

**GREECE
Thiva Case Study Report -- D9
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WaVE Case study report – the case of Thiva

1. Abstract

This report presents the findings of the WaVE research carried out in Thiva, Greece, in the period between September of 2006 and December of 2007. Thiva is a medium-sized town reflecting many characteristics of contemporary Greek society insofar as co-existence between the majority and minorities are concerned, particularly in terms of the relative newness of the situation of a mass presence of immigrants. The research focuses on the interaction between the majority population and Indian and Pakistani male immigrants; Albanian immigrants (male and female); and female migrant labourers (from Poland, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania and Serbia), in the context of welfare needs and provision. The research entails mainly semi-structured in-depth interviews with both majority and minority individuals and participant observation in various settings of interaction between majority and minority individuals. Issues of bureaucratic inefficiencies are a central focus of this report inasmuch as difficulties faced by immigrants in the process of becoming registered and renewing their documentation constitute a central axis of majority-minority tensions from the perspective of minorities. Lifestyle issues factor into the perspectives of many majority individuals consulted regarding their attitudes towards the welfare of immigrants. Certain values amongst both majority and minority individuals may in some cases lead to tensions between them, but we cannot generally speak of a conflict of values in the case of Thiva.

2. Thiva in context – presentation of the town

2.1. General characteristics

Thiva is a medium-sized Greek town (pop. 24,443) 85 km northwest of Athens, located in the prefecture of Viotia. Thiva occupies the same space as ancient Thebes and accordingly is home to several archaeological sites and well-preserved ruins; these mark the otherwise architecturally typical modern city. A second significant marker is its recent past (and, to a limited extent, present) as a centre of industry. A boom in the 1970s and early 80s in the establishment of factories there began descending by the 1990s; today most of the factories in the region of Viotia (approx. 120) are based in and around Thiva. Factory closures are, to a large extent, responsible for the relatively high unemployment rate: in the period between 1981 and 1991, Thiva saw an unemployment rate increase of 184% (compared to 102% nationally) (Fokas 2006a). Based on the 2001 census, 1,293

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individuals are unemployed, of which 701 are women and 592 men¹. A third important marker of the town is its well-developed agricultural industry (mainly cotton, oil, cereals and potato), based for the most part in villages on the outskirts of Thiva.

Thiva is a relatively diverse Greek town, for a number of reasons. The presence of *Arvanites* has, historically, been a factor of diversity in Thiva². So has the fact that Thiva was a major hub of Greek industry, and thus attracted labour migration internal to Greece. The few remaining factories continue to draw immigrant employees, but most of Thiva's immigration is drawn to its agricultural industry. This applies especially to third country (non-EU) nationals, as well as to much of the new arrival-EU (or candidate EU) member citizens. Thiva's relative proximity to Athens is another key factor.

A further reason behind Thiva's relative diversity is that the town was home to a refugee housing complex established for the refugees who came to Greece in the early 1920s following the Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922)³. In the 1970s a number of Muslims from Thrace also moved into this complex; they were drawn to Thiva by a national regulation offering them jobs there (see below). Over time, this refugee housing (known as the 'old refugee housing', or *sinoikismos*) has housed a chain of immigrants coming to Thiva.

According to the 2001 census, of a total population in Thiva of 24,443, there are 17 citizens of other EU countries, and 2,365 citizens of non-EU countries (in other words, 9.74% non-nationals – i.e., non-Greek nationals). However, these numbers do not reflect the current situation because of the continued immigration in the years since 2001 (the Thiva "Office for Foreigners", the municipality's office dealing with the issuing of residence papers to immigrants, declares it has registered approximately 3,000 immigrants to date) and because of the large number of undocumented (or, 'illegal') immigrants (for which reliable estimations cannot be offered). Furthermore, there are no statistics

¹ The figure may be compared with the national figure of 508,180 unemployed: female 231,091, male 277,089. All figures cited from the 2001 Census are drawn from the website of the General Secretariat of National Statistical Service of Greece (www.statistics.gr).

² *Arvanites* are a group settled in Thiva since the establishment of the modern Greek state in the 1820s. They speak a dialect quite close to the Albanian language; today they are thoroughly integrated in and indistinguishable from the majority community.

³ Otherwise known as the "Asia Minor Catastrophe", the failed Greek campaign to recover predominately Greek territories of the Ottoman Empire (in Asia Minor, Western coast of contemporary Turkey) resulted in the Lausanne Treaty, which foresaw a population exchange between Greece and Turkey. The Greek refugees from Asia Minor were settled in various parts of Greece, and such "old refugee" neighbourhoods as that in Thiva are scattered throughout Greece. The Lausanne Treaty also set special terms under which a minority of Greeks could continue living in Constantinople, and a minority of Turks could continue living in a region of Greece called Thrace.

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available in Thiva with exact numbers for ethnicities or religions represented in the town. The Thiva Office for Foreigners does not keep even informal statistics about the country of origin of applicants for residence papers (their documentation is on paper only). Accordingly, only estimates may be made regarding the size of various groups, on the basis of cross-referencing numbers cited by a range of sources.

In terms of the groups upon which the in-depth research is based, their size is *estimated* below, based on numbers cited by the Thiva Office for Foreigners and the deputy mayor of Thiva who deals specifically with minority issues.

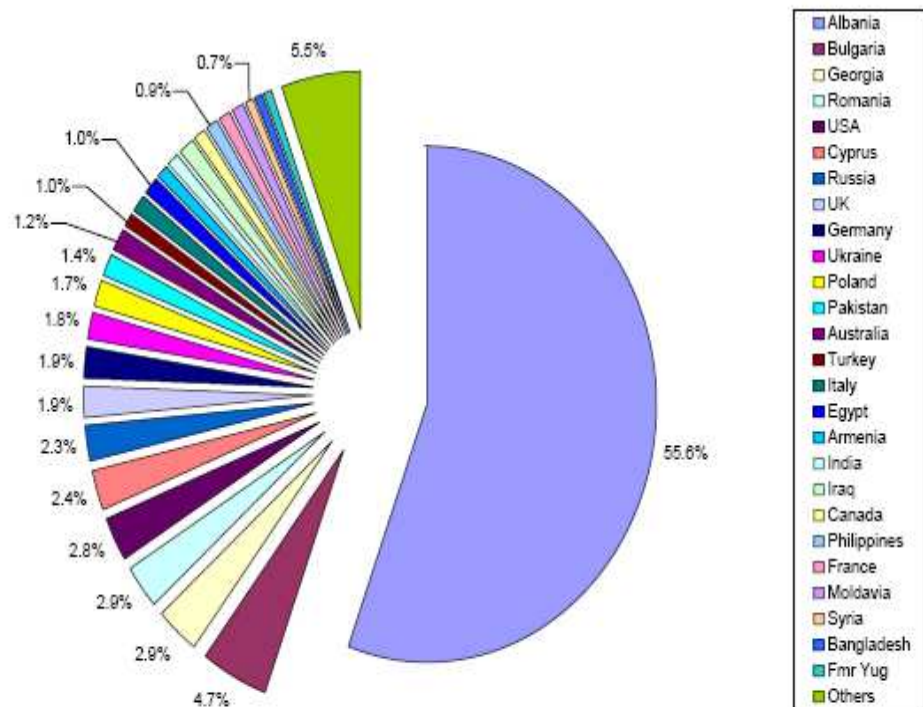
Figure 1.

	<u>Estimated size</u>
Albanians	1,000-1,500
Pakistanis	500
Indians	450
Romanians	400
Bulgarians	100

Given the lack of local level statistical data, it is worthwhile to consider the relevant figures for the national level (Figure 1); however, it is important to note that these figures do not reflect the presence in Greece of undocumented immigrants.

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FIGURE 2: Principal nationalities, Census 2001



2.2 The “minority” presence in Thiva

It is important to note first that the term “minority” is used here in keeping with the practice within the WaVE project overall. However, the term is not used thus in the Greek nor the Thiva context. Most of the groups under study would be called ‘economic immigrants’ (*oikonomiki metanastes*), and certain groups are called specifically by their names, as for example the Roma, or the Muslims from Thrace (though numerically minorities, they would not be called as such)⁴.

It is also important to note the local geography of the minority presence in Thiva. The continuing significance of the “old refugee housing” (*paios profigikos sinoikismos*; see p.3) should be emphasised as a symbolic and tangible focal point for the minority presence. This neighbourhood is now comprised mainly of minority groups; the rent is

⁴ There is a certain taboo in the use of the term ‘minority’ in Greece that is related to the Lausanne Treaty mentioned above, in its requirement of special treatment for minorities which – at the time – were in Greece the Turkish Muslims living in Thrace, emphatically referred to as a Muslim, rather than Turkish minority, and historically limited in their ethnic identity-related rights.

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very low (e.g., €50-100 per month), and the living conditions extremely poor. The neighbourhood seems to serve as a ‘first stop’ for newcomers. It cannot strictly be described as a “ghetto”, though, given the continued presence of (now, a minority) of the majority population (mainly progeny of the original Asia Minor refugees).

The area where the Roma live can, however, be described as a ghetto. It is on the outskirts of Thiva, and is on a markedly lower scale in terms of provisions (quality of homes, availability of electricity, the state of the roads, etc), but the degree to which the Roma live there by choice or not is a debated issue (much like the debate on whether the Roma choose their lifestyle or are simply unable to ‘escape’ it). Meanwhile, a large proportion of the Pakistani and Indian men (but especially Indian men) who work on farms seem to live in shacks owned by the landlord and situated on the land which they work. They are thus scattered throughout the villages on the outskirts of Thiva.

The groups present in the locality are listed in order of size and described below (please note: the information below represents a ‘mapping’ of the town terms of its minority presence; greater detail is offered only for those groups with which in-depth research has been conducted. See below):

Albanians

This is the first immigrant group (chronologically) to have a significant presence in Thiva, although the largest waves of immigration from Albania took place after the fall of Communism. Of all the minority groups present in the locality, Albanians are the most integrated, from certain perspectives: they tend to know Greek very well; they are more likely than individuals from other minority groups to be employed in jobs alongside Greeks; their children tend to fare fairly well in schools; and economically they are increasingly well-off, to the extent that it is also increasingly difficult to distinguish between Greek and Albanian status and lifestyles.

“Southern Albanians”/“Northern Epirots”

This category requires separate listing because, both legally and socially, it exists somewhere “in-between” the majority population and immigrant minorities. These are

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individuals who hail from that part of Albania where there was a sizable Greek minority dating back to the Ottoman period. This category bears a status as ‘of Greek background’ (linguistically and religiously defined), which awards them special immigration and welfare rights (*see below*). Yet they remain citizens of Albania⁵. Meanwhile, this status as ‘of Greek background’, possibly *together with* their special rights, affords them a significantly “higher” standing in the perspectives of much of the majority community. This relates to what Triandafyllidou and Veikou (2002) describe as a ‘hierarchy of Greekness’.

Pakistanis and Indians⁶

The Pakistani and Indian presence in Thiva is more recent, and mainly limited to this decade. Yet in this relatively short time span, they have a fairly established, and very visible, presence in Thiva. The two groups generally exist quite separate to one another, with little to no interaction except in cases where they are employed to work on the same farms. They are presented here (in this ‘mapping’ section) together though because of their marked similarities in terms of their experiences as minorities in Thiva, as well as in the local population’s attitudes towards the two groups. In fact, it is likely that most of the local population cannot distinguish between the two groups, except in the case of those Sikhs who wear turbans. This, however, is likely to change in time and with increased contact between the majority and both of these groups. It should also be emphasised that neither group is a monolith. The Pakistanis, in particular, are divided into at least two different groups with their own social networks (*see below*).

Most Pakistanis and Indians work as farm labourers. However, many have established shops, where they sell mainly imported food goods, and also run telephone services (serving as a “telephone booth” for calls to the respective home countries). Most of those Indians and Pakistanis who live within the city of Thiva live in the “old refugee housing”. This immigrant group is almost solely male; there are very few Pakistani and Indian women or children in Thiva. Furthermore, one important characteristic of this group is the

⁵ In accordance with immigration law 1975/1991, “Northern Epirots” are “co-ethnics”. The law does not set out the criteria for definition as “co-ethnic”; a decision of the State Council (no.2756/1983) defines the term as “to belong to the Greek Ethnos”. A further State Council judgement (no.2207/1992) sets out that “co-ethnics from Albania are the people that descend from Greek parents and their place of birth (theirs or their parents) is Vorios Epirus”. See Triandafyllidou and Veikou 2002: 198.

⁶ As explained below, these are two very separate groups, but they are presented together because the same information presented here applies to both groups, in terms of their experience in Thiva and their general relations with the majority.

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relative lack of knowledge of the Greek language. This significantly limits their job prospects and, of course, their level of integration with the majority population.

Roma

The Roma in Thiva are divided into two groups: the “permanent” and the “temporary”. The “permanent” Roma in Thiva have lived in a particular part of town (described above) for approximately 50 years, and their number is estimated at approximately 375 individuals. The “temporary” are considered – by the “permanent” Roma and by the local authorities – as the group most responsible for drug crime in Thiva; they live on the outskirts of the area where the “permanent” Roma live and are estimated to be approximately 250-300 people. Separate schooling for the Roma in Thiva has been established; in general the schooling of Roma children is a source of contention between the majority and Roma population.

Bulgarians and Romanians

Bulgarians and Romanians began settling in Thiva since the early 90s. They tend to know Greek relatively well, and to work mainly in shops, as cleaners, etc. There seem to be more females from these two groups (particularly amongst the Bulgarians). Most Bulgarians and Romanians in Thiva live in the “old refugee housing”.

“Russian Pontics”

The Russian Pontics are immigrants from the former Soviet Union “of Greek background” who migrated to the Soviet Union from Greek parts of the then Ottoman Empire, or who left Greece around the time of the civil war to escape persecution for their leftist ideologies. They are in essence ‘repatriates’, and are treated as such by the Greek governments with the same immigration and welfare privileges as those enjoyed by the Northern Epirots. However, this group were granted Greek citizenship upon their arrival in Greece (Triandafyllidou and Veikou 2002: 195).

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Muslims from Thrace

The Muslims from Thrace, also referred to as “Turks” by the local population, moved to Thiva around the 70s and 80s, during a period when a policy was being employed to weaken the Muslim community of Thrace by offering people civil service jobs (e.g., as cleaners in public buildings and on public roads) outside of Thrace.

Jehovah’s Witnesses

Jehovah’s Witnesses have a particular history in the area. In the mid-80s they had attempted to build their headquarters for all the Balkan area on the outskirts of Thiva: a large plot of land was purchased, and the buildings for the headquarters were built. However, the local populations (supported by many local clergy) reacted strongly against this, protesting at a mass level against the operation of a Centre for Jehovah’s Witnesses in the area. By the mid-1990s, the plan was abandoned, and the land was sold to the Ministry of Justice. Today, there is a Jehovah’s Witnesses house of worship in Thiva, but their number has not been established (nor estimated) by key informants. Likewise, there is a Pentecostal presence in Thiva, estimated to be two families who gather to worship in the home of one of these families. Both groups are thought by key informants (non-members of these groups) to be comprised of Greek converts.

Others

Old Calendarists would not normally be described as a “minority” by the majority population; they are Christian Orthodox, but follow the “old”, Julian calendar. The Old Calendarists have their own church, just outside of central Thiva. But they are otherwise indistinguishable from the majority population and only in religious terms may they be considered a minority group.

A note on religious characteristics of the groups: It should be noted that of all the groups listed above, except the ‘others’ category, only the Pakistanis and Indians are especially active religiously – each of course with their own areas of worship. The Pakistanis in Thiva have established a mosque (i.e., a building that operates as such), though legally the license they have is for the operation of a library. Most Indians in

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Thiva are Sikhs, and they tend to worship in warehouses. Religion, and their places of worship, serve as an especially important unifying factor for these two groups, and significantly marks their social and, to a certain extent, work life (e.g., through breaks for prayer). In the other groups listed, religion does not seem to be a marker of the groups. Specifically, for immigrants from Romania and Bulgaria, very little is known about their religious practices, both at the local and national levels, with no systematic research having been conducted on this subject.

2.3 The local welfare system

The government welfare provisions in Thiva can be described as *a limited/poor* as in the rest of Greece. The Greek welfare system is quite centralised, and so the gaps in the system overall are also present in the case of Thiva. In terms of local welfare activity, in Thiva, as in most Greek municipalities, the bulk of welfare services are based in the Welfare Office of the Prefecture⁷, which deals mainly with the provision of benefits to people with disabilities and the uninsured, and one-off allowances for emergency situations (e.g. natural disasters). The municipalities themselves do not have “welfare offices”; rather, welfare activity is carried out only on an ad-hoc and short term basis, based mainly at a “Municipal Enterprise” in each municipality (many short-term EU social programmes, in particular, are based at municipal enterprises)⁸.

The existence and role of municipal enterprises throughout Greece is explained as an effort towards privatisation of the system; however, several interviewees describe the municipal enterprises as a “loophole” through which politicians can more easily extend favours/jobs, without having to go through layers of bureaucracy, and without having to offer long-term contracts to employees. Much of the welfare activity at this level is, by extension, conducted on a short-term basis. Many short-term EU social programmes, in particular, are based at municipal enterprises.

All Greek citizens are offered the same welfare rights. In terms of non-citizens, the rights of these groups vary in accordance with a number of factors, including the relationship between the Greek government and their countries of origin. For example, as of 1 January

⁷ The Viotia Prefecture Welfare Office is based in Livadeia.

⁸ The municipal enterprise in Thiva is entitled ‘Municipal Enterprise of Cultural and Urban Development of Thiva’ (DEPOATH).

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2007, Romanians and Bulgarians enjoy the same welfare privileges as all EU nationals in Greece. As for *undocumented* non-citizens, they have no rights to local welfare provision; only in cases of emergency are they admitted to hospitals. The documented immigrants tend to have some form of social insurance (usually OGA – for those working in agriculture). However, they are often unable to afford the insurance payments, in which case they sometimes sign off of the insurance policy and sign up for “emergency help” from the regional welfare authority. Most of the recipients of this “emergency help” in Thiva are Albanians and Roma.

As noted above, special rights are accorded to immigrants from two particular backgrounds: Northern Epirots and Russian Pontics. If they are uninsured, they have the right to an annual (renewable) access to medical care (hospital care and medications acquired through the hospital pharmacy).

Role of majority church

The majority church in the case of Thiva is the Orthodox Church, represented in Thiva by the Diocese of Thiva and Livadeia, which includes 110 parishes and 22 monasteries. A great deal of Church welfare activity for the general area covered by the diocese is based in Livadeia (the diocesan headquarters) rather than in Thiva. Welfare activities carried out by the Church in Thiva include:

- A home for the elderly.
- An institution for the housing and care for handicapped people and people with chronic illnesses (mainly, elderly people with difficulties in mobility).
- A spiritual and cultural centre linked to a parish church (“Parish refuge”)
- One large “soup kitchen” (*sisitio*), which is run primarily by the “Women’s Association of Love”⁹.
- An International Conference Centre, which, in addition to hosting conferences, also provides housing for visiting scholars and students.
- Camps for Orthodox youth (from Greece and abroad)

⁹ Such associations exist in several parishes, but the largest (of approximately 100 members) is in Thiva. These women generally serve in diocesan ‘soup kitchens’, clean and decorate churches, and help to organise and run local religious festivals. The ‘Women’s Association of Love’ has its own statutory charter.

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All of the above are organised and administered at the level of the diocese; beyond this, each parish has its own programme of activities. In some churches in Thiva and Livadeia, the Church has “soup kitchens” for the feeding of the poor (again, operated for the most part by women). The Church also runs financial accounts for help to the poor (i.e., accounts to which parishioners can donate money to help the poor). There are also establishments called the “Associations for Women’s Love” which operate in several parishes and which help the poor. There is a centre for Mission and Communication run by a particular monastery in Livadeia, and a Blood Bank run by a particular parish in Thiva. One parish also maintains a financial account for assistance to “resourceless” young women. Finally, the Church runs a youth centre for individuals under 25 years old. The role of monasteries as centres of welfare deserves special mention. Their role as places of retreat and reflection, peace and solitude, worship and prayer serves what many in the Church identify as amongst the most important welfare needs – that of emotional, spiritual and psychological wellbeing. This is in keeping with conceptions of the person, and of the person’s welfare needs, as a “whole” – beyond, that is, material and physical needs. This role of the monasteries, it should be noted, is not limited to people of the Orthodox faith.

The local Church has an especially strong focus on issues to do with psychological health; this fact is attributed to the work of a few particular priests in the area who have training in psychology and psychotherapy. The Church initiated the establishment of a boarding house for the rehabilitation and deinstitutionalisation of the mentally ill,¹⁰ and it runs a psychological-help clinic housed in the Thiva diocesan building (see Fokas 2006a).

The aforementioned examples of church activities are the most obvious and observable. Less conspicuous is, for example, aid provided to individuals seeking direct assistance from the Church. Many minority individuals (often lacking formal rights to employment) seek employment in the Church and are given work cleaning the church, pruning the garden and cleaning the grounds outside, etc. People in need of financial assistance are often sent to the Church by both state and private-run welfare programmes: in fact, most of the contact between the clergy and minorities in Thiva is through the latter’s requests for financial assistance, and/or for food, clothing, or medication. In some cases money

¹⁰ For more information on this institution, see A. Augoustidis (2001-2). The Church donated the building for the boarding house, and played a significant role in preparing the local population for the establishment of the boarding house. The institution is the first formal cooperation between state and church in the provision of psychiatric care. Today, the boarding house operates independently of the Church.

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may be given directly to the person requesting it, but more often clergy will either give other items (clothing and food) or send the person in question to a particular supermarket or pharmacy (as relevant), having communicated with someone in the latter to give “x” amount in food to the person, or to give the medication required. Most of the requests come from Romanians, Roma, Albanians, and few Bulgarians (none of the five clerics consulted on this matter had received requests from Indians or Pakistanis). Finally, the Church frequently collaborates with state and private institutions in short-term programmes, and on an ad-hoc basis (for example, the Church soup kitchen provides meals to be distributed by the social workers in the EU-funded ‘Help at Home’ programme)¹¹.

There are also a number of “private institutions” present in Thiva which are, however, still linked to the Church in some way, or to the Orthodox faith. These institutions have no formal or administrative relationship with the Church, but their members and leaders often describe them as “the Church” – in other words, part of the body of believers which comprise the Church and, hence, are essentially indistinguishable from “the Church”. Such private institutions tend to be established at the initiative of one person or a small group of individuals with a special interest in and commitment to welfare provision. These include an orphanage, a home for the elderly, and a ‘religious association’ (named after St. John Kaloktenis) which has practiced internal and external missionary work in Thiva since 1918. Of these three groups, the latter is actively involved in welfare provision to minority groups, as it collects food, clothing, furniture, etc. donated by its members and given to the local poor upon request, a majority of those requesting being immigrants (primarily Albanians, Romanians and Bulgarians; no Indians or Pakistanis have ever sought help there).

Role of minority associations/networks

Most of the minority groups in Thiva seem to have some form of established association, at various levels of formality, and offering various forms of social care though none of these is strictly a “welfare institution”. However, the largest – the Albanians – do not seem to have any centralised association. Instead, Albanians tend to congregate in “social

¹¹ The information in this paragraph was gathered through interviews with 5 local Orthodox priests. The final piece of information, regarding ad hoc collaborations, was also confirmed through an interview with a social worker.

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groups” based on their areas of origin, for social events and carrying out no welfare activity. The Roma have an association, operating officially in a small shack since 2005. They have a president who tends to lead discussions with the municipal authorities on behalf of the Roma. The association supposedly represents all the “permanent” Roma living in Thiva.

The Pakistanis seem to be “divided” into two groups at least. One of these is linked to the aforementioned mosque/Pakistani library. The members of that group tend to congregate, socially also, in that space. A second group present in Thiva calls itself the “Pakistani Association”, and it was established with the help of the Pakistani Embassy in Athens. According to its president, the first group mentioned (that with the library) is comprised of “religious fanatics”. This association has been in operation since 2005 and is in the process of trying to rent or purchase a space to use as an office. When this research began, the group members meet in a space above a friend’s grill house, but by the end they had ceased to use this space for meetings, given that needs seemed to be efficiently communicated via mobile telephone to the handful of men who help those Pakistanis in need. Their main activities are: offering help to Pakistani immigrants to achieve a residence permit and to get their papers in order (social security, etc.), and offering aid to the poor and to the sick (they gather money from amongst the group). Originally they also pooled money to help the families of the deceased to afford sending back the body to Pakistan for burial, but recently the Pakistani Embassy has begun offering direct help for this. The group will also try to find a space for use as a mosque: currently they worship in an empty warehouse.

The Indians also have a formal association, with a designated president. The association is primarily religious in nature (rather than ethnic, the president calls it a religious association). Thus, its first priority is caring for the spiritual needs of the group, and it too is currently trying to find a space to use for worship. The association has been trying for three years to acquire a license for the operation of an Association, but has been unsuccessful thus far. Also, it is unable to afford – at present – the rent for a space it would use as an office. The association receives no aid from the Indian embassy. This association also gathers money to help send their deceased back to India for burial.

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It should be noted here that there are significant bureaucratic barriers to the establishment of a space as a place of worship for religious minorities (and more so for actually *building* a place of worship) (see Fokas 2006b). Therefore, there is an automatic limitation in having a space for meeting amongst religious minorities in that they are unable – or must struggle to – have a space of worship which they can also use for social gatherings and for welfare provision. For Pakistanis and for Indians, shops that they establish (mainly selling clothing and food from their countries of origin) often function as the gathering place between them, where welfare needs are discussed and addressed.

2.4 The state of flux of the local situation

The situation in Thiva is in a tremendous state of flux, as is most evident in the differences between the experiences of the various groups under study. For instance, the Pakistanis and Indians thus far tend to be men living without their families: their situation may be drastically different after some time, when and if they will have brought their families over from the home country. The mere parenthood of children in Greek schools dramatically changes the level of interaction between minorities and the majority. Related to the degree of uncertainty and fluidity experienced by various groups are also geographical and cultural factors. Albanians for instance seem to feel more secure with better prospects for integration compared to Pakistanis and Indians.

In terms of gender too, the local situation is changing significantly due to the very visible presence of female migrant labourers. First, their increasing presence is to a large extent at least directly related to Greek women's liberation from the household (whether this liberation leads to their entry into the labour force, or simply to their freedom to do other things). Also, the society is gradually being increasingly exposed to mixed-ethnicity marriages: Greek men are increasingly 'free' to choose to marry a non-Greek, and this significantly influences gender relations within the majority society.

A further significant factor of change in the gender domain is the very visible presence of male Pakistani and Indian immigrants. The presence of such a large number of either single or unaccompanied (for those whose wives are in their home countries) men on the local scene is a new dimension.

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From the perspective of religion, this is the least visible dimension of change at present in Thiva. The Indian and Pakistani presence significantly raises the levels of practiced religion (i.e., group worship) in the town, but still their religiosity is quite inconspicuous. And certainly their religious situation is in flux in the sense that they generally lack formal places of worship and thus currently worship in warehouses or other settings. Meanwhile, there is relatively little evidence of specific adaptations by the local Greek Orthodox Church to changes in society related to the minority presence, nor to changes in the gender domain, but it may be said to be modernising in terms of its activities in relation to the youth (on this, see Fokas 2006a).

3. Context and timeframe

Municipal and prefectural elections took place on 15 October 2006. This entailed a disruption in the fieldwork as regards interviews with much of the local public sector in the period prior to the elections. It also influenced the research in the three months following the elections, as the party that had been in power before lost the elections; the new local government took office only in January of 2007.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that much of the research was conducted in the months of December/January 2006/7, March/April 2007, and December 2007. These periods coincided with the two holidays (Christmas and Easter) when immigrants who have applied for but have not yet received their residence and work permits are allowed re-entry into Greece, as long as they have been issued a certificate which verifies that their application is in the process of being examined (the “*vevaiosi*”). Most immigrants in this category use these times to visit their families in their countries of origin. This means that the activity in the “Office for Foreigners”, where these permits are issued, was especially heightened during much of my research, as immigrants visited the office repeatedly in hopes that their papers were ready.

Fieldwork was also conducted in November 2007, and the situation was comparatively much calmer then, as were both majority and minority expressions regarding the system of immigrant documentation. However, in this period significant debates had been taking place at the national level, regarding Greece’s inability to properly manage its large flow of immigration (e.g., the Foreign Minister’s comment that Greece has accepted too many

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immigrants, in October 2007, and the Mayor of Athens' comment that Athens is like a bomb ready to explode, because of the large number of immigrants, in November 2007). These perspectives were reflected in discussion amongst the majority in Thiva, and there was noticeably more negativity in many majority individuals' expressions regarding the minority presence in the town¹².

4. Methods and sources

The fieldwork for the case study of Thiva was primarily qualitative, with quantitative material used where available. It is focused on the following main groups: 1. Albanians; 2. Male economic immigrants (Pakistanis and Indians); and 3. Female economic immigrants. These groups represent the main source of change in Thiva as regards increasing religious and ethnic diversity; therefore, this particular selection of groups helps us to grasp *changes* in society resulting from the increasing religious and ethnic diversity and, in particular, examples of conflict and or cohesion between (and within) minorities and majority.

The fieldwork was carried out through three main methods of gathering data. First, it entailed 72 **semi-structured in-depth interviews** (several of these interviews were follow-up interviews, and many were with 2-3 people, but not designed as focus group interviews¹³; and throughout significant time was spent in observation). Of these interviews, *approximately* half were conducted with majority individuals, and half with minority individuals. In the first group, members of the civil service (15), Orthodox priests (5), social workers (3), journalists (2) and members of the general public living in the 'old refugee housing' (8) were interviewed. In the second group, interviews were conducted with 6 Albanian immigrants (including 3 children of immigrants, ages 16-23), 10 Pakistanis, 4 Indians, and 9 female labour migrants (from Poland, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Albania, Serbia and Romania). A further interview was conducted with the Pakistani Ambassador to Greece; this interview was informative and helpful in terms of placing into context the experience of Pakistanis in Thiva. Of these interviewees, three individuals became (through the research process) key informants: a journalist, a Polish

¹² It should be noted that since the completion of the fieldwork and analysis, but prior to publication of this report, the Metropolitan of Thiva, Ieronymos, was elected Archbishop of Athens and all Greece (February 2008), replacing Archbishop Christodoulos after the latter's death.

¹³ Hence, setting an exact number for the interviews and interviewees is somewhat arbitrary. In this report the interviews are numbered in terms of the order in which they took place. Each interviewee is ascribed one number, which appears in brackets, together with an indication of his or her gender, after each citation of an interviewee.

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woman, and a Pakistani man. The interviews with minority individuals usually began in the form of biographical interviews. The interviews were not recorded; detailed notes were taken during the interview and typed soon thereafter.

Formal qualitative methods have not been applied for the interpretation and analysis of the data, but the data has been analysed and explored systematically, and a careful effort has been made to maintain a distinction between raw data as such and interpretive frames and analysis. Inevitably successive interviews were to a certain extent influenced by those preceding them, particularly as more knowledge was gained on both “majority perspectives” and “minority perspectives” on the same themes. Dominant themes arising through the interviews, in terms of “saturation points” (problems or aspects of issues on which respondents collectively concentrated and considered important) shape, to a large extent, the presentation of the results in section 5. Immigration policy and its pitfalls is one such theme. Special attention is paid to it because it serves as a first barrier to immigrant access to local state welfare provision, and because immigration policy and its related pitfalls serve as *the primary* source of tension between majority and minority, from the perspective of the minorities consulted for the in-depth research.

Gaining access to some respondents was initially quite difficult. To a large extent, this has to do with interviewees’ fear that I might be investigating their status as registered or not. Furthermore, it was difficult to determine the leadership of particular Muslim groupings: e.g., for one specific group two individuals claimed to be leader of the group, and neither acknowledged the important role of the other in the group.

A second main method employed in the research is **participant observation**. This method offered special insight into the general framework of interaction between structure and agency: through participant observation it was possible to see structural impediments to interaction between majority and minority and, more specifically, the limitations on resources and the overburdening of the local bureaucratic system which limited its ability to respond effectively to minority needs and demands. Participant observation was practiced throughout the research as a whole, but was more concentrated during certain periods and in certain settings. The general work of the Office for Foreigners (mainly in Thiva but also in Livadeia), the Prefectural headquarters, the Centre for Antiracist Support, and the local police station were observed on several

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occasions. Observation of the interaction between the local Greek population and the immigrant population in the “Old refugee housing” was also an important part of the research.

Third, the research entailed a **search of the local print media**. Specifically, a careful search of one local newspaper for any material related to minorities was conducted during a three month period (*Viotiki Ora*, October to December 2006), and a targeted search of three local newspapers in the period from January to November 2007, on dates when issues related to minorities had been covered by *Viotiki Ora*.

5. Findings

5.1 Examples of cooperation and/or cohesion between and within groups

Between majority and minorities

The following main areas of **cooperation and/or cohesion between majority and minorities** were identified through the research: first, in voluntary activities towards the ***provision of minorities’ basic needs***. We see such activities in the majority Church and in one particular religious association (as noted above, on p.13). These mechanisms were not established specifically for helping minorities, but rather for helping the disadvantaged, including the majority population. However, in both cases it is minority individuals who tend to seek help more – with the exception of Pakistanis and Indians.

A second visible example is in ***employer-employee bonds***, specifically, the bonds established between some farmers and the immigrants who work on their farms. The relationships tend to go far beyond the work domain, and a certain level of trust and intimacy are developed in some cases. Another interesting though rare example is a majority individual who offers a house free of rent to an Albanian family which, over time, improved the state of the house significantly, which was quite poor initially. She also tutors the children in the family for their English language lessons; accompanies the parents to their places of employment or to certain civil services as needed; offers use of her office (computer and scanner) to the children in the family for completion of their

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schoolwork. Such strong relations are more likely to develop with extended close contact between the two groups/individuals, and when the majority individuals see the minority individual suffering under poor policies or poor treatment by majority individuals.

Related to the above, we might identify “***affection through contact***” as another area of cohesion between majority and minorities. This is detectable in the “old refugee neighbourhood”: in many cases, the same majority individuals who complained at length about the minorities living there and how the latter had “ruined” their neighbourhood would nearly in the same breath praise the minority neighbours based closest to them, always referring to them as an “exception”. In other words, it is easy to shun the minority individual who you do not know, but in cases of extended close contact, feelings of compassion and cohesion tend to develop.

Within groups

In terms of **cooperation and/or cohesion within groups**, the first example of cohesion encountered, even through the preliminary mapping process, was ***group solidarity*** amongst Pakistanis, and group solidarity amongst Indians, respectively. Within each group, this solidarity is expressed through the activities mentioned above (p.13). The importance of such networks cannot be overemphasised, given the relative isolation of both of these groups (i.e., relative lack of social contact with the majority or with other minority groups, including one another), and given their language limitations. In fact, the lack of Greek language skills amongst most Pakistanis and Indians creates a situation of dire need for a few individuals in each group who are willing to undertake the various “causes” that arise (from helping to defend someone in court, to communicating with someone’s employer, to communicating with the civil servants in the Office for Foreigners). Religious worship is also a crucial factor of solidarity for the Pakistanis and for the Indians, as they meet in their respective groups for prayer. The groups’ internal cohesion is especially visible in the large ethnic and religious group celebrations which they organise, sometimes with the assistance of the local government (e.g., allowing use of public spaces, though usually at a cost), and of their national embassies based in Athens (the latter applies only for the Pakistanis and not for the Indians).

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A second area of cohesion within groups is in *female work networks*. One aspect of this begins with contact and friendship between immigrant women of various backgrounds. There was also a great deal of conspicuous “female bonding” developed around one of the key informants, who runs a kiosk in the central square. Herself an immigrant, but now living in Thiva for nearly 2 decades and speaking Greek fluently, she has developed friendships with a large number of women who she met at the kiosk and has developed a sort of network through this, passing on information about employment possibilities, and linking women with other women from their home countries.

But there is also a “darker side” of female cohesion, in terms of negative results of female chain migration: two cases were encountered in the fieldwork of women following their co-ethnic women into Thiva for work, but getting “trapped” into similarly poor work situations, often situations of exploitation, including sexual exploitation.

5.2 Examples of tensions/problem points between and within groups¹⁴

In terms of tensions or problem points between the majority and minorities, one domain in particular stands out as the problem most emphasised by minority respondents and, as such, deserves special attention: *immigration policy and its implementation*. This most conspicuous “problem area” in majority-minority relations in Thiva – at least, from the perspective of minorities – is strictly a welfare issue, but the attainment of residence and work permits is a first hurdle that must be overcome for immigrant access to welfare provision. Meanwhile, immigrants constitute the overwhelming majority of minorities in Thiva and in this research. Accordingly, immigration policy and its implementation is the starting point of a series of welfare challenges faced by Thiva minorities, as well as the root of a series of tension-points between the minorities and the majority.

Greek immigration policy is voluminous and complicated and cannot be thoroughly explained in the context of this report¹⁵. However, some significant problem areas will be identified here, as these arise repeatedly through the research. First, immigration policy was late in materialising, and – both in the initial legislation (2001) and in subsequent amendments and new legislation – policies were always following, rather than *preceding*,

¹⁴ This section is disproportionately longer, and substantiated with greater details and quotations, than the previous one focused on cooperation and cohesion. This imbalance should not be taken as a reflection of the reality on the ground, in terms of cohesion versus tension between majority and minorities.

¹⁵ For a more thorough examination of changes in immigration policy, see R. Fakiolas (2003a) and (2003b).

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developments in immigration. Lack of foresight in immigration policy is common throughout Europe but the problem may be more pronounced in Greece given the disproportionately (to its size) large and rapid influx of immigration. A second and related problem is the aforementioned point regarding the volume and complicated nature of immigration policy: to a large extent *because* of immigration policy's late development, there has been a constant flow of amendments and "clarification encyclicals", making it exceedingly difficult for civil servants who must deal with immigration policy to know sufficiently well all of the relevant legislation. And third, it is rarely implemented properly, with significant delays in the formal registration of immigrants due to inefficient bureaucratic systems, thus extending the period during which immigrants are without proper documentation, and in turn, thus influencing their access to welfare provision and preventing their legal employment and/or extending their illegal employment¹⁶.

The main problems related to the papers as reported by the interviewees are:

Cost: The bi-annual residence permit costs €300. This is a high price for many immigrants employed on such low wages, and in order to abide by the law, they must pay this even if for long periods of time they are unemployed. Meanwhile, one of the requirements for permit renewal is that the individual is insured, therefore a vicious cycle is formed. There are also complaints regarding the cost of legal advice: often immigrants are required to employ lawyers to help in the process of acquiring the papers and managing employment issues related to the papers, and this is a cost – they argue – that could be avoided if the process were simpler.

Delays: Many immigrants pay every two years for the renewal of their residence permits, often without ever receiving the permits, and in most cases with significant delays. "*We've been paying for 10 years, declares one interviewee, and my husband had never, not once, actually received the permit*" (15, F). Instead, he is obliged to 'get by' with a certificate that proves he has applied for the papers. According to the legislation, the immigrant's documents should be ready two months after the application is submitted; but in Thiva and Livadeia (both served by the same Prefectural Office issuing

¹⁶ In fact the delays themselves have led to the increase in volume of legislation; see Kiprianos et al. (2003).

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the residence permits, which is based in Livadeia), the normal waiting period is 6 months to one year (70, M).

Three respondents also complain about delays in the papers necessary for family reunification: two of these individuals submitted their application two years ago; the third eight months ago, but with the help of his employer (counting back from December 2006). The former were jaded by the long wait and had lost confidence that the papers would come through; the latter, and his employer, were confident that the papers would come through soon.

Greece, one respondent complains, “*is very behind [in terms of its relations] with foreigners*”. He repeats the sentence twice and adds “*No Pakistani is happy with the papers situation. If have papers, can work no problem*” (28).

Meanwhile, in their eagerness to attain the permits, individuals return several times to the Office for Foreigners (or, in more extreme desperation, go straight to the source, i.e., the Prefectural Office) to find out whether the permit is ready or whether any new documentation is needed for the application to move forward. This requires missing work for at least several hours (if not an entire day, depending on the queues), and this of course also comes at a cost for the applicant, who is mostly working on the basis of daily or hourly paid wages. Visits to the “Office for Foreigners” are especially during the “holiday” periods (as noted above, p.16).

Insecurity: Related to the above, many immigrants complain that they are so limited by these delays and are unable to go to their home countries any time that might be necessary outside of those holiday grace periods– e.g., in the case of illness of a loved one back home. Furthermore, although the certificate is meant to suffice for re-entry during those periods, still some immigrants are afraid to leave. And with good reason: for example, in the Prefectural Office in Livadeia (where the residence permits are actually processed), one civil servant suggested to an immigrant who was worried about going home during the Christmas holiday without actually having received the residence permit: “*Why don’t you call the border police at the border that you will cross and ask them if they will allow you re-entry with your certificate only?*” (33, F). The question was delivered with no small degree of irony, as both the civil servant and the individual in

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question know that there are many cases of abuse of power whereby the border police do not allow re-entry, and manipulation whereby immigrants manage to cross the borders only by paying someone off to get them through the border police. “*We will not get through the borders*”, declares one Albanian immigrant carrying only a certificate, “*unless we pay a mafia-like guy who is clearly associated with the authorities on both sides (i.e., they must all receive a cut from this)... We would have to pay him something like €1000, a ‘taxi’, they call it, to transport us from the borders to Greece. It’s all set up. But who knows really: can you be sure he’ll bring you home and not do something else with you?*” (16, M).

Poor treatment by the civil servants dealing with immigration policy:

Immigrant respondents issue complaints about the treatment they receive from civil servants working in the field of immigration policy, and on several counts. For one, there are complaints about the attitude of the civil servants: “*Here, people are mean to us, just yelling “wait” or “leave”!*”; or, as another respondent expressed, “*they yell at you there. They yell so much... and kids can end up in jail because of all that yelling*” [by “kids” he means Pakistani men, regardless of their age; and by this he means that if a Pakistani man dares to respond to this yelling by raising his voice as well, he may be sent to jail] (27, M). One Pakistani man notes that the problem is especially bad for Pakistanis and Indians because of their lack of Greek language; whereas he expects that Albanians do not have this problem, since they speak Greek so well.

A second complaint related to poor treatment is that the civil servants will “ask for things one at a time”, rather than tell the immigrants at once *all* of the documents that they will need for the application for their permits. As one respondent notes: “*The lady will send me back five times to get something, rather than telling me at the start what she needs from me. “Oh, I need this too”, and when I come back with that, she asks for something new... and in the meantime I have to leave work to do this. They treat me horribly*” (16, M). This is, in fact, one reason why a particular employer (a farm owner) explained that he “takes care of the papers” for one of his employees, visiting and calling via telephone the Office for Foreigners himself, rather than sending his employee: “*Orthodoxy [in one’s approach to the system] will get you nowhere unfortunately. And it is my responsibility to help [my employees]. Meanwhile, if I didn’t they would spend so much of their time trying to sort the papers themselves*” (29, M).

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This situation leads to frustration on the part of many immigrants. One particular female respondent (whose husband has been paying for the permit for 10 years but has never actually received it), expresses her deep frustration as follows: *“It’s easy to kill someone, but I think of my kids. They will say my mom went to jail because of me”* (15, F). Listening to her, one does not get the sense that she would actually resort to violence, but she expresses her anger thus, verbally, and she threatens to take the case “to the [television] channels” – notably, not to the courts. (This statement says a great deal about the justice system in Greece and the inflated role of television in this – a subject beyond the scope of this report).

Another female immigrant expressed her anger in a similar manner in the Office for Foreigners in Livadeia (town neighbouring Thiva). She speaks of a senior official at the Prefectural Office -- an official whose name carries the weight of a dirty word amongst some immigrant circles (her reputation precedes her for the harsh way in which she speaks to immigrants): when told to “find a lawyer to help you, and go complain to the Prefectural Office”, she responds *“I’ll pull [that woman’s] hair out if I see her”* (34, F). The senior official in question refused to take part in this research.

The “other side of the coin” on immigration policy and implementation: It is interesting to note that in the research process major complaints were also expressed by the civil servants – complaints directed not against the immigrants, though, but against the system. One string of related complaints is that they are understaffed, and thus overworked, and lacking in basic resources. For example, only two men work in the Office for Foreigners in Thiva, to handle approximately 3,000 applications for residence and work permits, and their renewals on a bi-annual basis. The office has two desks, one computer (still unused, see above), and many piles of plain files, each of which contains an application and all the supporting documentation. There is no electronic filing system, and in terms of office supplies the space is very limited. These problems (understaffing, overworking, lack of resources, and it should be added poor remuneration) are typical of Greek civil service.

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Meanwhile, there is no “waiting room”, nor any chairs, for the immigrants waiting to be served there. In busy periods they are required to queue outside. This, together with the lack of resources, is quite significant, when considering the fact that the legislation requires that a percentage of the state income from residence permits and permit renewals (the €300 charge paid by each applicant) goes specifically for the needs of the local Office of Foreigners. In the case of Thiva, the amount spent on the office for the 2006-2007 period of research should have been approximately €70,000, but only a fraction of this amount is used for this purpose.

A further problem is the aforementioned volume of immigration legislation (see p.21). In three different offices (including the local police), the civil servants there displayed large piles of paper work which represented the legislation the civil servants were meant to be familiar with in order to do their jobs properly. One police officer stated that he had worked for two years in Athens in a police department working solely on immigration issues, and still he only knew 20% of the legislation well. (This of course carries difficulty for the immigrants as well, who struggle to keep up with new and changing requirements.)

In this situation, from an outsider’s perspective the civil servants working in the Office for Foreigners in Thiva, in particular, face a special challenge to juggle the large volume of applications they must process; implementing the policy properly; and being helpful to the immigrants where the latter do not understand or are unable to comply with what is being asked of them. In this challenging context, these particular civil servants seem to tread a fine line between expressing their own frustration and managing that of the immigrants. One civil servant based in a Livadeia office states: *“This is the worst job, and it’s dangerous: these people don’t have education or culture. They may threaten me. This job is a punishment”* (70, M).

To a large extent, many of the problems discussed above relating to ‘the papers’ stem from aspects of Greek organisational culture and, specifically, its manifestation in the Greek civil service (see Psimmenos and Kassimati 2003).

A further area of tension between majority and minority – after those related to immigration policy – can be broadly termed as ***competition***. One domain of competition,

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where one traces interesting debates, is in the area of **competition for men**, between majority and minority women. During the time of the research one particularly “hot” issue was that of Greek men leaving their wives for immigrant (mainly Eastern European) women. There was one especially conspicuous case mentioned by a number of female respondents, but in general one could detect – both in the expressions of majority women and of minority women – a tension around the increased number of Greek men choosing to marry immigrant women.

Three of the female migrant labourer respondents raised the issue themselves during the interview: they wish to address what they feel is a predominant Greek female majority opinion about Eastern European women, exhibited in the following words of one female migrant labourer: *“In the shop [where I work, a fast food restaurant], people can be nice to me. Then they’ll see me on the street and don’t say hello to me. They view me as a prostitute...Greek women are jealous of us”* (55, F). She then asked my opinion on “why Greek men prefer us”, and subsequently offered her opinion: *“Greek women don’t work, they don’t cook for their husbands...Rarely will Greek men marry a foreign woman [a xeni], and if they do, they do because they will cook and a clean, etc. A Romanian woman will put family first, and then herself. She is low maintenance compared to the Greek woman who is always going for a manicure, to the gym, to get her hair done. The foreign women [xenes] are not so demanding, and don’t care for themselves so much”* (55, F).

This area of tension touches on interesting developments in Greek society (another situation of flux). But far more tangible problems between majority and minority individuals develop around their **competition for work**. There are several dimensions of competition. One, for example, is the competition between “legal” and “illegal” immigrants. One Albanian couple, with two high school-aged children in Greek schools, explains: *“Most people get into jobs with some kind of connection [meson]. They take Bulgarians, Romanians, Russians, etc. who are illegal immigrants. Because this way they don’t have to pay insurance. We, because we are legal, have a hard time finding work. We look to tomorrow, not just to today. The others [new immigrants] are so desperate that they can think of just today [and so they will take jobs without insurance]. We need legal status especially for the kids, because otherwise they will not be able to be admitted to or receive a degree from the university. Because they are good students, we want this for the kids. I [the male spouse] go to apply for work at a factory, they say they will*

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consider my application and get back to me, and then I learn that the post was filled by an illegal immigrant, someone without papers always gets the job. If I were to get the job, then the authorities are made aware that he has employed me, and he is required to pay my insurance. I am legal, and I have no rights. I can't ask for anything. Whatever I ask for, they close the door" (16, M). His Greek landlord describes this man as a "hostage of legality".

Of course, in this debate over whether "legality" or "illegality" is preferable (a debate which is fairly widespread amongst my respondents), the other side is the great exploitation to which the "illegal" immigrants are exposed in the labour market, and particularly in the daily-waged agricultural work they tend to do – e.g., especially poor wages for hard work. *"If they had papers"*, one Pakistani man states, *"they wouldn't take such badly paid jobs"* (27, M).

Another dimension of competition is expressed by a Greek farm owner, who in a principled manner pays the same amount to his Indian employees as he does to the Greeks who have occasionally worked for him: *"I have gotten a lot of heat from fellow farmers about this, who say I am ruining things for them [tous chalao tin piatsa]. And this is a big issue, how poorly the others pay their workers, fixing prices amongst themselves..."* (29, M).

Linked to the above is ***exploitation***, another significant area of tension felt on the part of minorities towards the majority. Objectively, it can be said that those immigrants who have not become legalised are prey to a great deal of manipulation. This manipulation starts, in many cases, in their home countries, in some form of human trafficking: for example, many Pakistanis have paid 'agencies' in Pakistan in exchange for the promise to find the individuals work upon their arrival in Greece and to settle their papers: *"People sell their homes in Pakistan to come here, and they can be sent back and do what? They are poor after having spent the money to come here. The biggest problem is the papers"* (9, M). According to the local police, in the last 2-3 years there have been 2-3 cases of kidnapping of Pakistanis by these "agents" when the former have been unable to make the payments. 'Milder' forms of manipulation include the case of Albanians, for example, who paid €1,000 to someone who would lead the path walking across the Albanian border into Greece.

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For others, the manipulation only began upon arrival in Greece. For example, one Lithuanian respondent in her early 20s arrived in Thiva for work at the suggestion of another Lithuanian woman who was already working there. Unwittingly she ended up in a job where she was expected to offer some type of sexual services; she was unable to leave this job until she could pay the owner the money she owed him for his “taking care of” her papers. Similarly, a Bulgarian woman in her early 40s came to Greece for work following an advert for farm labourers in a town in northern Greece posted in her home town. Her employer took her and her fellow workers’ passports with the promise that he would “fix their papers”. She worked under terrible conditions for six months – unable to leave because she had neither passport nor any money – and was able to escape only by phoning the Bulgarian embassy for help. At the end of the six months, she received neither payment nor a residence permit.

More common than such cases are those of employers taking advantage of immigrant’s vulnerable position before they have attained residence permits, by paying them extremely little for many hours of hard work. One case was mentioned above, for Pakistanis working extended hours with little pay (while a Pakistani with papers works in a factory – with no further qualifications – for much higher wages). This vulnerability of immigrants without papers varies of course, but it is recognised and “exploited”, in some form or another, at several levels.

Another example of exploitation, but also discrimination, relates to that of the experience of some minorities in the housing market. One Albanian young woman described her family’s experience when they first moved to Thiva more than a decade ago: many advertisements for rent explicitly (in the local newspaper) excluded Albanian applicants and, in cases where they were considered as potential tenants, the prices were raised significantly, so that Albanians had to pay a premium for their ethnicity¹⁷. This is a trend also noted in research in other parts of Greece (see Hatziprokopiou 2003). Notably, this informant emphasised on several counts that all of the problems that she and her family faced (in housing, in employment, even in trying to establish a contract for a mobile phone) would disappear were they from a few villages further south in Albania, and thus

¹⁷ In my study of the local newspaper over a three month period I was unable to find any such adverts, as this interviewee suggested that I would. But I believe it was quite likely for such adverts to have appeared in print ten years ago.

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“Northern Epirots” rather than just Albanians. In other words, she envied the privileges enjoyed by her Albanian neighbours who are able to claim some “Greek background”.

The ‘grey areas’ in between

A further “problem area” between majority and minority, and one which exacerbates – or plays a role in perpetuating – some of the other problem areas, is **communication problems**. Communication between the majority authorities and the minorities is quite limited. This does not lead to conflict per se, but it certainly limits the potential for cohesion. One immediate problem, of course, is the fear on the part of the immigrants: in many cases they avoid contact with authorities for fear of being deported. This fear is of course higher amongst the undocumented immigrants, but it must be noted that amongst the documented immigrants there may also be a sense of insecurity in relation to authorities, for fear that the legitimacy of their documents might be questioned. Furthermore, this limited communication is exacerbated by (no pun intended) the problem of limited opportunities for immigrants to learn the Greek language in Thiva – again, especially a problem for Indians and Pakistanis. Meanwhile due to the language barriers they are, of course, the least able to argue their cause well amongst local leaders (the major and deputy mayors).

There are two important dimensions to this problem. First, the efforts exerted by the local authorities to address this particular need fall very short of the needs of the immigrant groups. Although both at the prefectural and the local level there are some language-learning programmes, these reach an extremely small proportion of the immigrants, and most Pakistanis and Indians are unaware of their existence: as a former local deputy mayor explains, the programmes were advertised on Greek language posters and through the internet, in Greek, so of course few Pakistanis and Indians would have access to the information. Second, a great deal of EU funding has come to Thiva with just such intentions: the local OAED (Greek Manpower Employment Organisation) office receives funding for programmes to prepare immigrants for the job market, but clearly the needs are not being met (currently OAED is operating an advanced Greek language course, focused on written Greek; one Polish respondent takes this course).

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Meanwhile, there is a KEK (Centre for Professional Training) Programme in Thiva called the Centre for Antiracist Support (*Kentro Antiratsistikis Ypostiriksis* - KAYP). The programme is privately run and is fully funded by the EU and, as its name reveals, aimed at helping minorities (specifically: immigrants, repatriates and refugees) overcome any race-related barriers and to be integrated into the workforce in Thiva. Mainly, the Centre is meant to offer advice and support to the aforementioned minorities in terms of finding and maintaining employment, and handling any challenges they may have in relation to public authorities, etc. This, if any, seems a likely home for a programme for immigrants to learn the Greek language. But, after explaining in detail the intense competition in Thiva to win such programmes, specifically because of the significant amounts of money involved, the employee in the office responds to my question as to why it does not offer such a language learning programme by questioning what benefit this would have for the programme and its director. In other words, monies from the EU which would suitably be aimed at just this type of aid for immigrants are not being spent in this manner¹⁸. Language, then, is the locus of a problematic situation, and one which serves to perpetuate a host of other problematic situations between majority and those minorities who have little Greek.

The experience of minority children in schools can also be described as a “grey area” between cooperation/cohesion and conflict/tensions in the domain of welfare. When our research began, the Greek primary education system was in its first year of using new school books that had an aim to enhance integration between majority and minority communities. This aim was reflected, for example, in Mathematics texts which had drawings of children from different ethnic and racial backgrounds, and including reference to names from various ethnic backgrounds. One school teacher described the training she had undergone to be more inclusive towards minority children by, for example, asking them to share with the class how to say certain words or expressions in their own language.

The usefulness of such policies was questioned by certain minority children in Thiva. In particular, Albanian children found it problematic, given that they were often so

¹⁸ It should be noted that after two Pakistani respondents were brought into contact with the social worker at KAYP, specifically with the aim of exploring possibilities for Greek language courses, the KAYP social worker helped the two men prepare letters of request to be sent out to various agencies, one of which followed up on the request. In November 2007, a course of beginner Greek was due to begin for a number of Pakistani men brought together by the first two respondents mentioned.

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integrated into Greek society that their classmates did not know they were not Greek, except when teachers drew attention to this fact. It is this group of children, in particular, who complained about negative treatment by their fellow students based on their being Albanians (see the Greek State of the Art report for background information on majority attitudes towards Albanians, and the experience of Albanian children in Greek schools).

The school in the “Old refugees housing” is especially interesting because of its policy towards integration and cohesion between majority and minority. In that school the majority of the children is actually of immigrant background. According to one teacher there, special school policies aimed at cohesion between children of different ethnic, national and religious backgrounds is an absolute necessity, and it is relatively successful in this case. The teachers seem devoted to this cause, and find creative ways to implement their policies (e.g., through inter-cultural plays and musicals staged at the school).

A third “grey area” is in the **stance and the activities of the Church** – or, more specifically, in various clerics’ (divergent) stances and attitudes – in relation to minorities. There is embedded in the Church welfare activity, as well as in Church-related associations (e.g. the St. John Kaloktenis group mentioned on p.13), a tendency towards helping those in need. And given that the disadvantaged in Thiva tend to be minorities, there is an openness towards them expressed in a willingness to care for them and to try to address their material needs. This is found across the board with all interviewees in this category. As for minorities’ spiritual needs, however, any interest in these – much less effort in relation to these – is quite limited. Most conspicuous is the question of Indians’ and Pakistanis’ (i.e., non-Christian) spiritual needs: there is little knowledge about these, except that there exists a space used as a mosque, and there are widely varied attitudes towards the latter. Only one of five priests interviewed on this question was openly supportive of the mosque, and one was very much focused on the “relatively ok” current status of the space used as a mosque, emphasising that “*if it were to become a mosque, then we would have a problem*” (66, M). Elaborating, he notes “*if a minaret were built, and an imam were coming out and praying out loud, everyone would have a problem with this*” (66, M). When faced with the question of the lack of designated space for the fulfilment of Muslims’ and Sikhs’ spiritual needs, all resisted the notion that the Orthodox churches could be used for this, and all but one resisted the idea that buildings

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belonging to the parish churches (namely, buildings next to the churches where various gatherings take place) could be used for this purpose.

A special case: the “Old refugees housing”

The “Old refugees housing” constitutes a special case in the sense that it is characterised by a great deal of ambiguity in terms of majority-minority relations. If “affection through contact” is a factor observable in this area (see p.20), so too is “disaffection through less-immediate contact”: certainly it is the local majority population living in this neighbourhood who voice especially strong statements against the minorities, because their own **daily** lives are seen to be negatively affected by minorities’ presence. The tension they feel and express, then, is stronger than that of most majority respondents, because of their relatively more immediate contact with the minorities – though again the attitude changes with even *more* immediate contact, i.e., towards one’s immediate neighbour.

However, there are a very few (three, one female, two male), exceptions to this, whereby a sense of sympathy for the minorities is expressed due to the poor living conditions they experience in this area. Indeed, the local majority community living there today were once themselves the minorities, the outsider refugees from Asia Minor (or their descendents) who also faced discrimination and negativity from the majority local population, and also experiencing poor living conditions relative to the local majority (the neighbourhood was then on the outskirts of Thiva, and the houses very small and basic). These “exceptions” express a sense of solidarity felt with the minorities over their poor living conditions.

For most of the majority community living in the area, though, these poor living conditions of the minorities – especially of the Pakistanis and Indians, who tend to live in large numbers in one small house (majority estimations range from 8 to 30!) – are more a source of frustration against the minorities, for lowering the standards of living in the area and, they complain, the health and cleanliness standards. Indeed, in some cases the houses do not have running water. Most majority interviewees in the area seem to blame the minorities for living in such conditions; relatively few blame the majority individuals

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(their former Greek neighbours) for renting out these houses in such poor conditions, just to make a bit of money.

Debates over this situation reached what seemed to be a climax in November 2007, when the mayor announced plans for the municipality to purchase from the owner those houses which are in a hazardous condition and to level them, building instead a parking lot in that area, or an open square. (Indeed, parking and traffic problems arise in the local print media much more than issues to do with minorities). When asked what would become of those minorities currently living in those particular houses, the mayor responded that warehouses on the outskirts of Thiva could be adapted into housing for them, building walls within the building to separate it out into rooms (35, m). (Note: in a later interview a deputy mayor suggested that there were no such plans regarding parking, or relocation of the minorities [47, m]). Several majority individuals commenting on the approved plan, stated that “*this is ok, since they are used to and can live many people to one room*” (38, F; 53, M; 65, F).

This housing area, then, raises another case of cooperation or cohesion within a group, in this case between the majority individuals living there, most of them uniting behind this plan to “clean up the neighbourhood” (which effectively means to be rid of most of the minorities, given that most of them live in houses that are in especially poor condition). And the instrumental factors of money and space are especially important in this case.

6. Analysis: emergent values

Beginning with the last example, **quality of life** emerges in Thiva as a value in which much of majority-minority interaction is couched, as an over-arching value to which most of the following values in welfare areas are linked. Unquestionably, most minorities living in Thiva are there with the express purpose of improving their quality of life. Meanwhile, their work – to a large extent – allows for an improvement in the quality of life of the local majority. As one respondent notes, “*without them, our crop would die and our economy would come to a halt*” (53, M). Yet at the same time, in many cases the mere *presence* of the minorities is thought to impinge upon the quality of life of the majority. Increased crime rates supposedly attributable to the minorities is the most clichéd of perspectives, and one which is emphatically espoused by one senior police

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official respondent (though his views were countered by one of his juniors). But we see the complaint in other areas as well – complaints of the standard of living being lowered by minorities in the “Old refugees housing”, and of family and commitment values being eroded by immigrant (Eastern European) women. (Note: there is a general assumption, on the part of most majority respondents in the “old refugees housing”, that the minorities living in those terrible conditions are satisfied with this situation and with their quality of life.) However, there are also opposing voices, emphasising how the quality of life of the majority is made possible by minorities’ work, in the farms but also in the home, cleaning and caring for the elderly. The diversity brought to Thiva by the minorities, though, is not treated as a value by most interviewees (and this has to do with culture, and the extent to which religious identity is an aspect of culture: *cultural preservation* is indeed an element of quality of life, visible mostly in the majority). One exception is the view of one priest, who suggests that minority presence is a *blessing*, as it “*gives us the opportunity to love something outside of ourselves, something different to us*” (65, M).

To the above is related **education**, as both an autotelic and instrumental value. This is a value generally shared by both the majority and minorities. Traditionally Greeks give much emphasis on education and make significant **family** sacrifices in order to provide a good education for their children. This emphasis on education, as well as the element of sacrifice, is even more visible amongst minorities. The educational benefits to their children for being in Thiva (or, Greece in general) rank high amongst minorities’ reasons for being and staying in Thiva. This is especially the case amongst Albanians, whose children tend to do especially well in the schools and who have an advantage with the Greek language, but it also applies to children in all immigrant groups studied, except the Pakistanis and Indians who, again, are by and large without their families (thus far) in Thiva. Their own education, though, particularly in the Greek language, is important to them as their employment opportunities are largely influenced by this, but as we have seen, educating this group in the Greek language is not a value or priority for the majority population and administration.

Employment is a welfare area central in most majority-minority interaction in Thiva, given that most of the minorities have come to Thiva for work. And employment which can secure a certain level of welfare is the crux of all the aforementioned problems regarding immigration policy and its pitfalls: the question, for most of those minorities

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struggling with the immigration policy, is not about integration into society or about gaining, through employment (and through having the proper documentation) certain rights. Rather, it is about the ability to find and maintain work and, ideally, decent work (i.e., factory rather than agriculture, or a monthly salary in agricultural work rather than daily wages.). There is a great deal of variation in this domain, though, between the different groups. For example, for most Pakistanis and Indians, their employment is not generally about fulfilling a sense of identity; it is an instrumental function aiming to earn money which, in turn, is to win them a better life (to be able to bring their wives and children to Thiva too, to educate their children, etc.). For those minorities who are more integrated into Greek society and who have lived there longer, their employment expectations are greater, and the values that they link to these are more complex and include a sense of justice: e.g., for one Bulgarian female migrant labourer, she expects that she will have full access to Greek **health care**.

Indeed, **health** as a welfare area reveals different hierarchies of values depending on the relative status of the minority individual in question: access to health care is an expectation of those minority groups who are beyond the basic level of daily survival, and it is treated as a luxury by others. The Pakistanis and the Indians tend to the needs within their own groups, respectively, through their informal networks. If there is a critical medical need, they will together seek out medical help, but only in more extreme situation. This of course relates to their status as legalised or not (with even the legalised sometimes weary of seeking help from local authorities, including medical help, just in case their status might be questioned).

Meanwhile, in terms of **social care**, of relevance here is mainly the provision of basic needs of the disadvantaged. The Church and religious associations treat this as a priority, both in words and in deeds, though the provision does not even nearly meet the needs of the minorities (in fact, neither are majority needs met, insofar as care for the elderly is concerned, for example). Significantly, the reach of such activities is limited, in the sense that not all minority groups are equally likely to approach the Church or religious associations for help, and neither of the latter actually *go out* into Thiva to assess needs. Rather, their work is based on who comes to them seeking help. In both cases, Romanians and Albanians are cited as primary users, sometimes Bulgarians, but never Pakistanis or Indians. The latter, lacking their own family structures, operate as extended

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families within their networks (as noted above). For the other groups of minorities (Albanians, Bulgarians and Romanians), social care begins in the home, with the family, and is more or less limited to the home and family.

Assessing the links with religion, minorities and gender: an assessment of the research results from the case of Thiva suggests the following:

Regarding **religion**: religion in and of itself mainly operates as a value leading to cohesion. We have seen above examples of cohesion within minority groups (e.g., amongst the Pakistanis and Indians) and between majority and minorities via religious (church and religious associations) voluntary activities providing for the basic needs of the disadvantaged. Religion has as a conspicuous value amongst only the Pakistanis and Indians (not the other groups studied), and amongst some of the majority population. However, we cannot speak of religion acting *actively* as a factor of cohesion between majority and minority, neither looking from the minority perspective towards the majority, nor vice versa. For example, the majority religious activities in welfare provision are not geared specifically towards minorities: rather, they are driven by the Christian principle regarding caring for the needy, and many of the needy in Thiva happen to be minorities. The caring comes only in the form of material needs, and is not extended to include spiritual needs.

Nor, however, can we speak of religion as a divisive factor. It could be, it seems, if there were a drive towards the establishment of a “proper” mosque – i.e., a religious building, together with its minaret. But this is not an issue currently in Thiva.

Minorities as an independent variable has an ambivalent character. As is made clear in the national State of the Art report for the case of Greece, as a country, Greece is only slowly becoming used to the idea that it is no longer homogenous, but a strong sense of national identity, *as related* to the Greek Orthodox Church, persists, and the same applies to the local level. Therefore, to some extent “minorities” constitute a problem from the beginning, as multiculturalism is from the start *not* a national or local value, and assimilation is – in the dominant view – presumed impossible (i.e., romantic, ethnic notions of identity, rather than civic). That Albanians have, by and large, integrated so well is not necessarily, from a majority perspective, a good thing – as is clear in

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children's experiences in schools (with Albanian children wishing to hide their Albanian identity and, upon its discovery, being teased and bothered by majority Greek children).

At the same time, as noted above, so much of the local economy, as well as local majority quality of life and lifestyles, rely on minority work. This is why the poor state of immigration policy is particularly disturbing, and increasingly so to the immigrants who feel the exploitation intensely (i.e., having to miss days of low-paid work to beg for their "papers", for which they have paid expensively, all the while facing negative stances from much of the majority population).

The question of whether racism is an element in majority-minority interaction is a recurrent theme in the research: many interviewees brought the term up themselves, either to defend themselves as not being racist, or to explain why, indeed, there are racist tendencies in their own and their fellow Greeks' attitudes. This is a very difficult matter to assess: on the one hand, from a general perspective racism does not seem to characterise majority-minority relations in Thiva, in the sense that the local majority society seems reconciled to the fact that the immigrant presence is necessary and good, in the sense that it supports the local economy to a large extent. On the other hand, in specific, everyday interactions racist attitudes and practices may be detected. From the perspective of the majority of interviewees, though (including minorities and the majority), racism is a factor in majority attitudes and actions towards the minority.

Regarding **gender**, values related to gender become a factor in majority-minority relations in two main contexts. First, through tensions around the "competition", so to speak, between majority and minority (mainly, Eastern European) women for men: in this context were heard expressions of somewhat different values from the majority female population and the minority female population. However, one cannot describe this situation as particularly pressing (i.e., no real open conflicts between majority and minority emerge from it). Furthermore, the issue is intimately linked to the question of national identity and culture: majority society's (and majority women's) resistance to "foreign" women "entering" Greek homes through relationships and marriage has much to do with an effort to maintain Greek culture and national identity within the home, and to exclude others from this. Indeed, it is an exclusive conception of Greek identity that plays a large role here. A second context is that of the predominately *male* Pakistani and

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Indian presence. Especially in areas where many individuals from these groups live – namely, the “Old refugees housing”, one can trace amongst the majority community significant negativity towards the lifestyle of these individuals. Their tendency to live together, many people living in one room, is perceived as a lifestyle choice rather than a result of financial necessity. There are many Pakistanis (fewer Indians) who live together in homes within the town, some of them being unmarried (it is cheaper and convenient for three or four or more to live together) and some because they are unable, legally and financially, to invite their wives and children to join them.

Finally, it is important to remember that the Thiva case is very much in a state of flux, with most of the majority-minority interaction still being a fairly new phenomenon, and one which appeared fairly suddenly. Therefore, one might expect significant change over the next few years. Also, it should be noted that even in the short term, hierarchies of values and majority attitudes to immigrants are variable and highly sensitive to current events. Majority and minority stances and actions should not be considered as crystallised, and their sensitivity to national level developments and to socio-economic change at large should be recognised.

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