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

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‘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*,¹³⁰ 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*¹³¹, 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

¹³⁰ A small and unimposing restaurant.

¹³¹ 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 (φιλικατζιδικια), 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.¹³² 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

¹³² 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*.¹³³ 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

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

more widely practised (Connor, 1971; Partanen, 1987).¹³⁴ 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’.¹³⁵ 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.¹³⁶

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 [χύριοι]’. Many native Greeks in Nikopoli felt that they were separated from their FSU Greek neighbours by a

¹³⁴ 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.

¹³⁵ 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.

¹³⁶ 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.¹³⁷

Yannis, the owner of a *kafenío*¹³⁸ 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*.¹³⁹ 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.

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

¹³⁸ Not one where Albanians residents of Nikopoli visited.

¹³⁹ 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.¹⁴⁰

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

¹⁴⁰ 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 Nikopoli¹⁴¹ 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

¹⁴¹ 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.¹⁴² 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

¹⁴² 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,¹⁴³ 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

¹⁴³ 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 qualifications¹⁴⁴ 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

¹⁴⁴ 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.¹⁴⁵ 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

¹⁴⁵ 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.¹⁴⁶

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.¹⁴⁷ 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 Russia¹⁴⁸ 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.'

¹⁴⁶ 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.

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

¹⁴⁸ '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.¹⁴⁹ 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.¹⁵⁰

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.¹⁵¹ 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.

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

¹⁵⁰ On perceptions about crime see subchapter 6.3.

¹⁵¹ 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.¹⁵² 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

¹⁵² 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.¹⁵³ 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.¹⁵⁴ 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

¹⁵³ 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.

¹⁵⁴ 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.¹⁵⁵

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.

¹⁵⁵ 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 28th 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 μουσαφιρταίους]. 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 surname¹⁵⁶ 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

¹⁵⁶ 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,¹⁵⁷ 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 guys¹⁵⁸ 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

¹⁵⁷ A Turkish-speaking Greek village in Tsalka.

¹⁵⁸ 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.¹⁵⁹ 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?

¹⁵⁹ 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 Pontics¹⁶⁰ 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

¹⁶⁰ '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*.¹⁶¹ 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.¹⁶² However, for the purposes of my

¹⁶¹ 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.

¹⁶² 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.¹⁶³

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,¹⁶⁴ 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

¹⁶³ This may relate to the lack of entertainment places in the neighbourhood.

¹⁶⁴ 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 τρῶβηξα ἄσε]...

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,¹⁶⁵ 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

¹⁶⁵ 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.¹⁶⁶ 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

¹⁶⁶ 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.¹⁶⁷

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

¹⁶⁷ 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.¹⁶⁸

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

¹⁶⁸ 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.