negatieve opinies die leven bij een groot deel van de inheems-Griekse inwoners van Nikopoli. Deze neutrale opvattingen over hun burens weerspiegelden echter niet hun opinies over Griekenland en inheemse Grieken in het algemeen. Zij waren zich zeer bewust van, en geërgerd over de manier waarop in Thessaloniki onder de bevolking wordt gesproken over de Russen of de Russische Pontiërs. Zij associeerden dit negatieve discours eenvoudig niet met dat van hun inheems-Griekse buurtgenoten.

VSU-Grieken waren daarnaast uitgesproken kritisch over hun ontvangst door de Griekse overheid. Hun komst naar het vaderland had hen niet de sociaaleconomische zekerheid gebracht die zij verwacht hadden te vinden in Griekenland. Integendeel, de meerderheid van hen kwam terecht in onzekere en slecht betaalde baantjes die niet in overeenstemming waren met hun vaardigheden en onderwijsniveau. Zij lieten merken hierover bitter gestemd te zijn en het hun

historische thuisland aan te rekenen. Hun ontgoocheling was daarom zo groot omdat zij vooraf hun ‘terugkeer naar het vaderland’ hadden geïdealiseerd.

Wat betreft hun opvattingen over inheemse Grieken kon ik tijdens mijn onderzoek twee groepen onderscheiden: zij die ook kritisch waren ten aanzien van hun eigen gemeenschap, en stelden dat ‘hun mensen’ gedeeltelijk of zelfs grotendeels verantwoordelijk waren voor het ongunstige beeld bij de inheemse Grieken, en zij die alle blaam legden bij de inheemse Grieken, en deze als collectief beschuldigden van arrogant gedrag en gebrek aan respect. Dit onderscheid wijst op een polarisatie binnen de bevolking van VSU-Grieken met betrekking tot wat hun strategie in Griekenland met betrekking tot het samenleven zou moeten zijn. Ook wijst het op een scheiding van geesten over de betekenis van beschuldigingen van crimineel gedrag en een agressieve houding aan hun gezamenlijke adres.

De meer negatieve groep VSU-Grieken stelden dat inheemse Grieken soft, lui en naïef zijn, en zagen aanhoudende relaties met hen als een teken van (ongewenste) assimilatie. Negatieve ervaringen met inheemse Grieken en vooral de discussies hierover binnen hun groep activeerden hun minderheidscultuur en stimuleerden en wettigden hun verzetshouding ‘om niet te worden zoals zij’. De meeste van mijn FSU-Griekse informanten waren kritisch op een dergelijke houding. Zij waren van mening dat dit hen veroordeelde tot een uitzichtloze en onvruchtbare strijd met de inheemse Grieken, en hen ook als gemeenschap niet vooruit zou helpen in Griekenland.

Ondanks deze verschillen verzetten alle VSU-Grieken zich fel tegen het Russisch-Pontische label. Zij stonden erop ‘Pontisch’ of ‘Grieks’ genoemd te worden, enerzijds omdat het Russisch-Pontische etiket naar hun ervaring een indicatie was dat de privileges verbonden aan hun status van repatriant in twijfel werden getrokken, anderzijds omdat zij zich hierdoor voelden uitgesloten en een ondergeschikte status toegemeten.

Zonder hun Grieksheid af te zwakken, lieten VSU-Grieken bij tijd en wijlen merken dat hun voormalige status van burger van de SU een bron van trots voor hen was, en een manier om inheemse Grieken die zich laatdunkend tegenover hen gedroegen terecht te wijzen. In plaats van de rol van kandidaat-lid van de natie te aanvaarden, en naar acceptatie te streven door het Sovjetverleden af te zweren, hielden VSU-Grieken hun verschil staande om hun superioriteit te kunnen onderstrepen. Zij stelden dat zij meer Grieks waren dan de inheemsen, omdat zij immers hun nationaliteit hadden weten te behouden in weerwil van de onderdrukking die hadden moeten doorstaan in de SU.

VSU-Grieken deden geen moeite hun opvoeding in de SU te verbergen, noch waren zij bereid om hun gewoonten te wijzigen als deze inheemse Grieken vreemd voorkwamen, en de laatsten dit van hen verwachtten. Op straat bier drinken met vrienden, Russisch spreken, kijken naar de Russische televisie, en het bouwen van

vrijetijdsschuurtjes – deze activiteiten waren niet bedoeld als openbare verklaringen van de eigenheid, maar simpelweg praktijken gericht op de continuering van het verleden in het heden. De inheemse Grieken beschouwden deze activiteiten als provocatief en als opzettelijke uitingen van een gebrek aan respect. In hun ogen waren het tekenen van een gebrek aan bereidheid om ‘te integreren’ en van de onechtheid van hun Griekse afkomst. Inheemse Grieken plaatsten VSU-Grieken samen met de andere immigranten in het hokje van de nationale buitenstaanders. Eenmaal daar geplaatst, verwachtten zij van hen dat zij hun bereidheid te tonen om zich aan te passen en de staat van hun praktische nationaliteit te laten beoordelen.

Het is moeilijk te zeggen welke groep in Nikopoli de dominante partij is. Inheemsen eisten die status op met hun kritische bejegening van het gedrag van de immigranten. Zij stelden zich op het standpunt dat hun levenswijze de norm was waaraan anderen zich dienden te conformeren. De VSU-Grieken voldeden echter niet aan de verwachting. De negatieve houding van de inheemse Grieken kan deels begrepen worden als het gevolg van hun teleurstelling over hun gebrek aan vermogen hen te disciplineren naar hun eigen voorbeeld.

Inheemse Grieken in Nikopoli verdachten hun buurtgenoten uit de VSU ervan ‘namaak Grieken’ te zijn, dat wil zeggen niet-Grieken die hun papieren door fraude hadden verkregen. Cultureel verschil werd gezien als een uitdrukking van vermeend ‘niet-Grieks bewustzijn’ en als bewijs aanvaard dat zij feitelijk niet van Griekse afkomst waren. De ‘namaak Grieken’ vormden een ingebeelde categorie die de negatieve opvattingen over de VSU-Grieken legitimeerde zonder de officiële criteria voor het behoren tot de natiestaat of de heersende opvattingen over de kwaliteiten van Grieksheid aan te vechten. Deze oplossing was van belang voor het zelfbeeld van de inheemse inwoners. Hun collectieve charisma (Elias 1998; Elias & Scotson 1994) was ervan afhankelijk. De selectieve toewijzing van ‘goede’ eigenschappen aan ‘echte’ Griekse immigranten en ‘slechte’ eigenschappen aan ‘namaak Grieken’ stelde de ideologieën van Grieksheid, en daarmee de collectieve overtuiging van het eigen inheems-Griekse charisma veilig, en versterkte deze zelfs.

VSU-Grieken eisten geen dominante positie op in de wijk door vraagtekens te stellen bij het gedrag van hun buurtgenoten. Toch gedroegen zij zich als een gevestigde groep. Zij leken hun leven in Nikopoli te leiden overeenkomstig hun eigen normen, onaangedaan door de verwachtingen en kritiek van inheemse Grieken. Geholpen door hun numerieke overwicht in de buurt waren VSU-Grieken in staat om hun eigen instituties te ontwikkelen.

Nikopoli is echter een bijzonder geval vanwege de concentratie van VSU-Grieken daar. Het is een VSU-Grieks eiland midden in een inheems Griekse zee. Buiten de buurt hebben veel FSU-Grieken heel andere ervaringen. Verscheidene van mijn informanten beschreven aan mij gebeurtenissen waarin zij voelden dat zij hun afwijken van de inheemse normen moesten verdedigen of wettigen. Zij voelde zich in

dat soort situaties vaak in verlegenheid gebracht door hun VSU-afkomst of hun gebrekkige beheersing van het Grieks. Alhoewel in mindere mate het geval dan onder andere migranten, waren VSU-Grieken aangedaan door inheemse beoordelingen van hun gedrag in verschillende domeinen van het leven. Louter het bestaan van de Russisch-Pontische categorie en de erbij horende vooroordelen, en het feit dat VSU-Grieken de noodzaak voelen zich ertegen te verzetten, bewijst dat ondanks hun formele insluiting door de Griekse staat en de positieve wijze waarop zij door de media worden voorgesteld, zij nog steeds geen deel uitmaken van de groep gevestigde staatsburgers.

Het idee van een volk is een historische constructie en de inhoud van dat idee is continue betwistbaar. In de loop van de tijd verschuiven de etnische grenzen, krijgen groepen die eerder gezien werden als buitenstaanders toegang tot de vroeger zo exclusieve nationale club, en krijgen het recht hun privileges van lid van de natie te vererven. Dit zijn echter processen met een lange adem die meerdere generaties omspannen. Op de korte termijn hebben immigranten meestal slechts beperkte mogelijkheden om ideologieën van het behoren tot de natie te veranderen in hun voordeel. Omdat hun gedrag wordt beoordeeld naar de mate waarin zij zich voegen naar de inheemse normen, vormen andere migrantengroepen waarmee zij concurreren om nationale erkenning gewoonlijk een belangrijk referentiekader.

Assimilatietheorie wordt terecht bekritiseerd vanwege haar onoverdachte perspectief van de natiestaat (Wimmer & Schiller 2002; Favel 2003; Waldinger, 2003). Zij geeft een voorstelling van immigranten alsof hun meest belangrijke kenmerk de onverenigbaarheid van hun cultuur is, die een uitdaging of zelfs een gevaar vormt voor de vermeende culturele homogeniteit en sociale cohesie van 'inheemse samenlevingen'. Transnationalisme werd vervolgens als een superieure alternatieve theorie naar voren gebracht (Schiller et al. 1992; Faist, 2000); het was een stap in de richting van het te boven komen van het 'container model' van de maatschappij dat methodologisch nationalisme de migratiesociologie had opgelegd (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002). In hun poging om de natiestaat theoretisch te overstijgen, hebben de theoretici van het transnationalisme te sterk de nadruk gelegd op de mogelijkheden tot zelfbeschikking van immigranten. Immigranten kunnen niet uit vrije wil kiezen uit een baaiend van culturen en identiteiten, zonder zich iets aan te trekken van externe krachten.

Op de vraag naar de mate waarin naties verschillende samenlevingen en culturen kunnen omvatten moet kritisch worden gereflecteerd, en het antwoord moet worden gevonden met behulp van empirische data. Het feit dat naties bestaan in het denken en in de verbeelding van mensen kan echter nauwelijks worden betwist. Naties en ideologieën van het behoren tot de natie vormen wat Douglas. Deze constellaties bestaan uit ideeën die vanuit verschillende levensdomeinen in elkaar grijpen, daaraan hun gezag en vanzelfsprekendheid ontleen, en zo het denken en de interacties van mensen sturen. In plaats van een nationalistisch perspectief te vooronderstellen, of

het te negeren alsof het er niet toe zou doen, zouden we nog meer moeten reflecteren op zijn hegemonische kracht en de rol die het speelt in onze analyses. Alleen op die manier kunnen we de machtsdynamiek aan het licht brengen die de relaties tussen immigranten en inheemsen ordent en stuurt.