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

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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,[94] 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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[94] 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.[95] 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.[96]

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[95] 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.

[96] 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,[97] 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.[98] 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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[97] This issue, described in detail in subchapter 5.3, has been also covered by television programmes.
[98] 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]'[99] 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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[99] 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'.[100] 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 Πολίχνης). 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 *[κωλάδικο]*', he said.

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[100] 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.[101] 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).[102]

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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[101] 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) .

[102] 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 Geek 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 secretively, mainly overnight. In some cases it could take years before an *afthéreto* house was

finalized in Nikopoli.[103] 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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[103] 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.[104] 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.[105] 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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[104] 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.

[105] 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.

| 1. Old Nikopoli, end of 1980s | 2. Old Nikopoli and Efxinoupoli, end of 1990s | 3. Nikopoli in 2010 |
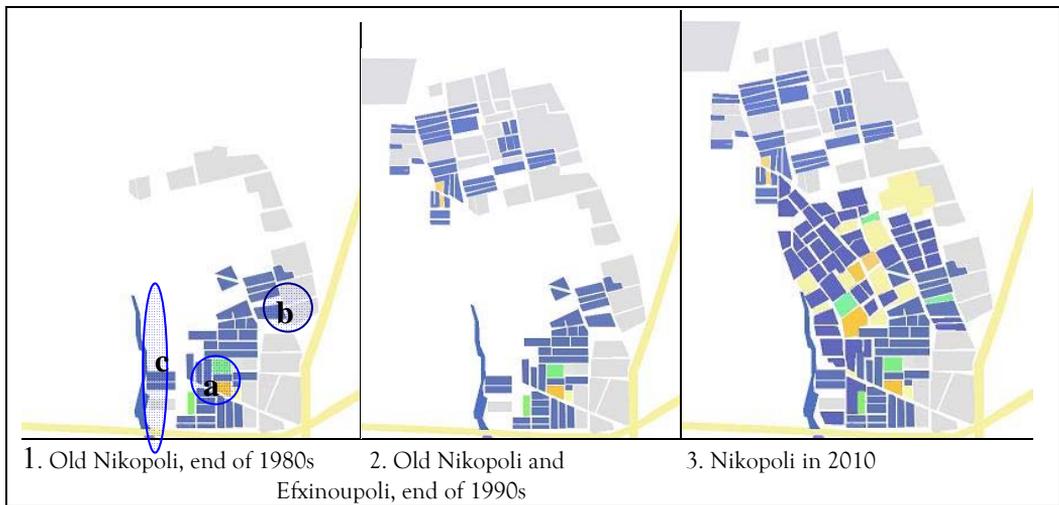
Map 5.1 The expansion of Nikopoli

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.[106] Apart from Nikopoli, the population of Theodosia,[107] another 'Pontic village', this one in Kilkis, 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

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[106] 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).

[107] 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.[108] Only a small number of families came to Thessaloniki, many of whom settled along the banks of the Assimakis torrent.[109] 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 *afthéreta* 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 *afthéreto…* 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.[110] 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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[108] 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.

[109] Another big concentration is found in Kordelio.

[110] 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,[111] 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.[112] 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 been have tolerated if it had

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[111] A supranational body founded by the League of Nations.

[112] 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 (Hirshon 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'etat. Among other things staunch anticommunism prevailed and FSU Greeks 'became' potential traitors, despite the fact that the majority of them were ideologically right wing.[113] 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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[113] 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. [114] 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 became 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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[114] 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*,[115] 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,[116] but on the margins of Thessaloniki.

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[115] A small number of *réma* squatters had to be re-housed because of the construction of the ring road.

[116] 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 Efkarpia and was officially defined as a manufacturing zone.[117] 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 200m². The same broker also played the role of mediator between the landowner and the authorities of the Community of Efkarpia. Consensus at the local level was necessary. The fact that the social circle of the broker intersected with the local governments in Efkarpia was probably a basic reason why construction took place in that particular locale.[118]

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).

[117] In that year Efkarpia was a community. It later upgraded to a municipality and eventually merged into the newly formed Municipality of Pavlos Melas.

[118] 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.[119]

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'.[120] 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*[121] [...] there is no one among our people [διϰὸς 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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[119] *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.

[120] 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.

[121] 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^2 plots, but rather a share of up to 200m^2 over the complete 1.35 hectare field. By law,[122] no settler owns a coherent plot of land but all have rights up to 200m^2 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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[122] *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, [123] 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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[123] 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.[124] 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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[124] 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.[125] 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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[125] 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.[126]

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 Exfinoupoli. 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 Exfinoupolis 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 Efkarpia. 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.

Efkarpia was a small municipality of less than 7,000 people and FSU Greeks made up more than one third of its total population.[127] 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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[126] Efxinoupoli, being severed from the residential area of the Efkarpia, could not be served by the existing social infrastructure of the municipality.

[127] In Efkarpia, FSU Greeks are also concentrated in Filothei and Amfiethea, 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 cliental relationships[128] 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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[128] 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 [πνιγμένοι 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' [παλιννοστήσας] 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.[129] A number of

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[129] 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 prize. 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. Were 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 secretively, 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 (*συνοικία 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?