The vicissitudes of identity in a divided society: The case of the Muslim Minority in Western Thrace

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Scene number 1

It is Saturday afternoon at the Community Centers created by the Project on the Reform of the Education of Muslim Minority Children. Thirteen year olds, belonging to the Muslim minority in Western Thrace, are involved in a creative educational activity, taking place in one of the Community Centers. Such an activity operates on the basis of small group work, aiming at utilizing experiential learning, and promoting psychosocial development. The group offers the opportunity of exchange of ideas and feelings not always easy to accommodate. The youths are involved jointly in a common task that actualizes differences, highlights the value of each member of the group as a distinct individual, and encourages the exploration of those skills that are necessary for a collective endeavor. When the groups are mixed (boys and girls belonging both to the minority and the majority), the task is even more challenging.

As part of the task, the youths are writing down the rules they perceive as necessary presuppositions for smooth operation of their group: (a) we should not tease each other, (b) we should decide jointly, (c) he should listen to what the other has to say, (d) we should help each other, (e) we should respect our “double” (διπλό). This last regulation represents a very revealing Freudian slip of the tongue.

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First Image
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In Greek the words «διπλός» (diplos) and «διπλανός» (diplanos) sound similar but they mean two completely different things: the first signifies «double» and the second «fellow man» or
«neighbor». The children whose Greek is poor obviously «make a mistake». They meant to say «respect for our fellow man», «for our neighbor». Instead their suppressed desire was to employ the word «diplos» unconsciously invoking respect for «their double» which they feel is not being accepted and is an object of continuous negotiation.¹

Scene number 2

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Second Image

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The above self-portrait of a ten-year old boy was produced in the context of educational activities taking place in another Community Center. The face has no mouth, the arms have no hands nor fingers, the body is floating in the air, while at the bottom of the paper he has scribbled, with many spelling mistakes, «There was someone in the past who did not know his name», and at the top he has added the words «like a fool». The freedom of expression that characterises the atmosphere at the Centers has allowed the young boy to reveal the trauma minority identity has experienced. The obvious association is the proverb «children and fools do not lie». The name being a primordial trace of human existence, marking one’s identity is being questioned. One’s name representing in the history of human kind and civilization the symbolic and institutional recognition of kinship, ties and continuity is missing in the eyes of the young boy. It is through the symbolic mediation of the name that biological existence is transformed into social existence, and one’s identity is inscribed in the symbolic order through the recognition by the other and by the use of social practices. It is the name that renders one part of a whole and it is the name that gives one a place in succession. One does not exist without a name. Without a name, identity is disqualified, and the sense of cohesion in the present and continuity in the future is lost.

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¹ Slips of the tongue are not the influence of the ‘contact effects of sound’ but the influence of thoughts that lie outside the intended speech that determines the occurrence of the slip and provides an adequate explanation of the mistake, Freud 1982, p.94.
Political conflicts inevitably impinge upon identity. Damage to identity is a narcissistic injury bringing about painful feelings of shame and humiliation. When shame is evoked and not acknowledged, it may lead to an unending spiral of shame, anger and aggression\(^2\). In order to prevent or undo this «loss of face» experienced subjectively as death of the self, people will sacrifice everything to prevent annulment and destruction of their individual or group identity (Gilligan, 1997).

The above scenes place us at the heart of identity politics in Western Thrace, the theme of the present paper. The Muslim minority, the largest minority in the country and the only officially given minority status, were recognized as citizens in May 1920 when Western Thrace became part of the Greek state. According to 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and the Convention and Protocol on the Exchange of Populations (30 January 1923), the Muslim inhabitants of Western Thrace, as well as the Greeks in Istanbul, were exempted from the compulsory exchange of populations. Most of the Muslim minority population in Thrace has a Turkish ethnic identity, bearing the stigma of the “life-long enemy” of Greece. This accounts for a historically induced antagonism creating a divided society in Thrace.

Modern Greek society has been for historical and socio-economic reasons, relatively homogeneous. The wars between Greece and first the Ottoman Empire and then Turkey, and the neighboring Balkan countries, from the nineteenth century into the 1920s, were followed by a forced exchange of populations in the 1930s. This moved much of the Turkish and Slav minorities beyond the Greek frontiers. Subsequently, between 1941 and 1944, the Nazis exterminated almost the entire Jewish population of Northern Greece. Similarly, the Chams (Muslim Albanian-speaking populations), and in 1949 the Slavo-Macedonians were subject to persecution. Thus, after the end of the civil war in 1949 and up until the 1990s, when immigrants started to flow in Greece in big numbers, the Greek nationalists could easily establish the myth that Greece was a homogeneous and monocultural society with the exception of the Muslim minority being the \textit{par excellence} “other”.

\(^2\) Scheff (1994) in his theory of ethnic nationalism describes the relation between shame dynamics and power struggles.
The arrivals of large bodies of immigrants, reaching 10 per cent of the Greek population, placed multiculturalism on the public agenda, stimulated growing debates on difference and identities, and fuelled racist and nationalist discourses and practices. This is not an exclusive Greek phenomenon. The post-colonial multicultural, multiracial and multi-ethnic Europe presents challenges to societies that imagined themselves as homogeneous. Racism, intolerance, anti-Semitism and xenophobia persist, at both personal and institutional levels, in more or less virulent forms, in every single country of Europe (Ginsburg and Sondhi, 2000). It is estimated that there are between 17 and 22 million national, regional and immigrant minorities, refugees and asylum seekers residing in the member states of the Council of Europe, amounting to about 10 per cent of the total population. Fekete and Webber (in Ginsburg and Sondhi, 2000) indicate how, without exception, in every European state, minorities continue to suffer from prejudice, discrimination and violence.

While Western Thrace has historically always included several cultural communities, the contemporary cultural and political climate is quite different from that prevailing in the pre-modern institution of the Ottoman millet system. Present-day multicultural Thrace has emerged against the background of the culturally homogenizing nation-state, and a very different view of social unity. Thanks to the dynamics of modern economy, the minority cannot lead isolated lives and is caught up in a complex pattern of interaction with the majority. And thanks to democratic ideas, the minority has the right (even if in real terms this is not always the case) to participate in the cultural life of the wider society. The reconciliation of unity and cultural diversity is particularly salient in the field of education. Education in the millet system was not meant to fuse the different elements of the Ottoman Empire as in a modern nation-state. On the contrary, it was a mechanism to keep the millets apart. The big challenge in Thrace is to transform minority education to a mechanism that helps develop a common sense of belonging, while at the same time discourses regarding diversity, bilingualism and multiculturalism between majority and minority will not be set solely by the majority.

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3 Millets were the religious communities organized around the principal churches for example the Greek Orthodox, the Armenian and the Jewish churches in the Ottoman Empire, which constituted the mainstay of the Ottoman administration. They were rather autonomous in their internal affairs and regulated a good part of the lives of their members including the judicial affairs pertaining to the issues of civil society.
Having designed and implemented since 1997 a large scale educational intervention targeting the Muslim minority children (the Project for the Reform of the Education of Muslim Minority Children known by its Greek acronym as PEM)\(^4\), negotiation of identities inside and outside of the classroom was one of the most salient dimensions. In this paper I choose to elaborate on three aspects of identity politics: (a) naming and categorization of the minority, (b) negotiation of identities in the context of the «Project on the Reform of the Education of Muslim Minority Children», and (c) accommodation of cultural conflicts in Western Thrace.

**What is in a name in Western Thrace**

I do not intend to go into the legal identity of the Muslim minority of Western Thrace, product of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, and part of the wider pattern of the League of Nations to protect minorities from the changes in borders and states produced by the First World War. What I am interested in for the purposes of the present paper is to show how in the complex interplay of national, ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural identities of the minority groups constituting the Thracian minority, self and other naming and categorisation have held an important place so much in majority-minority relations as in Greek-Turkish relations.

Understanding the identity construction of a minority requires an understanding of the intricate interplay between the real and symbolic groups it belongs to. Individuals and groups adopt identity strategies, at both the personal and collective level, by means of which they assert their existence, their social visibility, and their integration in the wider community, while at the same time valuing and establishing their own internal coherence. The case of the Muslim minority in Western Thrace is a very good example of such identity construction arising from constant dynamic negotiation between minority and majority.

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\(^4\) The Project on the Reform of the Education of Muslim Minority Children was directed by Professors Thalia Dragonas and Anna Frangoudaki, Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, Operational Program in Education and Initial Vocational Training I (1997-2000); II (2002-2004), III (2005-2008), “Education of Muslim Children”, financed 25% (initially) and 20% (subsequently) by the Greek Ministry and 75% by the European Social Fund.
The understanding of how and why identities (of self or group) are negotiated entails a double perspective: this of psychodynamic processes, and that of their embeddedness within larger socioeconomic, historic and political context. This paper will attempt an articulation of the psychosocial principles by which individuals and groups self-name, self-characterise, claim social spaces and social prerogatives with the historical and political context within which such descriptions and categorisations acquire meaning.

Negotiation of identities as an intrapsychic process refers to psychological mechanisms that take place within the individuals themselves. Primitive emotions surface, especially those associated with the first experiences of groups, and have to be worked through. Unconscious psychological mechanisms, such as splitting, introjection, identification, projection and projective identification, are set in motion and show how the external world of other people and the initial world of self can flow into each other (Klein 1946; Bion 1961). ‘Us’ groups project unwanted aspects of themselves into ‘them’ groups. As a consequence the ‘them’ group comes to be experienced as embodying the negative aspects that have been projected onto and into them and through this mechanism ‘them’ come to be devalued and denigrated. This is not a static operation. It is a continuous process in the making.

While it is fascinating to search for intrapsychic processes of the categorising and the categorised individual or group, if we do not contextualise subject positions, we run the risk of attributing dominance or subordination to human nature, and thus inevitably justify it. As formulated by Elias (1994) the function of a difference is to make a differentiation between the ‘haves’ and ‘must-not-haves’. Thus identity is more than an inner psychological state, an individual self-definition; it is a form of life daily lived in the world of nation-states (Billig, 1995).

As a result of the millet system whereby ethnicity or origin have little significance, the Treaty of Lausanne describes the exempted population in religious rather than ethnic terms. It consequently lumped together diverse ethnic groups that had only in common their Muslim faith. Thus, while religious identity is recognized by the Greek state, ethnic status is not acknowledged. In the power game of minority politics, the largest and strongest group is that of Turkish ethnic identity. Smaller groups within this larger one are frequently omitted in the category shuffle, creating “injustices of recognition”. The Turkish language is taught in minority schools as the maternal language so much to Turkophones as to ethnically and linguistically Muslim Pomaks.
(Slavic-speaking Muslims) and to Muslim Roma, several of whom speak Turkish while others speak Romani.

Interestingly enough, no reliable official statistics exist for either the exact size of the minority or its ethnic composition. The last figures published by the Greek Statistical Service, concerning language and religion, date back to the 1951 census. All subsequent information regarding population statistics of the minority is considered classified material. This lack of official data is indicative of the attitude of both the Greek state and the minority: the first wishing to present smaller numbers, and the second larger ones. Thus, different sources provide different undocumented estimates that vary widely from 90,000 to 130,000 (Dragonas, 2004).

In naming the minority, the Greek state employs a double standard: when the objective is to underemphasize the Turkish ethnic identity of the minority, its religious status is invoked; but when the intention is to weaken its unity, then its multiple ethnic composition is cited. When a minority NGO is claiming directly or indirectly the national character of a group of the minority, it faces a strong reaction by the Greek authorities and the majority public opinion, both referring to “Greek Muslims of Turkish decent” (Tourkogenis). With respect to Turkey’s policy towards the ethnic composition of the minority, the more Greece insists on a single Muslim minority, the more Turkey claims a single Turkish one (Akgonul, 1999).

Concerning the Pomaks, there is a nationalist rhetoric emanating from various ethnocentric sources, attempting to appropriate their origin. The Greek state has been very ambivalent towards this group, who has been simultaneously subject to appropriation and exclusion. The self or group identification of the Pomaks has hardly been taken into consideration (Trubeta, 2001; Demetriou, 2004). Whenever local agents, and to a lesser extent the central government, decides to embrace the Pomaks, the Turkish position in the identity politics of the minority is threatened. As far as the Pomaks themselves, and to a lesser extent the Roma, are concerned, caught between various political fronts and opposing ideologies competing for their allegiance, they choose to remain silent. Their political consciousness remains to a great extent locked up within the wider Greek-Turkish conflict.

While the dominant minority group is disinclined to acknowledge the Pomak or Roma identity of the other two smaller minority groups, its permanent grievance is the unwillingness of
the Greek state to acknowledge its own ethnic Turkish identity. Minority grievances concerning the right to found associations with national appellation in their title (a right rejected by the Greek Supreme Court) have been taken to European Court of Human Rights (Tsitselikis, 2008). Recently the Court upheld that the title of the Turkish Union of Xanthi does not constitute a danger to the public order. The implementation of the ECtHR’s decision by the Greek authorities is still pending. The issue has become of crucial importance, mostly of symbolic character, due to its view to gain for the minority as a whole a national recognition as Turkish.

As insists Bhabba (1983: 24-25), with respect to the colonial subject, colonizer and colonized are constructed within colonial discourse; the dominant is strategically placed within the discourse for the dominated subject. How one chooses to address the minority, or what a minority member calls him/herself plays active part in the discourse of identity politics and is fraught with connotations. Depending on the ideological position of the speaker, the minority may be called ‘Muslim’, irrespective of whether its members are religious or not; ‘Tourkogenis’ (of Turkish descent) meaning that it consists simply of Greek Muslims who at some point in their history came from Turkey; ‘minoritarians’ as opposed to the majority; ‘Turkish, Pomak or Romani speaking’, in order to shift the emphasis from ethnic to linguistic identity; or ‘Minority Turks’, thus underlining their minority status in the Greek society, while distinguishing them from Turkish citizens by pointing to their Greek citizenship.

One thing is clear: the Greek state’s resistance to accommodate otherness and the mobilization of multifaceted spectrum of political, legal and ideological arguments.\(^5\) A key to such identity politics is the ideological construction of “otherness” that justifies and perpetuates domination. The process of subjectification, the ambivalence at work in the representation of “otherness” and the dimension of the dominant-subordinate relation, all stem from the fantasy of a

\(^5\) As claims Tsitselikis (2008) this unwillingness to do so is rooted in grounds that are resistant to accept fundamental premises that constitute modern European states, such as rule of law, prohibition of discrimination, tolerance for minority groups. Deficits do not only occur in Greece but in a number of co-partners in the construction of the legal and political European systems protecting human rights. He uses Estonia, France and Turkey as some examples of national legal orders where the minority questions seem to be interpreted under a strict national ideological orientation that dictates policies and drafts relevant legal rules that derogate from human rights standards.
pure, undifferentiated origin frequently documented in the modern Greek national imaginary (Frangoudaki and Dragonas, 1997; Gourgouris, 1996). The mode of representation of “otherness” is based on a mechanism where difference is simultaneously recognized and denied (Bhabha, 1983). While the Turkish ethnic identity of the minority is denied, when one brings up the similarities between majority and minority population groups, the difference is immediately amplified and angrily the Turkish identity is evoked. Bhabha demonstrates how this mechanism of simultaneous recognition and denial of difference works with both dominant and subordinate groups such that both are caught in an imaginary, conflict relation that precludes the recognition of difference.

The resistance to finding out that the “other” is the same springs out of the reluctance to admit that the same is “other” (Johnson, 1986). If the average majority person, the average Greek, could recognize that the minority, the Turk, is just like him, he would have to recognize that he is just like the Turk. This recognition is very powerful because it forces the similarity between self and “other”. And if the same, however fleetingly, is “other”, then the differences that have been constructed to justify dominant supremacy are unmasked.

Going back to the drawings we started from, it is not clear how the young boy whose identity is being disqualified will react. The face of his drawing has no mouth, hence no voice to claim a life with dignity. His arms are truncated, hence no hands to fight with and defend himself. Fanon (1952) talks about the broken up body of the colonized subject trapped in an imaginary constructed by the colonizer. Fanon concentrates on strategies to resist oppression that do not involve compromise or flight, while most analysts writing on aggression and violence agree that a major source, if not the major source, of hostile or violent acts is damage of one’s sense of identity (Bracher, 1998).

As regards violent acts, while the Balkans is a ‘powder-keg’ region where ethnic conflicts have often led to violence, interestingly there has been very little overt physical violence in Western Thrace (Yiagcioglu, 2004)⁶. Minority members in their history of almost ninety years

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⁶ It is beyond the scope of the present article to analyze why the minority opted for the specific strategies employed to affirm its identity, ‘occupy a place’ in Thrace and cope with the oppressions it was subjected to. Interested readers should read Akgonul (1999), Yiagcioglu (2004), Featherstone et al. (2010).
have in the main employed non-violent protest methods to the restrictive and discriminatory, often harsh and oppressive, measures they were subjected to. In their struggle to have their demands accepted by the government, they have engaged in actions such as mass petitions, sit-downs, school boycotts, mosque boycotts, marches and demonstrations, burning of school textbooks. They have also used the courts extensively, including the European Court of Human Rights. Yet they been especially careful to avoid the use of violence, and neither the government nor the majority responded, as a rule, to the minority’s struggle by overt violence. When at the end of the 80s, tensions escalated threatening to become violent and minority rights became an issue of international concern, measures leading to the improvement of the minority’s condition were taken, leading to a gradual de-intensification of the conflict.

Policies for economic revitalization were introduced, liberalization measures were adopted, such as a more tolerant attitude toward the minority’s access to the Turkish mass media, and the ‘restricted zone’ along the Greek-Bulgarian zone was opened up. Important measures for the reform of the education of minority children were taken, education being a thorny issue of increasing importance for the minority. The most significant measure was that of positive discrimination allowing a .5% minority quota to enter the Greek universities sitting for special exams. Some opposition from both majority and minority hard-liners notwithstanding, the measure set major developments in motion. The Project for Reform of the Education of Muslim Minority Children (PEM), launched in 1997, was to change the scene drastically.⁷

The Reform of the Education of Muslim Minority Children (PEM)

Education is the *sine qua non* condition for fighting social exclusion in Thrace. Social exclusion has been a debilitating social process that has created a progressive loss of autonomy, a loss of a sense of worth. It has had profound consequences for people’s ability to make decisions about the course of their own lives, or about the course of events for which they are responsible. Thus

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Mustafa Mustafa an exMP of Synaspismos (the moderate left party) described publically the Project as a landmark in the education of the minority that has changed radically what existed before (University of Athens, 26 Nov. 2010).
individual opinions are rarely, if ever, voiced. Bodies such as the Consultative Committee (Symbouleutiki Epitropi) or the Association of University Graduates (Syllogos Epistimonon Dytikis Thrakis), composed by the élite members of the minority, control both discourse and course of action according to a strict party line.

PEM has aimed at the social inclusion of minority children by confronting massive under-achievement and decreasing high drop out levels from compulsory 9-year schooling. The minority’s educational level is very low. A huge percentage of minority members have only had six years of elementary education. In the year 2000 the drop out rates from the nine-year compulsory education reached 65%, while the national drop out mean was 7%, and in 2003 only 2.6% of men and .2% of women were holding a university degree (Askouni, 2006). Minority schools are segregated, and on the basis of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and Greco-Turkish Protocols (1951,1968) have bilingual curricula. Turkish language and the supposedly ideologically free mathematics, physics, chemistry, physical education, and religion (the Qur’an) are taught in Turkish, by teachers who belong to the minority; Greek language, history, geography, environmental studies and civic education are taught in Greek, by teachers who are members of the majority. Despite the fact minority primary schools are bilingual, they are obsolete institutions, in the sense that none of the issues of the current problématique of bilingual education seems to interest educational policy makers on either side.

PEM has been a comprehensive intervention inside and outside the classroom, including teaching Greek as a second language, development of educational materials, extensive teacher training, creative activities with youths, and work with the community. What makes this

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8 The educational intervention consisted of (a) New schoolbooks and teaching materials: Forty new textbooks were designed at primary level covering Greek as a second language, history, geography, the environment and civic education. Supplementary material such as an electronic method for teaching Greek as a second language; a 6,000-entry children’s Greek-Turkish dictionary; interactive educational applications both conventional and electronic; and songs were produced. All the materials respect the children’s ethnic identity and are interactive, playful, colorful and ‘user-friendly’. At secondary level, new materials were developed for use in conjunction with existing ones covering Greek as a second language, literature, history, mathematics, physics and geography. The main thrust of the materials is active learning and the encouragement of critical thinking. (b) Extended teaching program: More teaching hours were added to the standard secondary level program. Trained teachers have offered afternoon classes to more than 1,000 students per year. (c) Teacher training: For an average of 120 hours per year, both
intervention noteworthy is (a) the duration of such a concerted effort, (b) the broad spectrum it covered ranging from classroom materials to the involvement of the community, (c) the twofold approach of top down and bottom up processes, and (d) its interdisciplinary nature. Underlying PEM’s core was the accommodation of demands emanating from a deep and defiant diversity; the empowerment of educators, students and community in order to challenge the operation of coercive power structures; and the encouragement of an open-minded dialogue between the majority and the minority.

PEM is an educational project, yet deeply political. Education is by definition a politically relevant category, being an integral part of equal citizenship as well as a cultural institution, since parents and cultural communities have a vital interest in it. All educational structures are rooted in sociopolitical contexts traditionally disempowering subordinated groups in many different ways. Since the minority in Thrace has been a subordinated group, its education is no exception. Wagner (1991) discusses two distinct forms of what he calls ‘subordinated group illiteracy’: ‘illiteracy of oppression’ and ‘illiteracy of resistance’. Both types of illiteracy derive from basic problems of access to appropriate schooling. ‘Illiteracy of oppression’ is brought about by the majority society. It is a direct consequence of the process of integration/assimilation operant in the public school and in the entire society. It results in the slow destruction of identity and cultivates mechanisms of resistance in the minority community. ‘Illiteracy of resistance’, although caused by oppression, is to some extent instituted by the minority group itself. By wishing to safeguard its language and

primary and secondary teachers were trained in bilingualism, didactic and pedagogic skills, use of the new materials, social and gender inequalities, classroom dynamics, identities, discriminations and negotiation of differences. Extensive teacher training material was also developed.
(d) Research and work with the community: A number of surveys and qualitative studies were carried out on students’, teachers’ and parents’ profiles; language use and language assessment; drop out rates; parents’ attitudes towards education; representations of ethnic identity. Eight Community Centers were set up, equally staffed by minority and majority personnel, operating a lending library; offering afternoon classes and summer courses, Greek classes for parents, Turkish classes for Greek teachers; counseling for parents and teachers; organizing creative activities whereby youngsters could run their own projects. Two Mobile Units traveled daily to remote areas offering classes and creative educational activities. A thousand two hundred children per year profited from the activities at the Community Centers. Regular meetings were held with the teacher unions, minority leaders, local administration and government officials. Open workshops and conferences involved the entire community. For a detailed description of PEM’s activities see www.museduc.gr and Th. Dragona and A. Frangoudaki (2008).
culture, and fearing assimilation, the minority turns against itself and rejects the form of education imposed by the majority group. At the extreme, says Wagner, the minority group would prefer to remain illiterate, rather than risk losing its language and culture.

Wagner’s analysis reflects in the most accurate way the stunted process of minority education. At the onset of PEM, 13 years ago, 95 per cent of the parents were choosing to send their children to the segregated minority school. The quality of these schools was (and to a great extent still is) very poor; a large number of students completing primary education were illiterate in Greek and functionally illiterate in Turkish. The drop out rate, compared to the national mean, is exceedingly high (Askouni, 2006). These figures illustrate both ‘illiteracy of resistance’ in that the minority chooses the poor quality school, resisting the education offered by the institutions of the majority, and ‘illiteracy of oppression’ in that minority children were failing in huge numbers. Yet the effect of the intervention carried out by PEM, the positive discrimination measure for university entrance examinations, and the overall social changes show impressive improvement in the above statistics. In twenty years time, attendance of compulsory school more than quadrupled, while that of upper secondary school has multiplied by 1,000 per cent. The drop out rate has gone down by half and the 5 per cent of minority children attending the state primary school has increased to 32.5 per cent (Askouni, in print). As impressive the above changing figures may be, the leaders of the minority fearing assimilation clinging to the minority school wishing to safeguard their linguistic and cultural identity. Minority children still lag behind and low educational levels characterize hugely disproportionate numbers of minority children in comparison to majority ones. The drop out rate of minority children is still five times higher than the national mean.

On the intrapsychic level, another way of dealing with threats to identity is the idealization of the in-group, the resort to a closing up as a means of enhancing feelings of false security. Collective faith gets thus intensified. The ideal “we” mobilizes collective action that surpasses individual weakness and averts destruction. “United we stand”, individual energy and enthusiasm get marshaled, agreement and mutual accord are cultivated. Kernberg (1998) refers to identifications with state power, political groups, church, all offering narcissistic satisfaction intensifying an insecure identity. Yet when the group stops being idealized, things become shaky and the promised comfort is not there anymore.
In the case of the Thracian minority, I suggest that the group cohesion is slowly loosening. The local elections that took place in November 2010 showed that the members of the minority are not anymore that keen to follow blindly the line spelled out by the representatives of Turkey, playing, as the kin-state, an overwhelming role. A freer civil society is gradually born. In following my above argument, the in-group is becoming less idealized, and is not offering the security it used to. Yet this is not necessarily a bad thing. It may be an optimistic development, by which passive subjects are turning into self-defined ones.

If we were to go back to the first scene, described at the beginning of the paper, whereby the adolescents were setting rules for the operation of their group and focus on the invoked respect for the “double” of their identity, we would find it squeezed between two opposing forces: one is the explicit or implicit intention of the majority group to assimilate the minority, and the other is the conscious and/or unconscious fear of identity loss expressed by the minority. It is this fear that propels the minority to resist morphogenetic changes. Identities are valued or devalued because of the place of their bearers in the prevailing structure of power, and their revaluation entails corresponding changes in the latter, says Parekh (2000).

Jim Cummin’s entire work focuses on issues of identity and power intersecting, both in classroom instruction and in school organization (Cummins 1996, 1997, 2004). He describes in a most convincing way the ‘slow destruction of identity’, brought about by remaining trapped in oppressive school and social situations. He underlines the ambivalence and insecurity to identity that marginalized groups often experience. Power relations and educational achievement are tightly connected. The causes of underachievement are buried, says Cummins, in the complexities of dominant-subordinated group relationships. In order to reverse school failure, we must approach this relationship in dynamic rather than static terms. Identities are not stable. They are an interactional accomplishment, and the challenge facing education is to turn relations of power from coercive to collaborative. In the context of the latter, power is created and shared within the interpersonal space where minds and identities meet.

To meet this end, PEM brought to fore important identity issues; claimed a position of knowledge embedded within communal relationships; professed a move from authoritative monologic to dialogic practices of meaning making in the educational setting; and aimed at raising
the understanding of the historical, social and political conditions within which education of the minority takes place.

Negotiation of identities in multicultural Thrace

Although contemporary multicultural societies are not unique since many pre-modern societies also included several cultural communities, their historical context, cultural background and patterns of interaction between their constitutive communities are (Parekh, 2000). In almost all pre-modern societies, cultural communities were left free to follow their customs and practices, while the modern state has required cultural and social homogenization as its necessary basis.

In contemporary multicultural societies there are, as ideal types, two top down government approaches towards the management of diversity: the ethnic minorities approach and the citizens’ rights one. In the ethnic minorities approach, represented by theorists such as Kymlika (1995), the right to be different supersedes the right of equality. Targeted programs to meet the special needs and claims of ethnic minority groups are provided. In order for minority members to be treated fairly, the state should accommodate diversity by giving effective control to minority groups over certain political and cultural affairs through special rights of representation and self-government. It is the institutionalization of collective rights that can provide guarantees against majoritarian oppression. In contrast, the citizens’ rights model, represented by theorists such as Dworkin (1986) and Rawls (1993), is premised on equality of all individuals before law. Ethnic identities are not recognized within the public sphere. In this model, one’s cultural, ethnic, religious or racial identities are private matters. The role of the state is to ensure that every citizen is treated as an equal member of society with the same rights and responsibilities. The aim is to ensure that all citizens’ rights are protected; that members of minority groups do not suffer from discrimination and are not subject to the tyranny of the majority.

The Treaty of Lausanne introduced two opposing directions: with the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey, it provided the mechanism of homogenization of the two nation-states, while, with the exemption of the two ethnic minorities and the protection of their cultural identity and their civil liberties, it secured diversity. What was the intention of the Treaty as regards the management of this diversity in terms of the two models discussed above? While the purity of the two approaches is often not retained in practice, the accommodation of the Muslim
minority’s diversity definitely does not fall into the citizens’ rights model. It also does not fall under the ethnic minorities approach, since respect of the cultural peculiarities of the Muslim minority was neither the product of the Greek state’s active policy. Yet the protection of the minority’s cultural identity was not a remnant of the traditional status of minorities in the Ottoman Empire either. There, the legal and social mechanisms contributed towards keeping the different millets apart and not integrating them, while the British policy-makers who took part in the Lausanne Treaty promoting minority protection did not do this to perpetuate their separate status, but to integrate them within their host countries in order to secure international stability (Aarbakke, 2000). By allowing them to retain their cultural identity and assuring their civil liberties they intended to facilitate their assimilation into their host countries.

The 87 years that went by since the Treaty of Lausanne disadvantages on the grounds of identity are still being suffered. From the 1990s onwards, while minority rights never stopped being a responsibility of host states, international standards were developed by the Council of Europe and OSCE for the protection of members of minority groups in Europe. The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, drafted in 1995, was such an effort for protection. Greece signed the Convention in 1997 but has not yet ratified it and continues to apply the standards determined by the narrow interpretation in the Treaty of Lausanne. A document produced by DG A2 of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs justifies the reservations towards the ratification of the Convention by claiming, among others, that it would provide a concrete framework premising further the cultural rights of the minority.  

In the field of education, the Treaty of Lausanne (Articles 40 and 41) granted the minority the right to “establish, manage and control at their own expense … any schools and other establishments for instruction and education, with the right to use their own language and to exercise its own religion freely therein”. It also granted the state the right to introduce the teaching, alongside with the minority language that of the official one, and demanded an equitable share of public funds for adequate facilities for instruction. In the years that elapsed since the Treaty of Lausanne, minority education underwent changes from an unstructured framework and

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less interference by the state to a standardized program and operation under the close eye of the state authorities.

In her recent dissertation on “identity, Justice and Stability: A defence of democratic justice for the Muslim minority of Western Thrace in Greece”, Mantouvalou (2009) examines whether the recognition of minority language and identity guarantees fair treatment of the minority. She examines the equal recognition approach of Patten (2003) and the language consolidation of Levy (2000). She shows that although the liberal multicultural approach of equal recognition creates some parity between the different languages in Thrace, it does not assure equality of respect for individual identities and equal opportunities for minority members. The disadvantage the minority faces is treated primarily as cultural, and the structural aspects of exclusion fail to be taken into consideration. The result is marginalization in the name of cultural diversity. This is what led Cummins, when he visited Thrace in the context of PEM, to note: “Ironically, the Muslim children in Thrace have received a bilingual education for the past 70 years, illustrating the fact that the language of instruction itself is only surface-structure. Coercive power relations can be expressed as effectively through two languages as through one” (Cummins, 2004, p. 10).

Levy on the other hand, following the language consolidation approach, argues that in order for individuals to be treated as equals, the state should not publicly recognize particular identities or cultures. Language consolidation is in line with the equal citizens’ approach and rejects the model of the bilingual minority school. According to this position, the removal of the institutional framework that led the marginalization of the minority for decades would translate into equality of opportunities for minority members and equal respect for their identity. The language consolidation approach, says Mantouvalou, disadvantages members of historically discriminated groups, because it does not correct the institutional biases that exist in allegedly neutral settings and the structural aspects of the discriminations they suffer; it just makes them invisible.

The democratic pluralist model is the third way between ethnic minorities approach and that of the citizens’ rights. It is not a top down approach. Pluralism refers to more fluid and open-ended processes of negotiation and contestation rather than fixed representation and recognition of specific categories (Bellamy, 1999). Decision-making is grounded on the ideal of equal participation of all affected members in common institutions. When members of minority groups exercise this right they should not be separated from the majority, but effectively integrated in the
decision-making process. Multiculturalist policies that separate the minority from the majority in the decision-making process may bring neither justice nor stability in a state. Applying democratic pluralism to language use, Mantouvalou resorts to the principle of democratic familiarization used by Valadez (2001). Familiarization is grounded on the democratic principle of equal participation. It requires of the state to give a fair hearing to members of minority groups in order to reduce internal and external forms of domination they are subjected to. Giving voice to members of the minority can increase understanding and empathy between the majority and the minority population, and remove the structural obstacles minority members face when they participate in the mainstream society.

The application of the democratic pluralist model in minority education in Thrace diverges from the segregated minority school. One has to respect an international treaty, as well as the will of the minority to sustain this type of school which they believe meets its needs. However PEM has held the firm belief that a segregated school, no matter how much better it may get academically, will not accommodate rigid dichotomies, will not promote dialogue between cultures, and thus will not encourage collaborative relations of power. The democratic pluralist model will be fulfilled by improving the quality of education offered to minority students at the state school.

An example of good practice towards democratic pluralism was the pilot introduction of the Turkish language, as an optional course in secondary education in 2005. This provision must be extended to all state schools in Thrace and to all educational levels. There are other such examples that took place within PEM. The creative activities between majority and minority youths offered the opportunity for negotiation of conflict, common goal setting, compromise and resolution of difficult issues of coexistence. Youngsters proved much wiser than their elders. The development of a Turkish textbook jointly by members of the Muslim minority in Thrace and members of the Rum minority in Istanbul, residing in Greece, was another opportunity for shared deliberation. It was the very first time that a joint product was developed in the realm of education. The staffing of the Community Centers was also something new in the Thracian society. For the first time, young people from both the majority and minority youths either administering the Centers, offering counseling services or working as youth workers, found themselves striving for a common goal. In all these efforts new values and new rules had to be developed. A new space was
required to create requisite containment of emotional and intellectual tensions, to manage individual and group differences, divisions and conflict and to foster productive organizational dynamics. The entire PEM’s venture was geared towards the reconciliation of unity and diversity, cultivating inclusion without being assimilationist, promoting a common sense of belonging while respecting legitimate cultural differences, respecting plural identities without diminishing shared citizenship.

Conclusion

This paper explored the way identity of the Muslim minority in Western Thrace is negotiated. The stimulus for this analysis was the drawing and the words of minority children while involved in creative activities in the context of the “Project on the Reform of the Education of Muslim Minority Children” (PEM). The youngsters who laid down rules for their group by resorting to the language of the unconscious, with a Freudian slip of the tongue asked for respect of their double identity—an identity of equal value to the dominant one. The drawing of the young boy revealed that he is moulded, inculcated and penetrated by threat to his identity. The menace has left him with no name, the signifier of identity, and no power to claim one.

The vicissitudes of identity were understood at the intrapsychic, the interpersonal and the sociohistorical and political levels. The complex interplay of national, ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural identities of the groups comprising the Muslim minority was brought to fore. The members of the minority have been caught between the ebb and flow of Greek and Turkish relations and conflicting interests; on the one hand their Turkishness has been nurtured on the basis of their kin status and, on the other, their control, their exclusion from the mainstream of society or alternately their assimilation have been orchestrated by the Greek authorities. The politics of domination in Western Thrace have led to a long-standing control, other naming and categorization in service of political interests superimposed on the minority.

The top down approaches in accommodating cultural diversity either give control to minority members over certain political and cultural matters that directly affect them or ignore ethnic identities in the public sphere but ensure citizens’ rights and premise equality of all individuals before the law. The first approach may protect specific collective rights for a minority but runs the risk of segregation, of building boundaries between the majority and the minority and of paying
lip services to inequalities of power within the minority itself. The second model has a moral standing and offers a powerful tool in Western society yet it may leave unnoticeable structural aspects of exclusion, enduring injustice and social constraints difficult for the oppressed to overcome and, therefore, to be empowered. Neither approach guarantees that coercive power structures in Western Thrace get challenged and that the childrens’ rights to a culturally sensitive and equitable education are secured.

The model of democratic pluralism is the only one that can challenge the disempowerment the minority in Thrace has experienced. This model treats identities as a dynamic and shifting nexus of multiple subject positions and provides space whereby identity options can be negotiated and renegotiated. It stresses the centrality of dialogic interaction between cultures, between the oppressed and the oppressor towards cooperation and common goal setting. Commitment to dialoging implies a willingness of competing parties both to accept certain modes of deliberation, certain norms and democratic procedures and the desire and intention to arrive at a consensus.

The aim of PEM was to fight social exclusion that has had profound consequences, preventing the minority, to make decisions about the course of their own lives or about the course of events for which they are responsible. Exclusionary and assimilationist educational policies, implemented for a very long time, have rendered subordinated minority members invisible and inaudible. Learning Greek is a necessary condition for minority members to be treated formally as equals within the state. Yet marginalization cannot be remedied only by acquiring the language of the majority. PEM placed a lot of resources in improving the teaching of Greek but also introduced measures to reverse educational inequality and provided opportunities towards identity negotiation and collaborative relations of power.
References


