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**Migration, tradition and transition  
among the Pomaks in Xanthi (Western Thrace)**

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**Abstract**

During the second half of the last century the Greek countryside entered the world of industry and commerce, which was followed by important economic and social changes. For several political and historical reasons the Pomaks in Western Thrace did not follow these changes. The traditional world-view of rural Greece was deeply affected by the passing from subsistence to consumer economy thus changing the way of interpreting traditional value systems. In the Community of Thermes in the Pomak area of Xanthi, the traditional mechanisms of community integration and identity have survived and the viability of the community as a discrete entity with its own identity has remained more unbroken. During the last decade, however, following the abolition of several restrictions of an economic and political character, which the Thermiots as members of the Muslim minority suffered for decades, the community has been facing the challenge of adapting to new economic and cultural patterns brought about mainly through migration.

This paper examines how the Thermiots have responded to the recent abolition of the socioeconomic restrictions, which have been partly responsible for their being maintained on the edge of social and economic change. Based on research

material from the fieldwork I conducted in the area in 2000-2002, I focus on the way migration has affected approval of certain new values, especially in relation to education. I look on how people experience the duality between old practices, which started losing their meaning, surviving as 'forms' only, and how these 'forms' are being challenged by the new rationale that the need for participating in the modern world brought together.

Part-time and long-term Thermiot migrants usually do not culturally integrate with the societies they work in. Their hearts remain focused on their home villages and their main ambition is to supplement family income. Nevertheless, they act as carriers of modernization back to the village by introducing modern conveniences into their houses. And into the community they bring new ideas and aspirations for catching-up with the rest of the Greek society by taking advantage of the educational opportunities offered in their area.

Increasing modernization and urban contact may in some cases lead to a decline of ceremonial and ritual life and the diffusion of secular ideas among peasants. Migration often intensifies processes of secularization and modernization since it brings people closer to urban life. Besides the material benefits it may bring into the community, it has been observed, that migration contributes to the change of traditional and spiritual values of the people. Among the Thermiots, there has been a considerable change of attitude towards the way the community viewed education as well as some criticism of several traditional practices affecting women. This has mainly been the result of intense contact of young people with city people during a period of steady social change that the community has been undergoing.

## **Introduction**

The argument presented here is based on data collected during fieldwork, which I conducted from January 2000 to July 2002 in the highlands of Xanthi (*Ξάνθη*), the so called Pomak area, located in Western Thrace (*Δυτική Θράκη*). The Pomak

area of Xanthi<sup>1</sup> or the ‘mountain’, as both Christians and Muslims commonly call it, includes 59 villages<sup>2</sup> and ‘mahalas’<sup>3</sup>. With a population<sup>4</sup> of 15,824 people<sup>5</sup>, till the early ’90s it was socially and economically marginalized from the rest of the Prefecture of Xanthi. The area can still be regarded as a discrete unit with visible boundaries, which could serve to designate it as separate.

The Community of Thermes in the Pomak area of Xanthi (*Κοινότητα Θερμών*), which includes seven villages (Ano, Meses and Kato Thermes, Medousa, Kidari, Diasparto and Kotani) as well as a small Spa resort, Loutra, has been my fieldwork location. The distance of the first village (Ano Thermes) from the town of Xanthi is 46 km and of the last one (Medousa) 54 km. The population of the Community was 1,396 people according to the census of 1991. The estimated permanent residents though, were less than 1,200 people, and gradually decreasing year by year.

The Pomaks<sup>6</sup> constitute the second most numerous Muslim group in Greece after the ethnic Turks and remained rather cut off from the rest of the population of the

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<sup>1</sup> This area includes villages with exclusively Pomak population. There are also other villages in the Prefecture of Xanthi, not on the mountainous zone, with considerable Pomak population.

<sup>2</sup> See also Theoharidis 1995.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Mahala’ coming from the Turkish word of Arabic origin *mahalle* meaning small village quarters or neighbourhood. The word is extensively used in Thrace as well as in many parts in Western Macedonia. In Xanthi, the word is used to describe a group of houses smaller than a village. My informants used either Pomak, Turkish or Greek words to express an idea. In the text I use the words they used providing a translation in English. Shifting language code is a very common phenomenon among multilingual people such as Pomaks.

<sup>4</sup> National Statistical Service of Greece: 2001 Census.

<sup>5</sup> See Greek Government’s project “‘Ioannis Kapodistrias’ for the reconstruction of Local Authorities”. Local Association of Municipalities and Communities of the Prefecture of Xanthi. Office for Development and Programming. May 1998.

<sup>6</sup> For several Greek scholars they are indigenous Thracians who were assimilated by the Turkish populations due to their proximity. About the Greek theories on the history of the Pomaks see Hidioglou 1989; Milonas 1990; Varvounis 1997; Magriotis 1990; Theoharidis 1995; Troumbeta 2001; Brunnbauer 2001. For the Turks the Pomaks are descendants of a Turkish tribe, the Kumans, who moved to the Balkan area in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. The Bulgarian theories maintain that the Pomaks are Bulgarians who had been islamized between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. A number of Bulgarian scholars have dealt with this issue (see Krasteva-Blagoeva 2001) some holding the theory that the Pomaks were forcefully islamized and some others that they voluntarily converted to Islam for economic reasons (see Zhelyzkova 1990 referred by Krasteva-Blagoeva 2001). Their conversion to Islam attributed negative connotations to the name ‘Pomak’, which according to Bulgarian Christians derives from the ‘*povlyakal se*’ (dragging), because they dragged after another faith. The Pomaks themselves though claim that ‘Pomak’ is someone who has been ‘*pomachen*’ (tortured) to change his faith. For an extended literature review on the Bulgarian, Greek and Turkish theories on the origins of the Pomaks and their name see Troumbeta 2001; Brunnbauer 2001.

country until the early '90s. Their practice of endogamy and lack of opportunities in trading and traveling contributed significantly to the creation of a bounded, isolated community. The creation of the Modern Greek nation-state did not mean the opening of a new era for the Pomaks. On the contrary, their location in one of the most strategically important areas of the country (near the borders with Bulgaria and close to Turkey), their Islamic religion, which in the administrators' minds identified them with the ethnic Turks and their language<sup>7</sup>, a Bulgarian idiom of the South Slav group of languages, contributed to a deterioration of their situation. Being generally unable to deal with the bureaucratic machinery of the state, they have used middlemen for their social and economic deals. This of course is not an unusual phenomenon in Greek society, although within the minority it might have some further significance, stressing even more the "we/they" dichotomy, which apparently exists anyway.

### **Education and Social Change in Thermes**

During the second half of the last century the Greek countryside entered the world of industry and commerce, which was followed by important economic and social changes. The Community of Thermes, as well as the whole Pomak area, did not follow these changes. The traditional world-view of rural Greece was deeply affected by the passing from subsistence to consumer economy thus

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<sup>7</sup> The Pomak does not constitute a 'language' but an 'dialect' and thus, in the text the word 'language' is not used in the linguistic meaning of it to designate a separate language but rather in the sense of a 'language code' used by this particular group of people. There have been two major efforts to record the Pomak language. One was made by the 4<sup>th</sup> Army Corps (*Δ' Σώμα Στρατού*), based in Xanthi. With the support of the Commander of the Corps, three Pomak soldiers, graduates of the Special Academy of Thessaloniki (*ΕΠΙΑΘ*), together with a small team of Christian Philologists (graduates of Greek Studies), also soldiers in the same Corps, undertook this task which included two dictionaries (Pomak-Greek and Greek-Pomak), edited in 1996 as well as a grammar book, edited one year later (Karahoca 1996). They used the Greek alphabet. Soon after this first publication, a Greek entrepreneur called Emfietjoglou, president of a large construction company which employed many Pomaks, especially during the construction of the big dam of Thisavros in the Prefecture of Xanthi, funded the edition of another dictionary and grammar by using the same team of Pomak teachers. Another effort to record the Pomak language was made by a Christian teacher, Theoharidis (1996a,b,c), who spent twelve years as a teacher at minority primary schools in the Pomak area of Xanthi (1964-1975). He has been criticized by educated Pomaks for not having acquired sufficient language competence for such an enterprise and also for having registered 26,000 words in his dictionary including also those taken from Greek and having been slightly altered. At the time that these lines are written, Ritvan Karahoca, one of the Pomak teachers who worked for the dictionary published by the 4<sup>th</sup> Army Corps in Xanthi, is working on an electronic Pomak dictionary which includes about 11.500 words (see <http://www.PomLex.com>).

changing the way of interpreting traditional value systems (Du Boulay 1974:233). In Thermes the traditional mechanisms of community integration and identity, deeply rooted in the Muslim religion, have survived and the viability of the community as a discrete entity with its own identity has remained rather unbroken. During the last decade, however, following the abolition of several restrictions of an economic and political character, which the Thermiots as members of the Muslim minority suffered for decades, the community has been facing the challenge of adapting to new economic and cultural patterns brought about mainly through migration. The traditional cultivation of tobacco has become costly and non profitable and the terrain in the mountainous Pomak villages has restricted the introduction of many other kinds of cultivation.

This paper examines how the Thermiots responded to the abolition of the socioeconomic restrictions, which affected them for decades and have been partly responsible for their being maintained on the edge of social and economic change. I focus on the way migration has affected approval of certain new values, especially in relation to education. I look on how people experience the duality between old practices, which started losing their meaning, surviving as ‘forms’ only (du Boulay 1974:257), and how these ‘forms’ are being challenged by the new rationale that the need for participating in the modern world brought together. Finally, I attempt to explain whether the rather slow pace of the community in accepting the state Gymnasium in the area is a form of cultural persistence, or resistance<sup>8</sup> to modern ideas, which are feared to threaten local traditional values, and to the dominant state, which is seen as perpetuating its ideology within school.

### **Migration, tradition, and transition**

During the last decade, temporary seasonal and long-term migration have helped to supplement scarce resources and contributed to the family income. In Weber’s words: “Going away from home [has been] the only way to keep home going” (1976:278). Temporary migrants time their departures with the seasons according

to the nature of the work they do. Construction workers usually have better job prospects during spring and summer months, while those working as dock workers or sailors depend on their contractors. Young men who can migrate to the cities or to foreign countries have been doing so in growing numbers. Those migrating abroad are often not accompanied by their wives who stay behind at the villages taking care of the children, the fields, the animals, the houses and the elderly people. However several among those migrating within the Greek territory choose to take their families with them. The latter are long-term migrants who have stopped any kind of productive activity in the villages and if some day they come back to the village permanently they choose other occupations than that of cultivating tobacco. Still though, their occupational options in the village are very restricted because Thermiot migrants, like the Etyolo's migrants<sup>9</sup> described by Nolan "do not learn trades which will be useful to them in the village, and so they are unable to offer skills which would compete with or alter established village activities in any way" (1975:578). On the other hand, with time, economic dependency for cash on outside wage-labour increases and villages lose their self-sufficiency. Besides, migration creates the need for more consumption goods, which cannot be fulfilled with local capital.

Part-time and long-term Thermiot migrants usually do not culturally integrate with the societies they work in. Their hearts remain focused on their home villages and their main ambition is to supplement family income. Nevertheless, they act as carriers of modernization back to the village by introducing modern conveniences into their houses: modern kitchens and toilets, as well as satellite TV and other equipment. And into the community they bring new ideas and aspirations for catching-up with the rest of the Greek society by taking advantage of the educational opportunities offered in their area. Du Boulay described the pattern of modernization in the less remote towns and villages of Greece after the 1970s as steadily increasing "whereby the world moves in before the inhabitants move out" (1974:236). In the case of Thermes, it seems that traditional patterns

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<sup>8</sup> The notion of resistance has become popular when talking about relationships between subordinate cultural groups and dominant cultures (see Reed-Danahay 1996).

<sup>9</sup> The village of Etyolo, is a community of Bassari subsistence farmers in eastern Senegal.

are still persistent and it is the people that have moved out who bring ‘the world’ in.

Migration expresses the inability of the local economy to satisfy people’s changing needs and aspirations and often signifies dissatisfaction with village life (Brandes 1975:56). In the case of the Thermiots, it contributes to the local economy while at the same time expands the horizons beyond the traditional village culture, especially in relation to education and social mobility, leaving however other traditional cultural areas rather untouched. The response of the community towards modernity has been developed in a dual centrifugal/centripetal way, quite similar to that described by Brandes for the village of Becedas in Spain, on one hand, “thrusting villagers into ever-increasing integration with larger surroundings [while on the other hand retaining village activities]” (1975:56-57). Among the Thermiots these two forces are clearly observed especially among the male individuals. Men, through migration, various economic activities and military service, come into contact with the world outside their familiar community framework. Nevertheless, when they return to the villages they enjoy a sense of belonging and the security that this feeling brings along. They move forth and back in two different cultural realms, thus becoming carriers of new ideas, which eventually affect their traditional value system.

The motives that led to migration have been various but primarily of an economic nature especially for those who are currently in their forties. Nevertheless, for younger men who are now in their late teens the bleak economic prospects and the narrowness of the village also in terms of lack of opportunities for having fun and enjoying modern conveniences, make them resolute in their determination to get away forever. Most of the male students of the Gymnasium in Thermes were happy living in their villages as students but for the future they dreamed a life in the town of Xanthi or elsewhere away from the villages. Several among the male school leavers rode motorbikes without a permit<sup>10</sup> and escaped to Xanthi to find jobs as waiters or shop assistants. Parents

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<sup>10</sup> The age limit for acquiring a driving license in Greece is eighteen years old.

often do not agree with their boys' leaving home in their early teens. They would prefer to keep them in the village to help the family with tobacco production. But on the other hand, they know that the village does not offer employment opportunities and tolerate their decision to leave home early, encouraging them to become skilled workers. After completion of their eighteenth year of age young men join the army and several among them never come back to live in the village. Priorities for girls yet are different and the village offers them the security they need to prepare their dowries and find their future husbands. They look forward to the religious festivities (*Bayramlar*) when young men return temporarily thus, increasing their choice possibilities. They do not dream of leaving the village on their own since this is still unthinkable of women, but of getting married to somebody who could offer them a good living (see also du Boulay 1994). Parents, as it has also been observed in other peasant communities (Brandes 1975; Reed-Danahay 1996), encourage their daughters to get married with someone who has a good occupation and is not a tobacco cultivator. A girl's mother, who was made to stop her studies after the Gymnasium to help her family with tobacco production, said once in the presence of her daughter:

“I told her that they<sup>11</sup> should have their eyes open to find someone who has a good job and not someone like us working with tobacco. Otherwise, she will spend her life like me and her grandmothers labouring over tobacco leaves. If they are clever they will consider this. If not, they will suffer for the rest of their lives. It is not enough for a woman to be good -looking. She should also be clever as to whom she ‘loves’”<sup>12</sup>.

Men, who migrate soon after their military service as bachelors, return to the village to get married as soon as they find a job. Those among them who were already involved in a relationship get married before military service usually under pressure from the girls who do not trust them enough to let them go away without a commitment. During the first years of migration most of them leave their young brides behind. This often leads these young women to depression since married life for Pomak women is very restrictive and demanding and not as romantic as they expected it to be. Men come back periodically usually during the religious festivities to see their families and their parents as well as have a

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<sup>11</sup> She talks about the girls in general.

holiday. Most of them express their happiness to return to the villages and describe their life away as being tough (*σκληρή*) and lonely (*μοναχική*). They often state that if they had had better occupational opportunities in the village or the area they would not have left. They blame the state for not having invested in the area and having left people “at the mercy of God” (*στο έλεος του Θεού*). As a middle-aged migrant describes the situation:

“There is nothing in the area to keep its people there besides their love for it. The state could have built a factory and create some opportunities for us. Nobody comes here. There is no trade, tourism, nothing. Only during the summer there are some old people visiting the ‘Loutra’ (Spa) but they hardly contribute anything to the local economy because they stay there and they do not visit the villages. The traditional cultivation of tobacco is declining since it is not profitable any longer. Young people do not like working in the fields. They have no patience for working the land. They prefer migrating as labourers and working hard often under very unhealthy conditions to staying in the village. As labourers they earn more money and can support themselves and their families (*να ζήσουν τους εαυτούς τους και τις οικογένειές τους*). It is bad to be away from your own people but it is worse not to have enough to live on.”

Those Thermiots who migrate together with their families do not only hope to improve their economic prospects but also to provide their children with the opportunity for education and advancement. In terms of their future and most importantly in terms of their children’s lives, several among them cast doubt on the validity of maintaining their traditional way of life in the villages. Greek language learning for their children is among their priorities and they recognize that in an environment away from the village they will make better progress. Even if they intend to return to the village some years later, they know that their children will learn the Greek language well enough to pursue studies at the Gymnasium and the Lyceum. During my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to get to know well three children who were brought up away from the village, two of them, a boy and a girl, in Athens and one girl in a very touristic Greek island. As well as their good knowledge of Greek these children shared some modern ideas about education and job prospects for girls and expressed their wish that their small community might accept that the girls should also be able to work and live

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<sup>12</sup> Meaning to whom she decides to consider as a prospective husband.

a more interesting life than the one imposed by tradition. These children have had the opportunity to compare life in their villages with life in cities and although they felt more secure within the environment of their own culture, they have often stated that life outside the village offers a whole range of ideas and opportunities more attractive to young people. It seemed to me that confidence in their own inherited way of life, which still maintained its validity, was not threatened but rather certain aspects of it were being criticized.

The Thermiots who migrated and later returned to the village permanently or those who visit their villages periodically often disputed with those who have lived permanently in the area and remained close to village life and traditions. Conflict is often focused on 'schooling', in relation to whether the Greek state schools should be trusted not to affect students' religious and cultural identity. The difference of attitude between those having lived and those not having lived away from the community is often quite obvious. Some of the former take the initiative to persuade the latter that the world outside the community is changing and if their children 'remain illiterate' (*μείνουν αγράμματα*) their future prospects will be poor. Nevertheless, the increasing involvement of the community in the national economy reduces self-sufficiency of the local economy and enhances dependence on outside economic agents. People realize that in the future their children will need to compete in the open job market, which for unskilled workers becomes increasingly competitive, due to numerous immigrants flowing into the country mainly from Balkan and Asian countries.

Education and job specialization of their children becomes a priority for those Thermiots who seem more prepared to accept socioeconomic changes. Du Boulay has suggested, that "the ambitions of parents for their children, and the way in which they accept their children's ambitions, is a sure index of the values they hold with regard to the modern world". For the people of Ambeli she has studied, she observed that, "every villager has an explicit ambition for his children to live better than he did, and this better life is seen exclusively in terms of a more urbanized and literate existence" (1994:254). Most parents generally share the same ambition for their children to live better than they have. Most of

them view education as the vehicle for their children to achieve a better future and encourage them to pursue Gymnasium studies.

Thermiots have been very hesitant in expressing openly within the community their wish their children to study at a Greek state school, such as the local Gymnasium. School preference for the locals declared ethnic preference, thus for years, under this kind of pressure people have been depriving their children of the opportunity to study at the local Gymnasium. By the time this attitude has started changing and at the time of my fieldwork the local school admitted a considerable number of students from the majority of the villages of the Community.

The way the locals responded to the existence of the state Gymnasium in the area has affected inter-community relations since some people gave priority to adapting to the newly formulated conditions of life, whether others seemed rather unwilling to abandon traditional cultural models and escape the politicization of public education in the area. Ties among these two categories of people have been loosening because the former often hesitated to express openly within the community their wish that their children, both male and female, integrate into Greek society, get an education and have enhanced occupational opportunities, since the latter would accuse them that by getting their children educated in the Greek state schools with Christian teachers, they jeopardized their traditional values primarily related to Muslim religion.

Despite evident depopulation, their villages still remain the focus of the social existence of the Thermiot migrants. Even for their brief or intermittent periods of village residence, they seem to adapt well and become incorporated within the existing community structure. People living permanently in the villages reproduce local culture, continue the village's productive activities and assist each other on several occasions. The migrants, by participating in the community's social and religious activities or life cycle occasions, reaffirm their relationships and define their status vis-à-vis the others. Thus, mutual bonds are strengthened among kinsmen, friends and neighbors.

The desire of the majority among the Thermiots to feel 'European' involved them in a duality which they seemed unable to resolve. People still could not decide whether breaking-away from traditional forms of life would be dangerous for the integrity of the community, and which aspects of modernity and Europeanization could be beneficial but not threatening to traditional beliefs. Du Boulay suggests that, realization that the preservation of certain beliefs and customs deriving, "from the dicta of a theocratic society which now no longer exists, has over the generations steadily been losing contact with the cosmology, or cosmologies, that first gave it birth, [surviving only as 'forms' from which] the intellectual content has largely been lost"(1994:257).

Young Thermiots have started questioning the value of certain traditional standards expressed in religious terms and which no longer seemed significant. For example, the traditional belief that girls should not pursue any further education after primary school has been strongly challenged by younger people within the community, often taking the form of a struggle against religious authorities and older people who viewed such a thing as a threat to the Pomak Muslim tradition. The first parents to send their daughters to the local Gymnasium in school year 1998-99 faced negative criticism from the majority of the community. These girls were no more than ten by school year 2001-02, but this was already a considerable shift of attitude from the traditional one, which considers that girls should only be educated. They told me that it has not been an easy decision for them to take because, although they considered the exclusion of girls from education anachronistic, on the other hand, they feared the community's and mainly the elders' reaction to their decision. They explained that the girls themselves kept coming to them with strong arguments, which could not be responded to persuasively. Claiming that Muslim tradition did not encourage the education of the girls was not a satisfactory argument, since children watch satellite Turkish channels, which present a rather more European type of a Muslim society, where girls as well as boys both enjoy rights to education, work and life opportunities.

With time, these girls graduated from the Gymnasium and demanded that they continue their studies at the Lyceum. Parents had to take another difficult

decision then because the Lyceum was quite far away from the Community. Another traditional custom suggesting that the girls should not travel any distance from the village without being accompanied by a parent or a close relative had to be broken with. For the parents of one of the girls, who were returned-urban migrants, this has been a rather easy decision, since they were both very positive about their daughter's wish to go to the Lyceum. For the parents of the other two girls though, the decision was not an easy one to take. In one case the parents, especially the mother, were absolutely negative and the girl did not go to the Lyceum. In the other case, parents could not agree with each other, since the mother was against whereas the father, a teacher himself, was quite positive. Their daughter went to the Lyceum for few days then she stopped going for about three weeks and in the end she returned back to school to complete only two of the three years of studies. Then she dropped out to get engaged.

Since one change brings another, the two girls who finally went to the Lyceum started gradually abandoning the traditional Pomak skirts and kerchiefs that all girls wore within the community, at least when they were at school. This did not pass without criticism and one day the girls were warned not to come back to the village if they left for the school 'uncovered' [*adbulena* (P.) *ακάλυπτες* (G.)]<sup>13</sup>, meaning without wearing their kerchiefs. The girls did not yield to threats and criticism but avoided non-traditional dressing practices within the community. During the summer months, married women who suffered working in the fields under extremely high temperatures wearing their black complete suit *karama* (T.) or *ferace* (T.)], also challenged the use of wearing such a heavy dress during both winter and summer. Taking it off would mean breaking traditional standards of feminine honour. Some women told me that certain practices are there only to make them suffer, since they are not 'rational'. Besides, tradition did not want married women to frequent public places such as coffee shops [*καφενεία* (G.)] and taverns, or participate in festivities and celebrations, which usually took place in the village square during the *Bayram* (T.) or weddings. Women sat at the sides of the square, observing from a distance the men (married and unmarried)

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<sup>13</sup> For the Pomak words (P.), for the Turkish (T.), for the Greek (G.).

and the unmarried girls dancing, eating and drinking. Only on one occasion in a wedding celebration did I see a married woman dancing in a group with other men and girls next to her husband. This woman had lived in an urban center for almost twelve years with her husband who was a labour worker and both of them were often critical of certain traditional village practices, which were restrictive for women. Contact with the outer world often intensified the need for picking up a modern system of thought and questioning those practices that involved unnecessary suffering or deprivation. Unlike the Anaphiot migrants described by Kenna (2001), who seem to be more committed to 'tradition' than those who do not migrate, Thermiot migrants are more ready to accept modern practices.

It has been suggested, that increasing modernization and urban contact may in some cases lead to a decline of ceremonial and ritual life and the diffusion of secular ideas among peasants (Brandes 1975, Redfield 1943). Migration often intensifies processes of secularization and modernization since it brings people closer to urban life. Besides the material benefits it may bring into the community, it has been observed, that migration contributes to the change of traditional and spiritual values of the people. Among the Thermiots, there has been a considerable change of attitude towards the way the community viewed education as well as some criticism of several traditional practices affecting women. This has mainly been the result of intense contact of young people with city people during a period of steady social change that the community has been undergoing. Weber, observes that quite often personal experience is needed "to persuade people of the usefulness of education. Certain migrants had learnt this, and we have seen how they and their children recognized at an early date the value of instruction and the profit one can derive from it in the great centers" (1976:327).

In Thermes, the community does not yet seem quite ready to approve of new values and break away from its traditional ones. Young people have argued that certain practices are anachronistic and incompatible with being citizens of a European country, but yet very important in people's lives. Several young informants claimed that, "until the elders have gone things will not change" (*αν δεν φύγουν οι παλιοί τα πράγματα δεν αλλάζουν*). Young Thermiots are often

critical of the elders. They say that they have ‘old minds’ (*παλιά μυαλά*) and they cannot accept new things. They tolerate their attitude though and they hardly ever become openly oppositional. The elders are those who, by living permanently in the villages, are very little affected by social and economic changes while at the same time reserve positions of control and authority over village matters and individuals. Young people pay respect to the older people and are very reluctant to openly criticize them. A young female student told me:

“The old people want to have control over us, and decide about what we should do in our lives. We respect them but they have ‘old minds’ and they have lived their life. Now they should let us live ours. They know little about what is happening away from the Community. If my father listened to them, now I would not be at the Gymnasium. Our parents some times are found in between. They know what is right for us but they respect the elders’ wish.”

Most of the male parents I interviewed seemed to distinguish the matter of paying respect to the elders and the fact that they wished to be able to decide about what was best for their children in relation to educational matters. They agreed that sometimes the old people cannot understand that the children will have to live in a more competitive world and education is very important for both boys and girls. As a father put it:

“We travel away from the village and see that there is no future here. Our children sooner or later will go away. Many have already gone. We must help them to have a better future. Old people have some ideas which are backward and we cannot always listen to them”.

Married women seemed to care more about the elders’ opinion and avoided provoking their criticism. A woman would be very easily criticized about her manners, clothes, character, diligence and industry. Any departure from customary traditional rules would be quickly noticed. “There are things we don’t like but we do because we do not want the old people to ‘talk’ about us. It is not good when they talk about you”, a woman said.

Community resistance to social change is often expressed as cultural persistence. The educational strategies of families in Thermes often reflect resistance to schooling, encouraging at the same time local cultural identity among the children. In general, family education strategies in Thermes seem to have started encouraging schooling since they gradually become concerned, in parallel to the reproduction of local culture, also about their adaptation to the changing circumstances and opportunities outside the community and within the majority culture. The process of adaptation has not been easy, neither for the parents nor for the children, since the new family strategies of education eventually lead to the physical detachment of the young people and the depopulation of the area. What is important for the Thermiots is to manage to control the pace of changes by resisting certain aspects of modernity introduced by schooling and migration. Their resistance, which is often seen as 'backwardness' by members of the majority culture, is rather a form of cultural opposition, continuously informed by their local identity and cultural values although these are also subjects to change. The elders suggest, "that people should do things the way they found them", this appeal though, cannot always find legitimacy among those young people who similarly to the Kalymnians described by Sutton, claim: "We must change in order to be part of Europe" (1994:225).

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