Portrayals of Indian immigrants in the Greek media

Despina Karamperidou

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Developing Evidence based Management and Operations in
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The Demo: India-EU MaP project, co-funded by the European Commission, is a continuation of the Carim India project (www.india-eu-migration.eu) and it examines the multiple facets of Indian migration to the EU. Its overall aim is to improve migration management between India and the EU, strengthen EU-India relations, and produce in-depth empirical knowledge about the different migration streams and pathways of Indian nationals in the EU. Its specific goals include providing:

1. Evidence based research for more informed policy making and state intervention.
2. Improved source country capacity in managing migration.
3. Raising awareness among potential migrants of the risks of irregular migration.
4. Collaboration with civil society groups.
5. Empirical research and analysis of Indian communities across the EU, and their impact.

The project is led by the Indian Centre for Migration in Delhi with the partnership of the Migration Policy Centre, RSCAS, EUI.

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Abstract

This paper investigates the representation of Indian immigrants as reflected in Greek newspapers and news blogs. The paper is part of a larger project on the media representation of Indian migrant communities in EU member-states aimed at informing integrative migration policy at the national and supranational level. Methodologically, qualitative content analysis has been employed to guide data systematisation and processing. Empirical investigation reveals that portrayals of immigrants vary according to news outlets' ideological inclinations and political orientation. Portrayals also vary depending on the specific issue at hand. In general, media portrayals of Indian immigrants, whether positive or negative, are determined by the interaction of factors that are both exogenous and endogenous to the migrant community. Regarding exogenous factors, emphasis is placed on the unfolding Greek crisis and how it influences media tonality on Indian migration issues.

Key words: Indian migration, Greece, media portrayal, content analysis
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1. Introduction: aim and scope of analysis

A 2010 public opinion survey aimed at gauging Greek-held perceptions and sentiments on migration revealed widespread xenophobia, growing distrust towards immigrants and increasing uneasiness with diversity. 60% of Greeks believed that migration harmed their country; 10% more than in 2008 when 50% would share this view. More specifically, 59% of the respondents believed that migration negatively affected the economy, 47% that immigrants deprived native population of jobs and 57% that migration eroded Greek ethno-national identity. These numbers in 2008 were, respectively, 47%, 39% and 47%. Furthermore, 75% strongly believed that immigrants were to blame for increasing crime rates. Accordingly, 10% more respondents in 2010 believed that the Greek state had a much too lenient legal framework with respect to migration than they did in 2009: 72% instead of 63%. Likewise, more believed that restrictions needed to be introduced on the number of immigrants that could come to the country: 88% in 2010 compared to 76% in 2009.

The role of media in shaping public perceptions on migration has long been recognized by social scientists, national and supranational policy makers, non-governmental actors and the migrant communities themselves. In the case of Greece, too, several studies have turned the spotlight on the national media and their capacity to communicate migration-related issues in a pro-integration, not immigrant-phobic manner. These studies, taken as a whole, have uncovered the failure of the Greek media to form bias-free perceptions of migrant communities and to deal with migration in a constructive manner that reflects diversity and supports integrative policy-making (Kiliari 1997; Konstantinidou 2001; Lalioti 2005; MEDIVA 2012).

This report is broadly aligned with the literature briefly discussed above, yet has a much narrower scope. It aims at exploring the portrayal of a specific migrant group in the Greek media namely, the Indian community. In so doing, the analysis illuminates how the Greek media ultimately contributes to the shaping of public perception of Indian immigrants and of Indian emigration issues. Both aspects can potentially be used to inform India-specific and Asian migration policy at the national and EU level.

Methodologically, qualitative content analysis has been employed and applied to the output of Greek media outlets. In total, 183 newspaper articles from more than 30 printed and online news outlets (national and local) were reviewed. Data collection covered the period from 1 January 2009 to 31 January 2015 and focused on articles dealing both with the Indian community as a whole and with Indian immigrants as individuals. Articles comparing the Indian community to other migrant groups were also included in the analysis.

Analysis led to the detection of six central thematic categories: ‘Business/Investments’, ‘Crime’, ‘Integration’, ‘Culture’, ‘Labor Market’ and ‘Religion’. The salience of each theme, measured as the number of relevant articles appearing in the press, is depicted in figure 1. Business and crime were the most frequent topics as articles falling under these categories comprised more than 50% of the total number of articles examined. 28% of all articles (i.e. 52 articles) focused on Business/Investments and 25% of all articles (i.e. 45 articles) dealt with crime. The analysis proceeds as follows: first, the contextual framework of the empirical investigation is presented through a short discussion of the history and demography of the Indian community in Greece. Thereafter, media stories are divided

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2 For a detailed review of media-centred migration research in Greece for the period 1990-2005, see: Stratoudaki (2007).
3 All articles were accessed online during the period from 25 January to 2 February 2015.
according to theme and analysed by addressing two questions: what are the key characteristics of the media portrayal and the factors conducive to them? The Appendix presents and briefly describes media outlets used for data collection.

Figure 1. Thematic dispersal of news stories on Indian community

2. The Indian community in Greece: historical emergence and demographics

In the course of a few decades Greece was gradually transformed from a country that has traditionally ‘exported’ immigrants into a host country for immigrants (Triandafyllidou 2009). This transition – which constituted a collective experience for states in the broader geographic and socio-economic space of Southern Europe – originated in the 1970s and increased in momentum from the 1990s onwards. Emigration from Asia in general and India in particular, has roughly followed these time patterns. In fact, the emergence and rooting of the Indian community in Greece took place in three distinct phases: from 1970 to 1991, from 1991 to 2003 and from 2003 onwards (Tonchev 2007).

Until the early 1970s Indian nationals could only slip into the country illegally. Following the deteriorating conditions in Lebanon during the country’s civil war (1975-1990) however, more than 2,000 Indians residing there left for Greece and stayed on quietly after the expiry of their visas. This marked the first wave of collective Indian emigration to Greece. From 1991 onwards the explosion in immigration flows globally, significantly increased the number of Indian immigrants coming to the country. Most arrived individually without proper documentation and permits, in search of labour to support their families back home. In January 1998 the Greek government granted a general amnesty to all illegal immigrants thus legalizing the status of the many Indian immigrants among them. A series of regularisation schemes followed on from this. In the years preceding the Athens Olympic Games of 2004, another sizable group of Indian nationals lured by employment opportunities in the construction sector, entered the country marking yet another wave of Indian emigration to Greece. From that point onwards the small Indian community that had already taken roots in the country entered a self-feeding stage: systematically attracting more newcomers through family and kin networks, irrespective of internal and external opportunity structures and migration push and pull factors.

As a result, currently, the Indians comprise the eighth largest migrant community in Greece and the second largest national group among Asian immigrants (Papageorgiou 2013). They make up
Portrayals of Indian immigrants in the Greek media

approximately 2% of the total legal migrant population, estimated recently at 537,000 individuals. Their exact number is projected at 12,893 according to the database of the Ministry of Interior and Administrative Restructuring, last updated in January 2015. Among them, only 967 individuals are officially registered as employed and a mere 16 as studying. Informal sources that take illegal migration into account, however, suggest that Indian demographics in Greece are quite different, with as many as 25,000-30,000 Indian nationals actually residing in the country. According to 2005 data, 90% were men, aged 20-40 (Baldwin-Edwards and Kiriakou 2004). Despite the several family reunification programs implemented since, only a few women have arrived in the country by this route, preserving the predominantly male profile of the community.

Only around 2,000 to 3,000 Indians live in Athens, mostly in the municipalities of Tavros and Renti. The majority of them cluster in rural areas close to the capital such as the Attica region (Marathon and Megara), Boeotia (Thiva and Oinophyta), Piraeus (mainly in the island of Poros) and Argolida. Most legally residing Indians hold low to medium level positions in shipping, IT companies and banks and some have their own micro businesses (Indian Ministry of External Affairs 2001: Chapter 12, ‘Other Countries of Europe’). Nearly all illegal Indian immigrants however are unskilled or low-skilled manual workers occupied with agricultural works such as the rearing of animals, the collection of crops and fisheries. Some also work in shops or as domestic helps.

**Figure 2. Temporal Expansion of Indian Community in Greece**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of registered individuals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1,720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>7,583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>10,697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>10,279</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data source:* www.statistics.gr (registered immigrants, only).

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4 www.tovima.gr, 26.2.2013: 537,000 immigrants reside in Greece legally. The number of illegal immigrants is unknown.

3. Integration

3.1. Portrayal of Indians as a poorly integrated migrant community

Most members of the Indian community arrived in Greece during the so called ‘third wave of migration’ typically, without legal documentation or through regularisation programmes. Indian nationals are thus popularly regarded as a ‘new’ and poorly integrated migrant group. This commonly held perception is systematically reproduced by local and national media outlets.

According to the Greek media, a key characteristic of the Indian community is residential segregation which is often a sign of limited immigrant embeddedness in a host country’s social fabric (Bolt, Özüekren, and Phillips 2010). A series of newspaper articles comment upon the Indians’ tendency to create ethno-cultural “ghettos” within which their cultural and linguistic features are perfectly preserved and where inter-ethnic contact is kept to an absolute minimum. References to neighbourhoods thickly populated by Indian nationals as “little Indies”, “Asian statelets” and “artificial immigrant homelands” illustrate the outcome of Indian residential clustering. As some articles explain, this practice is often restricted to individuals from a certain region of India and serves two important functions: the introduction of newly expatriated members to the host society’s cultural traits, institutions (especially those in charge of residential and work permit certification) and labor market; and, the creation of a ‘comfort zone’ where estranged and culturally disoriented individuals can feel at home and be sheltered from dangers ranging from xenophobia to poverty. Residential clustering also creates employment opportunities for some community members as within the miniscule Indian enclaves demand for specific goods and services is created (e.g. special coffee houses, Indian markets and restaurants, and Bollywood video clubs).

Consequently, the establishment of an immigrant micro-cosmos is not by definition ‘bad’, some printed press entries argue. In fact, native inhabitants of the rapidly “Asianised” and “Africanised” regions of central Athens occasionally think that the settling of immigrants has introduced refreshing cultural elements into the heart of the ancient city “in a fashion that resembles Soho and Tribeca”.

Indian immigrants are characterized as “quiet”, “likeable” and “traditional” when it comes to family values. However, the vast majority of news articles that address immigrant residential segregation in general and Indian clustering in particular, focus on illegal immigrants and have a strongly negative content. It is possible to categorize the root causes of negative portrayals, as they emerge from the study of relevant press articles, around two central issues: the vast difference in living standards between migrant and non-migrant residential areas; and the functioning of ghettos as a mechanism of cultural resistance.

More specifically, media reports on Athens’ urban ghettos and rural settlements across the country portray Indian immigrants’ housing as a “public health hazard” and “health threat time-bombs”. As noted, due to their unsettled and irregular residential status that makes them vulnerable to labor exploitation and material deprivation, most illegal Indian immigrants are forced to live in abandoned buildings or run-down apartment complexes, often, in very large groups and under conditions of extremely poor hygiene. Indian ghettos are also criticized for functioning as a resistance mechanism to

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9 www.athensvoice.gr, 26.11.2014: Indian town;
10 www.psaxniwths.blogspot.hu, 12.3.2014: Indians live in shacks infested with rats. Shocking pictures;
the ‘Hellenization’ of their inhabitants i.e. as a preventive factor on the immersion of Indian nationals into the dominant Greek culture. In fact, almost every relevant article emphasizes the great difficulty Indians face in mastering the Greek language, something attributed to their limited contact and restricted socialization with natives.

Interestingly enough, Indian-held perceptions of societal integration confirm the dominant portrayal of their community as a poorly integrated one. The few Indian testimonies recorded in news articles, are especially valuable, as they shed light on how the process of integration is experienced not by the host society, but by newcomers in that society. “We stick together because a poor stranger is twice a stranger” explains a small shop keeper.11 “We like Greeks but do not have a lot to do with them. They go their way and we go ours”, states a young man who works with his wife as domestic help in Plaka, Athens.12 Other Indian immigrants are more direct. “We keep away from the Greeks. Some of them are nice but others treat us badly, throw water at us and call us names”, a man who works as a gardener confessed.13 A waiter concurred: “We are discriminated against. I get no tips because I am dark skinned while my Greek colleagues do”.14 Finally, a middle-aged shop keeper, legal resident for over a decade, while referring to Greece’s complicated naturalization process, said: “it is easier to go to the moon than become a Greek citizen”.15

The insufficient integration of Asian immigrants vis à vis other migrant ethnic groups has become the subject of newspaper articles that record scholarly research findings.16 In these informative analyses, first wave immigrants are compared to their third wave counterparts, in an attempt to pin down factors conducive to successful immigrant integration. The latter is directly related to two factors: 1) the state’s capacity to integrate its migrant population (through sound policy making); and 2) immigrants’ capacity to internalize the social habits and values of the host society. The limited capacity of the Greek state to implement its national strategy for third country nationals’ integration has been well-documented and is considered to pose similar challenges to all immigrants. The capacity for social integration differs, though, among migrant groups (Hellenic Ministry of Interior 2013). Ethnic characteristics, place of origin, religion, linguistic and labor market skills, interact to determine migrant groups’ social integration pathways. Outcome variations, studies argue, help explain why first wave immigrants – mostly Albanians and those of Central and Eastern European descent – have achieved remarkable levels of integration and living standards convergence in terms of the native population: they have joined, in essence, the middle classes. However, third-wave immigrants remain largely marginalized. In this respect, it is not only the duration of a migrant community’s presence in a country that determines its depth of societal integration (‘old’ vs. ‘new’ migrants), but also: immigrants’ racial alignment to the host society; absence of strong religious beliefs; and, above all, a declared willingness to ‘nest’ in the receiving country and to adopt its value system.

Indeed, for Indian immigrants, Greece is more likely to be an in-between stop rather than a preferred end-destination. Most declare their wish to briefly stay and work in the country until they reach a financial status that would allow them to either return home or move on and settle in another European country.17 The temporality with which they perceive their stay in Greece and its instrumental nature, affects the demographic synthesis of the community which in turn, negatively affects the depth

13 Ibidem.
17 Closed-end interviews with immigrants of Indian origin conducted in Athens by the Institute of International Economic Relations; basic findings outlined in Tonchev (2007).
of its integration. According to a 2007 IIER study, more than 90% of Indians in Greece are male and almost all of those who are married, live in Greece alone, unaccompanied by their spouse and children (Tonchev 2007). More specifically, the analogy between men and women in the Indian community as a whole is 16:1 and among working Indian immigrants, 37.5:1. Finally, the rate of family reunification for Indians is a minuscule 2%: compared this with 16% for the Albanians, 14% for Europeans in general and 8% for Africans. This hardly helps social integration as single males are typically treated with suspicion and fear.

In order to deal with the many and complex factors that impede the Indian community’s integration in Greek society, the Indo-Greek Cultural and Welfare Association was founded in 2001. Since then, the association has undertaken a series of initiatives to facilitate the integration of Indian immigrants. It has done so by targeting immigrants through expertise building activities; and the native population through awareness building events. Past activities included: the setting up of an information desk exclusively for the Indian community of Renti; the organisation of expos with Indian artefacts; socio-cultural events such as music and dance programs, talks and symposia; social get-togethers, film shows, visual art exhibitions and charity events. These activities serve as a chance for Greeks and Indians living in Greece to get to know each other. Other local initiatives that bring together immigrants and natives include the anti-racist festivals organised by leftist parties within the framework of which, immigrant associations and artists participate in awareness raising and cultural events. These few annual day events are organized in several Greek cities and are publicized primarily in leftist press outlets.

As far as the state’s effort to assist immigrant integration is concerned, this is non-comprehensive and insufficient, not just for Indian and Asian immigrants but for all migrant groups. For instance, there are limited opportunities offered to immigrants and their children to learn Greek. Characteristically, in 2006, only 400 positions were available to immigrant children in an educational and skill-building program (EPEAEK) and only 25 intercultural schools were tasked with introducing Greek as a second language to migrant students (Tonchev 2007). Language courses are typically offered by some migrant associations. However, it has not been possible to find out whether the Indian association in Greece is one of them.

18 www.indogreek.org
19 www.antiracistfestival.gr
4. Labor Market

4.1. Portrayal of Indian immigrants as second class workers

With the onset of the Greek crisis the debate over the economic impact of migration was re-invigorated. While explicitly articulated only by right-wing news outlets and extremist parties, the belief that immigrants have contributed to shrinking labor market opportunities and declining living standards for natives was effectively spread across Greek society. The rise in suspicion and hostility against immigrants followed the unprecedented rise in the general unemployment rate from 7.5% in 2008 to 27.9% in 2013.

Despite the dominant popular perception of immigrants as part of the problem rather than the solution for crisis–stricken Greece, references in the mainstream media to Indian immigrants largely avoid scapegoating narratives. Indians are typically presented as an extremely under-privileged migrant group that is particularly prone to exploitation. The basic reason behind this sympathetic portrayal is that Indians do not compete for jobs with the native population. They traditionally fill in labor slots tagged for low-wage, menial workers. Consequently, news stories focus on the intensification of labor market competition – a direct consequence of the crisis – strictly between Indians and other migrant groups. An article published in centrist/liberal Kathimerini explains how the crisis has shaped a peculiar class system of immigrant workers. Competition for low-end jobs under conditions of economic difficulty has become a race for the bottom in which Indians have lost. They have become second-class immigrants who are forced to work for disgracefully low salaries and no benefits.

A number of factors help explain the positioning of Indian immigrants at the lower end of labor market competitiveness: low educational levels, lack of on job training and technical expertise, low linguistic capacity and illegal status. According to newspaper reports, in Athens, Indians and Pakistanis accept less than 20 EUR for a day’s work in the construction sector, only Africans and Afghenis work for less (Tonchev 2007). In rural parts of the country a similar situation has been consolidated: farm salaries that were once set at 30-40 EUR per day by Albanian and CEE workers, have been slammed to levels beyond competition by Indian and Pakistani workers who, as reports put it, “work for next to nothing” and as a rule, are without insurance. The alarming status of Asian field workers has been stressed in a series of articles. These describe the immigrants’ working and living conditions as reminiscent of nineteenth-century US slave plantations.

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20 According to public opinion surveys the percentage of Greeks who think migration impacts negatively on the economy had increased from 47% in 2008 to 59% in 2010. Similarly, the perception that migration impacts negatively on employment because immigrants ‘steal’ the natives’ jobs gathered the support of 45% of the respondents in 2010 compared to 39% in 2009. See http://www.publicissue.gr/category/pi/surveys/society/immigrants/ [Accessed 16 February 2015].


22 www.kathimerini.gr, 22.11.2014: Residential permits given to Indian masseuses. List of immigrants who reside legally in the country;


23 www.kathimerini.gr, 28.4.2013: The labour market specialisation of migrant groups.


25 According to a 2007 IIER study (Tonchev 2007), illiteracy rate for Indian immigrants (10.7%) is higher than the average of all immigrants (9.2%) while the majority of Indian immigrants have received only primary schooling (35.8%). The same source notes that an increasing number of highly educated Indians, especially in the IT sector, emigrate to other EU states but not to Greece.

26 www.dealnews.gr, 19.1.2011: Agriculture salaries decline even further.

27 www.tvxs.gr, 18.4.2013: 19th century plantations in Manolada: a slave market;
Despite being clearly exploited and victimized by dense networks of traffickers consisting of co-patriots and natives, Asian workers are blamed by ‘old’ migrant groups for the plummeting of salaries and the regression of working relations in Greece. Ironically, in a twisted yet unfortunate repetition of history, while in the 1990s it was Greek workers who blamed Albanian immigrants for declining salaries, in the crisis-shaped present it is the Albanians – now widely recognized as highly skilled workers – who accuse the Asians. Frictions and clashes between these groups have been recorded in the media, some resulting in shootings and killings.

Inter-migrant violence is a manifestation of the immense strain placed upon all immigrants, ‘old’ and ‘new’ in a stagnating economy. In fact, unemployment has hit immigrants harder than the native population. According to a left-wing newspaper article which copies data from Eurostat, the 28% unemployment rate recorded in 2013 was distributed among Greeks and immigrants in a largely unequal manner: respectively, 24% and 40.3%.

The only viable option under such difficult conditions is for economic immigrants to leave, a choice made by numerous Indians in the past few years. Madhur Gandhi, a shipping businessman in Athens and president of the Indian Community in Greece said to the BBC Hindi service that the crisis has affected many of his co-nationals. “Lots of factories and shops were closed and our people lost jobs. Agriculture workers were also affected but most seriously affected were the construction workers. About 1,000-2,000 Indians have gone back to India.”

5. Crime

Analysis of press articles under the broad category ‘Crime’, revealed two distinct types of criminal activity linked to the Indian community in Greece: 1) crimes committed by Indian nationals while residing illegally in the country (legal Indian migrants have not been involved in such events in the past few years); and 2) crimes committed by Greek nationals against members of the Indian community. Each type of criminal activity is portrayed in a different manner by the media – the ideological colouring being of course the decisive factor shaping how individual outlets deal with the question. As a general rule, however, two perceptions of the Indian community are dominant: Indians as a security threat and Indians as victims of racist attacks. Interestingly enough, the central actors in the crime stories collected – Greek nationals and members of the Indian community – take turns in the role of the victim and the perpetrator. In fact, these roles often interact and merge in story narratives, as illustrated below.

5.1. Portrayal of Indian immigrants as a security threat

The perception of Indian immigrants as a threat is undoubtedly linked to the broader and illegal migration phenomenon in Greece, which has grown so much in the last years. Uncontrolled inflow of illegal migrants has deterred integration and has led to an unsustainable inflow of migrants that ‘pool’ in the country. The persistence of illegal migration has in turn, created incentives for illegal activities.

Indeed, Greek media outlets have reported a substantial number of crimes committed by Indian nationals, for the most part, illegal immigrants. Crimes span all levels of severity, ranging from serious

(Contd.)
Portrayals of Indian immigrants in the Greek media

...offences such as murder, rape and drugs trafficking, to petty crime, including cattle theft and fraud. Most articles published in wide circulation newspapers are descriptive in nature: they merely state crime-related facts, usually reproduced from police briefings. There is thus no special portrayal of Indian perpetrators vis-à-vis members of other migrant communities or Greek offenders. However, biased perceptions linked to the ethnicity of perpetrators routinely find their way into online versions of traditional news outlets, in the comments section. The latter, provide a platform for informal yet influential public debate on illegal immigration. As almost 85% of internet users in Greece rely on online sources for information, commentaries both illuminate public perceptions and shape opinions.

Articles published in low circulation local papers and online blogs of nationalistic orientation are equally biased, frequently involving hate speech and explicit racist references.

In the aforementioned sources of information the perception of illegal immigrants in general and Indians in particular, as a security threat is unambiguous. Hostile references are commonplace: “illegal immigrants that overstay their welcome”, “abuse hospitality and protection provided by the Greek state”, “destroy the economy”, “severely damage the welfare system” and threaten the physical security of the native population. Crimes of sexual nature, especially, when committed by Indian nationals, are directly linked to the worrisome rise of rapes in the Indian homeland, spurring cultural biases in the portrayal of the perpetrators.

Such stories, that brand illegal immigrants either generally or, more specifically, Indians, as a security problem, unfavourably influence public perceptions on migration as a whole. Linking a large variety of social and economic problems with migration can have a distorting effect on public perceptions. Indeed, in Greece, the general threat perception has influenced anti-immigration sentiments, and reactions of distance or even hostility towards immigrants. Especially since the onset of the country’s sovereign debt crisis, the debate on migration has become inextricably linked to the rapidly falling living standards in the country. Populist groups have exploited the circumstances,

32 www.iefimerida.gr, 16.6.2011: A 30 year old woman was raped and tortured in Rethymnon [a German woman working as a tourist guide in Crete was reportedly raped by two men of Indian origin];
www.star.gr, 29.8.2013: Shocking news: four men raped a boy in Vonitsa [a Pakistani minor accused four men of Pakistani and Indian origin of having beaten him, raped him and stolen 500 EUR from him];
www.protothema.gr, 1.8.2014: Indians beaten up and stabbed by a co-national [three Indian nationals severely beaten, stabbed and robbed a fellow Indian in Rethymnon, Greece];
www.protothema.gr, 22.7.2013: Indians were dealing drugs in Evia [two Indian nationals residing illegally in Greece were arrested with the charge of heroin trafficking in the island of Evia];
www.skai.gr, 1.8.2012: Criminal network imports drug pills from India [two Indian nationals arrested with the charge of illegal import and dealing of drugs].

33 www.kathimerini.gr, 31.8.2012: Two foreigners arrested for theft [two Indian nationals arrested for stealing products from shops in the Menidi area, including small electronic devices and cigarettes and selling them in their mini-market];
www.evianews.gr, 11.2.2013: The smell of blood made police officers check the car! [two Indian nationals arrested for the theft of lambs in Evia, assisted by two Albanian nationals. The alleged perpetrators have established a criminal group since August 2012, aimed at stealing and slaughtering animals during night hours. In total, 29 lambs have been removed from stables in the region];
www.kalimera-arkadia.gr, 28.11.2012: Indians arrested for stealing sheep in Peloponnesse [two young Indian nationals arrested in Korinthos for having stolen 3 lambs from Derveni];
www.kathimerini.gr, 21.1.2013: Staged weddings with foreigners in Ahaia [the paper reports an increase in the phenomenon of ‘fake weddings’ between Greek women – usually unemployed or mothers of many children and immigrants – most of Indian and Pakistani origin. Amed at securing residential permit for the immigrants, the cost of such deals ranged from 5000 to 7000 EUR. The phenomenon has been on the rise for the past 5 years. While in 2011, 280 fake weddings were conducted, by the end of 2012 their number has increased to more than 1500. Allegedly, municipal officials were involved in the fraud].

further aggravating these sentiments which in several instances, have culminated in large anti-immigrant demonstrations or racist attacks on individuals.

5.2. Portrayal of Indian immigrants as victims of racism

Already in 2010, UNHCR noted an alarming rise in racist hate crimes in Greece (UNHCR 2010). As a case in point, in the summer of 2012 alone, more than 300 such assaults were recorded. In the years to follow, stories of uncalled-for attacks against immigrants would make headlines and shock newsreaders even outside Greece.

The printed media has reported several instances during which members of the Indian community have been victimised. While some of the attacks were carefully planned and organised to specifically target Indian settlements and religious sites, others were spontaneous, triggered by random encounters between extremists and individuals of the ‘wrong’ skin colour. A particularly well-orchestrated attack, impregnated with symbolism, was the one against the most ‘visible’ and populous fraction of the Indian migrant population, the Sikh community. In the early hours of September 21, 2014, shots were fired from an automatic weapon against the Sikh temple in the Marathon area. That was the second attack on the Sikh community that night. About 45 minutes earlier, unknown individuals had broken the windows of the Sikh temple in Kato Souli, a few kilometres away. The attacks instigated an international outcry when the TV channel ‘Sikh Channel’, owned by members of the Sikh community in the UK, arrived in the area and covered the racist attacks in long reportages. Greek newspapers and TV channels also dealt with the news extensively. The dominant portrayal of Indian victims – most of them legal residents of the country for decades – was that of wrongfully victimised, peaceful individuals. References to a “family-oriented”, “non-violent” and “hard-working” community were dominant in liberal and left media outlets. Supportive comments for the perpetrators were, however, also to be found in nationalist news sources.

However, the most shocking anti-migrant violence recorded in Greece’s recent history, took place in the strawberry fields of Manolada, a rural area in the Peloponnese. On April 7, 2013, hundreds of field workers of Asian origin – including many Indians – gathered in protest to demand wages amounting to six months of unpaid labour. The demonstration ended in bloodshed when three local farm caretakers drew weapons and opened fire against the workers. Twenty six of them were critically injured. The Manolada incident demonstrated, in the most emphatic manner, the danger of the anti-immigration rhetoric gaining ground in Greece. It thus instigated a lot of investigative journalism work. Journalists referred to the “annihilation of workers and human rights”, “modern economic slavery” and a “Greek apartheid”. Most newspaper articles and TV reportages were highly

35 www.tovima.gr, 20.7.2012: International shaming of Greece that has become the cradle of racism.
36 www.tvxs.gr, 2.7.2012: Attacks and invasions in migrant households in the Menidi area: major damages inflicted [Seven houses were invaded and their residents, of Indian and Pakistani origin, were brutally beaten].
37 www.tvxs.gr, 22.6.2011: Golden dawn: every dark skinned individual is a target, not just immigrants [two Indian nationals, employees of a multinational firm based in Piraeus were attacked by five Golden Dawn members. The attack took place during a Golden dawn demonstration against migration];
38 www.kathimerini.gr, 31.8.2012: Five young Greek men responsible for the attempted manslaughter of five Indians [five Indians waiting at a bus stop in Rethymnon, Crete, were attacked by the group of young men. The attack was uncalled for and resulted in all victims seeking hospitalization for stab wounds].
personalised, based on the dramatic testimonies of the victims and human rights activists. Workers were described as “victims of trafficking” and “modern slaves”, forced to work under inhumane conditions with minimal pay, if any, living in shacks on the side of the fields for which they had to pay rent to their bosses. Most worryingly, the investigation revealed that Manolada was far from an isolated incident. All around the region, a clear pattern emerged: the trampling of human and workers’ rights on the basis of nationality and residential status, while the authorities turned a blind eye.41

Academic and newspaper articles alike have associated two interrelated factors with the phenomenal increase of anti-immigrant violence in Greece: the manifestation of the sovereign debt crisis and the subsequent extraordinary transformation of the Golden Dawn from a marginalised and negligible political force, to an appreciable parliamentary power. A far-right political party of fascist and neo-Nazi orientation, the Golden Dawn rose to national political significance rapidly, from its strongholds in downtown Athens, under the pressure of unsustainable migrant inflows. The organisation has since 2009, systematically and instrumentally employed methods of immigrant intimidation to win the hearts and minds of aggrieved Athenians, disappointed by inadequate rule of law provision and the ineffectiveness of national migration policy.

Indeed, by casting themselves as a ‘righteous avenger’ and by presenting racist hatred crimes as retaliatory acts, the Golden Dawn received either the silent tolerance or the vocal support of a sizable part of the Athenian constituency.42 Outside the capital, the manifestation of the economic crisis’ negative consequences, created the perfect ambiance for the incubation of anti-immigrant sentiments. The de facto merging of the migration debate with that of the sovereign debt crisis greatly boosted Golden Dawn’s popularity. Being electorally rewarding, immigrant scapegoating and stereotyping spilled-over across the political system, contaminating the rhetoric of mainstream parties and triggering a series of hastily designed, controversial (due to their harshness) governmental measures aimed at controlling illegal immigration.43 The latter solidified the popular view that migrants were part of the problem, and led to yet more violence against them.44

(Contd.)

www.kathimerini.gr, 18.4.2013: Condemnation for the strawberry slaughter;
www.tanea.gr, 15.3.2014: Nothing has changed in Manolada.

41 This is not a blanket statement describing working relations all across the country. For instance, Papageorgiou, who has contacted extensive fieldwork in the area of Thiva, describes friendly and warm relations between employers and Indian field workers (Papageorgiou 2013).


43 www.tovima.gr, 4.8.2012: Operation Xenios Zeus has started [a mixture of police cleansing operations in central Athens areas and the establishment of migrant detention centers];

www.tovima.gr, 10.1.2013: BBC chastises operation Xenios Zeus and the Greek police;
www.protothema.gr, 29.4.2012: Amygdaleza has opened! [an immigrant detention centre started operating];
www.vice.gr, 14.2.2015: Amygdaleza’s hellhole is a national shame.

6. Business/Investments

Despite the signing of a series of bilateral financial agreements in the past 40 years, commercial and investment flows between India and Greece remain at low levels. According to the latest available data (2013), Greek exports to India have been virtually unchanged since 2007, corresponding to a total net worth of 46 million EUR. On the contrary, Indian exports to Greece during the same period contracted sharply, falling from 463 million EUR in 2007 to 322 million EUR in 2013. Reportedly, the 31% decline in Indian imports was due to massive cut-backs in Greek demand, largely a consequence of the country’s sovereign debt crisis and the subsequent decline in domestic disposable income. Bilateral investment flows are at similarly low levels. According to the 2014 annual report of the Bureau for Economic and Commercial Affairs of the Greek embassy in New Delhi, fourteen Greek companies were active in Indian territory in 2013, while in Greece, only one major Indian investment has been recorded. Several smaller Indian investments (primarily joint ventures in the shipping, agricultural and IT development sectors) have, nevertheless, been registered. Greece is ranked eighty-fifth worldwide in terms of investments in India. The cumulative Greek FDI between April 2000 and April 2013 amounted to just USD 3.72 million, while exact data on the cost of Indian FDI in Greece is not available.

6.1. Portrayal of India as an appealing business partner

Perhaps due to low level bilateral investment flows, the Indian market has traditionally been perceived as “mysterious”, “oriental” and “challenging”. A 2010 Kathimerini article, quotes one of the first “brave” Greek investors in the country: “it is hard for anyone who has visited India not to comment on the objective difficulties in developing business activities there”. India’s distinct business culture, its legal, taxation, accounting, recruitment and cultural integration specificities, have been highlighted as intimidating those who might want to do business there. In the past few years, however, printed media in Greece moved away from focusing on business climate issues and concentrated on the portrayal of India as a rapidly emerging economic powerhouse. References to a “vast market”, an “investor’s paradise”, a land of “unique business opportunities” have become commonplace.

As the Greek crisis unfolded and deepened, stories narrating the efforts of Greek entrepreneurs to penetrate the Indian market mushroomed. A similar trend was recorded in the reporting of efforts orchestrated by Greek state institutions and domestic business associations to attract investments from the sub-continent.

48 In the manufacturing, mining, packaging, agro-industry and energy sectors
49 By Tata Steel
50 See www.ficci.com, website of Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry.
51 www.kathimerini.gr, 12.4.2010: The Indians close big deals in Greece too.
52 www.news.gr, 16.1.2015: Greek food companies cooperate to jointly invest in India; www.aggelioforos.gr, 2.12.2013: The opening of Thessaloniki to the Indian market [Thessaloniki hotel owners’ association invites thirteen Indian tour operators in an effort to stimulate the inflow of Indian tourists]; www.dealnews.gr, 24.10.2012: The discovery of India [Greek companies strive to enter the Indian market]; www.reporter.gr, 20.11.2014: Which Greek companies dare (to invest) in India.
6.1.1 Greek Investments in India

The crisis was, in fact, a turning point, in consolidating popularly held perceptions about the robustness of India’s economic apparatus. It also, and more importantly, led to West-oriented Greek entrepreneurs taking a leap of faith and diverting their planned investments to India. “The selection of India as an investment destination was anything but random”, explains the CEO of Chipita – a Greek company planning to invest more than 60 million EUR in Bombay’s confectionary industry. “After a series of investments in the US, we decided to enter less mature but more appealing markets”. The 2014 Franklin Templeton (GISS) investment climate survey illuminates the line of thought underpinning such strategic decisions. 81% of Greek investors considered the rate of economic revival in Greece weak and fragile and declared themselves hesitant to invest both domestically or in near European markets. Slow growth prospects, political instability, widespread and prolonged uncertainty were among the stated reasons. On the contrary, 80% of them appeared eager to invest in Asia, a region that was expected to yield top returns for the decade to come.

The numbers tell a compelling story: faced with financial turbulence of historic proportions, Greek companies systematically turned to foreign markets as a way out of massive economic contraction and continuing domestic stagnation. However, advanced western capitalist economies – the traditional destination of Greek FDI – were now, for the first time, not a self-evident choice. Instead it was India and other Asian markets (China, Russia, Turkey) that cast their ‘mesmerizing spell’ on Greek capital holders. As a result, the number of Greek FDIs investments in India alone, rose remarkably, increasing from just seven in 2007 to twenty in 2014. Most investments came in the manufacturing, mining, packaging, agro-industry and energy sectors.

Extensive market institution-building recorded during this period also serves as evidence of the Greek entrepreneurs’ heightened interest in investing or setting up a presence in the Indian market. In November 2011 the Hellenic-Indian Chamber of Commerce was established. The declared goal of this autonomous, not-for-profit organization was to promote the harmonious development of Greek-Indian relations in the economic and business field. This incorporated assistance to Greek business people who wished to create financial partnerships with Indian companies and the latter’s representation vis à vis Greek governmental departments and agencies. At the chamber’s inaugural meeting, its President remarked: “India is undoubtedly the new emerging economic giant of the 21st century that will take the world by storm. Its remarkable growth rates are a powerful testament to that. It is not only an opportunity but a self-evident strategic choice for Greece to develop and strengthen bilateral economic relations between the two countries”.

The creation of the Hellenic-Indian Chamber came a few months after the status of the memorandum of cooperation between the Greek and Indian governments was upgraded from bilateral to strategic and was appropriately expanded to support collaboration between the two countries. Both processes were initiated by the Greek side. According to the then Greek minister of foreign affairs it was of paramount importance for Greece to “build a strategic financial cooperation with a dynamically developing country” especially during a time when “the country is trying to adopt an extrovert developmental strategy as a way out of the crisis”. Cooperation agreements were reached between private-sector collective bodies as well, through the signing or re-activation of existing memoranda. Agreements between the Greek Entrepreneurs’ Association (SEE) and the Co-Federation of Indian Industry (CII) and between the Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ABEA) and the

53 www.fpress.gr, 12.6.2014: Greek company Chipita expands to India.
54 www.kathimerini.gr, 14.4.2014: Greek investors are optimistic but hesitant.
55 www.imerisia.gr, 2.5.2013: Greek exporters are mesmerized by the markets of China, India, Russia and Turkey.
Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), constitute two such cases. Empirical evidence on the extent to which these agreements were actually implemented is scarce as relevant reports – when they exist – are not available online. However, the media recorded a systematic effort on the part of Greek companies to increase immersion in the Indian market through a series of workshops, expo participations and information seminars. A consulting company called ‘Indo-Greek Cross Border Investments’ was also created in 2012 and has since been functioning as a one-stop-shop for Greek companies interested in entering the Indian market.

6.1.2 Indian investments in Greece

Indian investments in Greece did not follow a similar upward trend. In fact, during the period 2011-2014, the Greek press recorded a series of sunk take-over deals and Indian investments that were never to materialize. Former cooperative tobacco factory SEKAP in the border municipality of Xanthi is a case in point. Plans to partly privatize the company were afoot under the country’s memorandum commitments, when in 2011, the Andhra Pradesh headquartered Bommidala Group made a binding acquisition offer.

   Media outlets received the news in different ways depending on their ideological background. Left-wing journalists focused on union fears about possible wage reductions and personnel cut downs and were, by definition, opposed to the takeover, a point reflected in the dismissive titles of the relevant articles. When amidst a host of controversies and obstacles the Indian company eventually backed down and withdrew its offer, several articles in liberal and centrist newspapers sharply criticized the government for poor business conduct (allegedly, information on the obligations of the company was withheld by the investors) and highlighted how an opportunity had been missed. Ethnos described Bommidala Group as a “colossal company”, its owner as a “dynamic tycoon” and reckoned that if the deal had been sealed, SEKAP’s position in the domestic and regional markets would have been greatly bolstered. Instead, according to Kathimerini, the Greek state lost 70 million EUR in revenue and 100 job positions were cut.

   The SEKAP case was the closest an Indian company would get to becoming involved in the Greek privatization program. In 2014 the Indian network management company ‘India Power Company’ was outbid and failed to continue to the next round of the competition for the acquisition of 66% of ADMHE (Independent Manager of Electrical Energy Transport). While other financial deals were never officially on the table, the press recorded a series of discussions between Greek state officials and representatives of Indian interests.

   Some were initiated by the Greek agency for privatization which reportedly, recognized the hegemonic position of certain Indian enterprises in industries of strategic importance. They consequently made a conscious effort to bring domestic

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58 Annual reports on Greek-Indian bilateral trade and economic relations published in 2010 and 2014 by the Bureau for Economic and Commercial Affairs of the Greek embassy in New Delhi (see note 46).
59 www.imerisia.gr, 4.5.2012: Investment opportunities in India [the Greek Association of Industrialists organised a one day workshop on entrepreneurial, investment and commercial opportunities in India. During the workshop, the Indian economy, its trends and growth potential were discussed along with the prospects of Greek companies to get involved in the sectors of bio-technology, energy, environment and transport].
61 www.ethnos.gr, 18.3.2012: Eighty three million EUR were not enough. The Indians’ packed up and left.
63 www.kathimerini.gr, 26.2.2014: The Indians are out of the race for ADMHE.
investment opportunities to their attention. Others were initiated by Indian diplomats or Indian entrepreneurs themselves.

Media coverage of these meetings had a common denominator: irrespective of source, it was vague and lacking precision, as most of the contacts were declaratory and exploratory in nature. In many cases they constituted diplomatic moves of good faith, a way for Indian diplomats to express public support to the Greek state in completing its memorandum commitments. In other cases, they were largely a marketing strategy employed by the Greek government itself to signal – both to its domestic constituency and to its international lenders – that it has been actively working on the realization of the memorandum. One thing is for sure: none of the publicly communicated meetings led to the realisation of an investment or initiated any sort of large-scale bilateral financial cooperation.

Newspaper articles cited political instability and fiscal imbalances – both direct consequences of Greece’s sovereign debt crisis – as the foremost impediments to the country’s investment-attraction capacity. But an Indian national proved that risk aversion is not always the right way to go. Prem Watsa, the chief executive of Canada-based Fairfax group, came to Greece in 2012 at the height of the crisis which he considered an opportunity. He bet on the country’s turnaround by investing massively in its banking, real estate and energy sectors and has so far managed to achieve big returns and to earn a respected position in domestic entrepreneurial circles. An Indian immigrant to Canada, Mr. Watsa, nick-named ‘the Warren Buffet of Canada’, embodies the American dream, Greek newspapers remark. He is proof that through a balanced combination of hard work, determination and wits, one can pull oneself out of the deepest destitution and reinvent oneself as a success. A story, all too familiar – though on a much smaller scale – in the case of many Indian immigrants in Greece, too.

6.2 Portrayal of Indian immigrants as successful micro-entrepreneurs

Biographical portraits of Indian immigrants have found their way into the society sections of high circulation newspapers. A recently published piece narrates the life course of a successful restaurant chain owner. It tracks his experience in Greece from arrival as a young unskilled manual laborer to

64 www.kathimerini.gr, 29.1.2014: Colossal Indian oil and natural gas group seeks investment opportunities in Greece [a 25-strong group of experts from the Indian state-owned company, involved in mining and trading of oil and natural gas, visited Athens after an invitation of the Greek investment promotion agency. The meeting was of an exploratory nature and no concrete interest was expressed from the Indian side].

65 www.morias.gr, 27.2.2012 and www.news.gr, 25.2.2012: Indian entrepreneurs plan to invest in Peloponnese [Indian Ambassador visited Peloponnese and communicated his belief that Indian companies could be interested in investing in the area. The Ambassador expressed his certainty that Greece’s creative human resources will pull the country out of the crisis. Two bilateral meetings were to be planned to facilitate the recording of opportunities and the drafting of investment plans. The meetings were never realized];

www.kathimerini.gr, 24.2.2013: What are the Americans, Canadians and Indians looking for in Piraeus? [the Indian substitute minister for foreign affairs visited Piraeus port and declared her country’s interest to get involved in the development process of the Greek ports, especially in the de-nationalization process of the Thessaloniki and Volos ports].

66 www.voria.gr, 31.1.2014: Russians and Indians interested in the energy deposits of Northern Greece [according to the paper’s sources, Russian and Indian energy companies are in competition over the energy deposits in Northern Greece. Allegedly, Indian energy entrepreneurs visited Greece and had a series of meetings with government officials that focused on possible investments in the energy sector. They specifically asked to be briefed on the situation in Prinos];

www.protothema.gr, 19.8.2014: Indian interest for the peaches of Imathia [representative from a large agro-biotechnology company based in New Delhi visited the provincial town of Veria and expressed interest in the local peach produce].

67 www.new247.gr, 12.4.2014: The Indian who invests billions in Greece;


68 www.andro.gr, 22.5.2013: An immigrant? I think not!
his gradual transformation into a thriving food entrepreneur. Another story describes the everyday life of a Sikh taxi driver in the busy streets of Athens and yet another, the ten-year long struggle of a young Indian immigrant to set up his own micro business in downtown Athens. Along the same lines, a series of entries in cultural blogs and the food sections of newspapers and magazines, take the form of short travel guides to the “little Asia in the heart of Athens”; a place far from the Athenians’ strolling, shopping and dining out, top-preferences. Enriched with ethnographic elements, these stories offer a rare glimpse into immigrant entrepreneurship. More importantly, it is through these articles that the image of Indian immigrants as hard-working, resourceful and successful businessmen is constructed and reinforced.

Until recently it was the Chinese who had strategically placed themselves in the narrow commercial streets of central Athens, with more property than any other migrant community in the city. The supremacy of the Chinese community in small-scale trade activity was certainly undisputed. However, the crisis saw the transfer of much of Chinese commercial activity to Bulgaria. According to the latest evidence the share of other Asian migrant communities is steadily on the rise. Four out of five shops in the streets of Menadrou, Sophokleous and Evripidou, in the very heart of Athens, are operated by Pakistanis and Indians with 2% of these, actually being owned by the entrepreneurs. Most are mini markets, clothing stores, restaurants, and telecommunication service shops. The daily gross income of these businesses is estimated at an average of 600 EUR or at 36 million EUR annually. The Indian restaurants are especially well-positioned and return a good income as the average dining experience per person ranges from 36 to 40 EUR.

Indian foodstuff stores and restaurants have a prime position in press articles touching upon immigrant entrepreneurship and its impact on urban cultural integration. Indian mini-markets are presented as “Athenian chefs’ biggest secrets” and “hidden gems” waiting to be discovered by the curious. Indian restaurants, too, according to the articles, offer a memorable dining experience. Either posh and pricey, oriented towards attracting native customers, or basic and budget, targeting first and foremost members of the Indian community. Indian restaurants are praised for high product and service quality. Likewise, in all relevant news stories, restaurant owners are described as “kind”, “competent and friendly”, “ready to share recipes” and “eager to bond” with their customers in a way not possible in large store and food chains.

Personal immigrant narrations and life-course accounts are powerful tools for overturning native-held biases and stereotypes that immigrants collectively and indiscriminately, harm Greek society and economy. The capable owners of these micro-enterprises are living proof that controlled migration can benefit the stagnating Greek economy while culturally enriching the urban space. Food in particular is especially powerful as by bringing people together, interacting in the same space, it acts in an anti-racist manner, a point often stressed by the Indian restaurant owners. One offers an insightful explanation as to why that is the case: “owning a shop, especially one reaching out beyond the local Indian community, is a sign of nesting, of taking roots. It serves as evidence that you are not only willing to work hard but also, that you are committed to stay and to integrate”.

69 www.iefimerida.gr, 5.4.2014: A ride with the only Sikh taxi driver in Athens.
75 www.andro.gr, 22.5.2013: An immigrant? I think not!
7. Religion

7.1. Portrayal of Sikhism as a mysterious yet peaceful religion

There are no official data on the religious distribution of Indian immigrants in Greece. It can, however, be safely maintained that, paradoxically, India’s two largest religions – Hinduism and Islam – are underrepresented in the country, as the biggest part of the local Indian community originates from Punjab and practices Sikhism (Papageorgiou 2013). As a result, press articles touching upon religion are heavily skewed towards Sikhism, and how it is practiced in Greece. A few articles introduce Hinduism and Indian Islam but, for the most part, are constitute descriptive accounts of religious practices in the Indian context, only.

The Greek constitution recognizes the right to the freedom of religious consciousness and allows the free and uninhibited practice of all ‘known’ religions under the protection of the rule of law (Article 13, Paragraph 1-2). In practice however, religious groups not aligned with Eastern Orthodoxy face difficulties in exercising these rights. Probably stemming from the (until recently) almost perfect ethno-religious homogeneity within Greece, there is a strong popular and bureaucratic resistance to the provision of ‘visible’ places of worship for small religious groups. This is irrespective of whether the latter are associated with new ethnic categories (such as the Indians) or with historical and officially recognized minorities (such as the Muslims). Until 2006, state legislation necessitated the approval of the Orthodox Church for the construction of non-Orthodox places of worship. Despite law amendments that have dwarfed the role of the dominant church in the process, a host of bureaucratic predicaments still persist. As a result, most immigrants practice their religion in unsuitable spaces deprived of architectural elements and symbols characteristic of individual professions. Such spaces include rented storage areas, garages, former industrial production plants and small apartments. The Sikh community in Greece has created its own places of worship – in essence, unofficial Gurdwaras – in at least ten areas across the country. The biggest ones are in Tavros (Athens), Marathon, Oinophuta, Megara and Poros (Papageorgiou 2013).

A series of press articles, TV channel shows and photo reportages in popular blogs have “taken a peek” inside Sikh temples and Sikh festivals. These stories serve as an introduction of Sikhism to the multiculturalism-hostile yet, curious Greek public. Emphasis is placed on rituals involved in the practice of the religion: the washing of the hands, face and feet before entering the temple as a purification act; the repeated recital of hymns accompanied by the sound of drums; the collective singing of Kirtan (traditional songs); the symbolism behind characteristic clothing items of the congregants – such as the turban – and the role of the community’s religious leaders, the gurus. The Gurdwaras are described as full of life, especially on Sundays when the main meeting takes place. In the Tavros Gurdwara alone, more than 500 worshipers – men, women and children – gather every Sunday, many of them from afar, since out of the approximately 25,000 Sikhs residing in Greece only 3,000 are based in Athens. Beds are made available to travelers and Punjabi meals prepared by volunteers in the communal kitchen are offered to all visitors on a daily basis. The Gurdwaras, however, are not presented solely as places of worship, but also, as spaces of cultural practice and

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76 www.tovima.gr, 25.7.2010: Hanging out with Athens’ Sikhs.
www.eirinika.gr, 19.5.2014: Athens’ Sikhs live and pray in Tavros. Photos of their colorful world that does not want to live surreptitiously;
www.protagon.gr, 9.5.2014: Indian Sikhs in Athens;
www.popaganda.gr, 28.3.2014: Athens’ Sikhs have a free meal for all;
www.tanea.gr, 3.1.2015: Omonia’s gospels.
See also: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SF7hnsDjt0, 3.2.2014: The Sikh temple in Tavros.
socialization where co-nationals get to meet, exchange news, dress and eat as they would in the ‘old country’. In this sense, the life and activities of the Sikh Indian community in Greece, as is often the case with diaspora groups, are structured around the temple.

Greek visitors describe their experience in Sikh temples as “surprising”, “a trip to forgotten feelings and sensations” and refer to the manifestation of Sikh festivities, such as the Vaisakhi day, as “an attack of colors, sounds and smells”. Indian immigrants are described as “deeply religious”, “welcoming”, “kind”, “eager to share their culture” and to “include visitors in the rituals”. The general portrayal of Sikhism in the media is that of a peaceful religion that pronounces a set of socially desirable values such as physical purity and abstention from adultery and swearing and hence, a moderately positive one.

It is noticeable that most articles make a conscious effort to distinguish between Sikhism and Islam since the two are often conflated in the Greek collective imaginary. This muddle harbors the danger that popularly-held negative biases linked to Islamic extremism might spillover into Sikhism. To preempt that, media stories stress the distinctiveness of the two faiths by detailing the emergence of Sikhism as a religious project attempting to unite the best aspects of Islam and Hinduism. The historically competitive relation between Sikhism and Islam is also emphasized along with the Sikhism profession to non-violence. As it is explained, “the Sikhs’ sword – their most controversial traditional clothing item – is not a sign of aggression. It symbolizes their fight against passions and it is not directed against other religions and their believers”. Within the Greek framework of resistance to multi-culturalism, it can be argued that Sikhism is treated with hesitant acceptance: probably because it relates to a small, non-threatening (in terms of ethno-cultural homogeneity) ethnic minority.

On the contrary, much of the de facto obstructionism to non-Orthodox religious practice in Greece is related to widespread Islamophobia. This is linked to the country’s specific historical experiences and the contemporary rise of Islamic extremism, globally. Athens is the only European capital without an official mosque to serve its estimated Muslim population of 300,000 and this has been one of the most contentious issues in local and national politics for the past ten years. Muslim Indians are rare in Greece hence they do not appear save for one or two references in pieces covering Muslim immigrant demonstrations related to the mosque controversy. The few articles that touch upon Islam as practiced in the Indian sub-continent, however, convey the message that Indian Islam is moderate and not susceptible to extremism. Despite chronic disaffection and sporadic bursts of violence with Hindus, India’s Muslims have remained moderate, tolerant and quick to condemn religious violence. Analysts explain this tolerance through the close integration of the Sufi-dominated version of Indian Islam with Hindus, with whom they have shared a number of cultural traits for almost 1,000 years. Stable democratic governments and the lack of territorial concentration of Muslims in mono-religious enclaves, are also factors identified as being conducive to Islamic moderation.

Finally, Hinduism, India’s largest religion, is presented in the Greek press primarily through TV documentaries and press articles in the form of travelogues. Dominant representations are those of a colorful, mysterious and charming set of religious rituals underpinned by an ancient value system which is worthy of respect yet, linked to seriously problematic issues such as deep inequalities and social cleavages (e.g. the caste system).

78 www.tovima.gr, 6.8.2012: The Sikhs of Athens on the US mayhem. All religions should be respected they say.
81 www.tvxs.gr, 16.11.2010: Muslim prayer followed by street riots in Athens.
82 www.tovima.gr, 31.10.2014: Why India’s Muslims are not Jihadists;
www.skai.gr, 27.11.2008: India’s Muslims then and now.
Documentaries screened on national television (NET)
8. Culture

8.1. Portrayal of Indian culture as rich and charming

The review of press articles revealed that a host of activities linked to the Indian cultural tradition take place in Greece every year. These include film festivals, book launches, recitals, theatrical performances, dance festivals and exhibitions. Desk research showed that the bulk are initiated by the Indo-Hellenic Society for Culture and Development (EL.IN.E.P.A.), a civil, non-governmental society founded in Athens in 2003. The society’s declared goal is that of strengthening Indo-Hellenic relations and the deepening of trans-cultural dialogue through “the aesthetic, moral and intellectual uplifting of the individual”.

The Greek ministry of foreign affairs too, notes that Greek-Indian cultural relations date back some 3,000 years. The fact that both countries have a rich and ancient cultural tradition is also frequently noted in press articles reporting on Indian cultural events and is highlighted as a bonding element between the two nations. As a case in point, a left-wing newspaper recently described a series of concerts where Greek and Indian traditional organ players performed simultaneously, as a “rare encounter at the crossroads of two ancient musical traditions” and as an “ancient musical bridge that eliminates all distance between Greece and India”.

Apart from accentuating the historicity of both Indian and Greek art forms, the Greek media is equally emphatic about the uniqueness and ‘differentness’ of Indian cultural expressions, traits that are presented as particularly attractive and charming. Hence, while ancient origin appeals to the Greeks’ respect for ‘old cultures’ and is put forward as a unifying element, ‘exoticness’ appeals to Greek curiosity; the Greek public has, during its contemporary history, been a complete stranger to Asian orientalism. As a result, dance and Bollywood festivals are attractive manifestations of ‘otherness’, referred to in several media outlets with the use of words and phrases that have a positive connotation such as, “bursts of color and light”, “magical”, “dreamy escapes from reality” and “journeys into the Indian soul”.

What is striking however about the portrayal of Indian culture in the Greek media is the complete absence of direct references to the Indian community residing in the country. The lack of an explicit linkage between Indian cultural events and the local migrant community is possibly explained by the fact that the local immigrant community is almost never involved organizationally in the press publicized events. Neither do locally-based Indian cultural societies partake in them, as most performers come directly from India. As a result, the opportunity to associate the local migrant community with a theme that is commonly presented in the media in a positive manner is missed.

In some ways, this is similar to fashionable yoga and Indian dance studios, owned and operated by Greeks, many of whom were trained in India. It can, thus, be argued that only a westernized version of Indian culture has infiltrated Greek society as Indian cultural expressions have been adapted for

84 http://www.elinpa.org/index.php/en
86 www.rizospastis.gr, 7.7.2011: Greek and Indian musicians in a charming ancient musical journey.
www.lifo.gr, 5.2.2014: 10 days with India’s untouchables.
87 www.protothema.gr, 12.1.2015: Bollywood is here.
www.shape.gr, 10.6.2014: The Bollywood festival is in Athens!.
88 Cultural events organised by the Indian community are typically not advertised in the press and are attended by Indians only. In fact, the few news articles that report on them highlight elements of segregation and cultural alienation. For example see: www.lifo.gr, 28.5.2009: A Bollywood star in Athens.
popular consumption. This has largely diluted their original content, making it more ‘digestible’ to natives but less readily associable with individuals of Indian origin. In other words, the viewing and experiencing of Indian culture through a life-style lens has blurred the capacity of Greeks to relate it to the Indian migrant community. As a result, Indian immigrants in Greece are not popularly regarded as carriers of a rich and sophisticated cultural tradition, even though Indian culture is thought of in these terms. In fact, Greeks reportedly treat Indians and other Asian immigrants as culturally inferior (Tonchev 2007). Immigrant specific factors, however, such as low socio-economic status, lack of education and limited societal integration, also help explain such attitudes.

9. Conclusion

Empirical investigation has revealed an important fact about immigrant portrayal patterns in the Greek media, namely, that they are highly inconsistent. Portrayals of immigrants vary according to news outlets’ ideological underpinnings most notably, across the left-right divide. Portrayals also vary across migrant groups – with ‘old’ migrant groups being depicted in a more positive manner than ‘new’ migrant groups. More interestingly however, the narrow focus on the Indian community has shown that the portrayal of a single migrant group can also vary depending on the specific issue at hand.

Within the framework of the preceding thematic analysis, the Indian community is clearly positively portrayed in articles falling under two thematic categories: ‘culture’ and ‘business/investments’. It should be noted, however, that in the titles and text of most of these articles, explicit reference to and a direct linkage with the local Indian migrant community is either absent or very loose. A grey area in terms of tipping the scale towards positive and neutral media representation consists of articles under the thematic category ‘religion’. On the contrary, in the thematic categories ‘integration’, ‘crime’ and ‘labour market’, the portrayal of the Indian community is neither constant, nor uniform as it continually shifts from negative to positive, depending on the specific characteristics of the Indian nationals who serve as the protagonists in any given news story: e.g. legal or illegal residential status, victim or perpetrator, etc.

Consequently, in the absence of rigid ideological motivations, media portrayals of immigrants, whether positive or negative, are shaped by the interaction of factors that are both exogenous and endogenous to a migrant community. On the endogenous side, the community’s demographic characteristics, socio-economic profile and residential status certainly matter in and of themselves yet, they encourage specific media representations only after their effect has intermingled with factors endogenous to the host country specifically, its social, economic and political context and their rate of change. In the case of Greece, the extraordinary rate of socio-economic and political change brought about by the sovereign debt crisis might be worth further investigation in terms of impact exerted on the media portrayal of immigrants in general and Indian immigrants in particular.

Whether the media changes its tone on migrants during times of economic stagnation and fiscal austerity and whether change in tonality is supply- or demand-driven i.e. responding to grassroots’ perceptions or shaping them, are important questions. Quantitative content analysis could be used to at least partly address these questions by recording temporal variations in the percentage of articles portraying immigrants in a positive or negative manner.
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Appendix. Basic information on media cited

Table 1. Basic information on media outlets used for data collection and analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Outlet</th>
<th>Short Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Newspapers</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. To vima</td>
<td>Liberal/Centre-Left Newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Kathimerini</td>
<td>Liberal/Centre-Right Newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Eleftherotypia</td>
<td>Left-Wing Newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. To ethnos</td>
<td>Liberal/Centre-Left Newspaper</td>
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<td>5. Ta nea</td>
<td>Liberal/Centre-Left Newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I avgi</td>
<td>Left-Wing Newspaper (Affiliated with SYRIZA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Imerisia</td>
<td>Economic/Business Newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Proto thema</td>
<td>Popular Newspaper</td>
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<td>9. Efimerida syntaktion</td>
<td>Left-Wing Newspaper</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Deal news</td>
<td>Popular Newspaper</td>
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<td>11. Rizospastis</td>
<td>Left-Wing Newspaper (Affiliated with KKE)</td>
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<td>12. Espresso news</td>
<td>Lifestyle/Yellow Journalism Newspaper</td>
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<td>Local Newspapers</td>
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<td>Free Local Press, Athens</td>
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<td>15. Aggelioforos</td>
<td>Local Newspaper, Thessaloniki</td>
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<td>16. Rethemniotika nea</td>
<td>Local Newspaper, Crete</td>
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<td>17. O Psaxniotis</td>
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<td>18. Morias</td>
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<td>21. Kalimera Arkadia</td>
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<td>23. Anti news</td>
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<td>24. News247</td>
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<td>25. Protagon</td>
<td>Liberal/Centre-Left News Blog</td>
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<td>26. Our Athens</td>
<td>News Blog</td>
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<td>27. Fpress</td>
<td>Economics/Business News Website</td>
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(continues)
Table 1. Basic information on media outlets used for data collection and analysis (cont.)

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<td>Entertainment-Oriented TV station</td>
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<tr>
<td>37. SKAI</td>
<td>Information-Oriented TV station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. NET</td>
<td>National TV Station (currently called NERIT)</td>
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