Communities of Refugee Minors. Xenophobia in Schools, Symbolic Practices, and Social Inclusion

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Abstract – Greece is an EU member state that has been a country of origin of refugees and migrants for many decades. Due to its geographical location and its political and economic stability, it serves as a natural crossroads between the countries of Northern and Central Europe and those in Asia and Africa, which is why Greece has become a country of destination for refugees and a point of entry into the EU in the last twenty years. This literature review aims to describe the communities of refugee minors in Greece educational issues. Refugees are heterogeneous since they come from different countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan. Of these, 46% are men and the other 36% are women; it is estimated that of the 64,000 refugees who arrived in our country in 2016, 36% are children of which 17% are unaccompanied This disparity in the arrival of refugees in Greece continues to this day.

Keywords – Communities, Refugee Minors. Xenophobia, Schools, Symbolic Practices, Social Inclusion.

I. INTRODUCTION

Apart from the country's obligation to grant asylum to refugees, Greece is required to address the major issues that have arisen—and still linger—with the arrival of thousands of refugees, the most important of which is the identification process of third-country nationals (Papapanou, 2016). The housing and accommodation of refugees are another two of the most important issues; in response, Greece created the first Refugee Accommodation Centers in 2015 and 4 hotspots on the islands, 5 informal structures, and 42 accommodation centers in areas of Epirus in 2016. However, living conditions, bad weather conditions, and inadequate rations were some of the main problems that refugees had to deal with on a daily basis (Scientific Committee for the Protection of Refugee Children, 2017). These despicable living conditions persist today as the number of refugees in the camps—mainly those on the Aegean islands—is huge, a fact which ignites riots, demonstrations, as well as clashes with the authorities and among refugees themselves. A typical example is the camp of Moria, on the island of Lesvos; the population of the camp in the Reception and Identification Centre and, primarily, the olive grove around it exceeds 19,500 people. In these conditions, 300 women, mainly from Afghanistan, are demonstrating under the slogan "Moria is hell" and request asylum for both themselves and their children as well as their transfer to another camp, in a protest against the inhuman living conditions (Newsroom, CNN Greece, 2020).

With the massive influx of refugees in recent years, thousands of underage refugees have also entered the country either accompanied or not. It is estimated that there were over 20,000 refugee minors living in our country in 2017, of whom approximately 8,000 resided in Refugee Accommodation Centers and the other 8,000, aged 0-17 years, in UNHCR shelters (Scientific Committee for the Support of Refugee Children, 2017). The research gap identified by the data so far is what happens with the education of these children and how the state ensures their integration into the educational framework.

II. EDUCATING THE REFUGEE PUPILS

According to UNICEF (2017), the number of refugee children in Greece in March 2017 was 20,300; at the same time, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated the number of unaccompanied minors in Greece in March 2017 to be 2,100, of whom 92% were boys over 14 years old, mainly from Syria, Afghanistan, and Pakistan (Zarampouka, 2018). Moreover, according to Eurostat data, more than 2,600 unaccompanied minors sought asylum in Greece in 2018, a number slightly higher than in 2017 (2,455) and the third highest in the European Union after Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom (Newsroom CNN Greece, 2019).

The need for immediate inclusion of children into the Greek educational system was now urgent. Greece considers it a priority, a duty, and an obligation to ensure and facilitate access to education for all minors living in reception facilities, which is why Greece decided to enact a law signed by the UN General Assembly on 20 November 1989, Article 28 of which, in addressing the education of refugee children, generally states that basic education is free and compulsory for all children and includes provisions for equal opportunities to study (Mamasidou, 2016-2017; Zarampouka, 2018; Kremmida, 2018; Tsaousidis, 2019).

The Ministry of Migration and Asylum, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, is developing an educational program enjoying massive support from local communities—with a few exceptions, of course—the aim being to ensure the right to education, which a basic human right for every child, as well as their psychological support and gradual integration into the Greek educational system or any other European educational system in case of their relocation (Zarampouka, 2018).

III. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

It is worth mentioning that, of the refugee children aged 6-15 years old that have arrived in Greece in recent years, only 46% have enrolled in school (Ombudsman, 2017). Stress, psychological trauma, language barriers, refusal, and difficulty learning the Greek language are some of the reasons that have kept children out of school and lead to high dropout rates from compulsory education (Tomara, 2017; Tsaoussidis, 2019).

Therefore, in order to smoothly integrate foreign pupils into the Greek educational system, the Ministry of Education is promoting the concept of intercultural education since it is now widely held that children are unable to cope with the educational standards of the school grade that is commensurate with their age. In order to implement the framework of support for the needs of refugee children, the ministry has defined Priority Education Zones and established Reception Classes, Supportive Care Classes, Reception Facilities for the Education of Refugees and the role of the Refugee Education Coordinator (Documentation Document, 2016).

Reception Classes are propounded as an essential educational institution for the learning and social integration of pupils from socially vulnerable groups, while the Educational Priority Zones as an institution were created in 2010 and are directly related to Reception Classes: in order to establish one such class, the school must be included in educational priority zones with specific criteria (Kalogridis, 2017; Kremmida, 2018). Moreover, the purpose of the Tutorial Departments was to smoothly integrate foreign pupils into the Greek educational system. Their curriculum includes the teaching of Greek language and culture and lessons take place after school hours with a maximum number of teaching hours at eight hours per week (Tsaoussidis, 2019).

Finally, the Reception Centers for the Education of Refugees operate twenty hours a week (4 hours a day) in the afternoon, either in public schools or accommodation centers, so as not to burden the school schedule. Apart from the teaching of Greek and English, mathematics, and new technologies, artistic and sports activities are also carried out in Reception Centers and their main objective is to achieve the psychosocial normalcy of children (IEP, 2016; Anagnostou & Nikolova, 2017; Tsaousidis, 2019; Choreva, 2019).

In addition to the educational services created for refugee pupils, there are various other programs that have been implemented from time to time. Some of them are a) DIAPOLIS, which includes Greek language teaching, psychological support, and the barriers that may arise in the pupils' attempt to communicate with the teacher; b) POLYDROMO, which relates to issues of bilingualism among pupils; c) "mentoring" programs, where older pupils are systematically engaged in classroom activities with younger pupils and are organized by non-governmental organizations; d) the "Schools for Change" program, which carries out informal educational activities that address children's human rights in primary and high school grades (OECD, 2009; Moumtzidou, 2012).

It is very important, however, to also mention intercultural education schools that aim to prepare foreign pupils for their prompt and successful integration into the educational system; this way, they will come on equal terms with their peers and will be able to participate in cultural and artistic activities of the society concerned. Intercultural education schools could also be created through the transformation of public schools into intercultural ones, since more than 45% of them had foreign, returning, and refugee pupils. During the period from October 2016 to March 2017, 111 operating educational structures comprising 145 departments hosted 2,643 pupils, both primary and secondary ones, who lived in facilities throughout the country except for the islands (Zarampouka, 2018; Choreva, 2019; Tsaousidis, 2019).

IV. STEREOTYPES – PREJUDICE – DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM

People's need to preserve their national identity in every possible way stems first and foremost from their strong will to maintain their self-image and self-esteem. This resolve refers both to people's individual and their social identity, since they seek a sense of belonging to a social group, starting with the family. This forms the basis of social identity theory, which advocates that an individual's social identity is constituted through multiple acts of identification they perform within different social categories. (Avdela in Fragoudakis & Dragona, 1997; Dragona et al., 2001; Androussou et al., 2001; Cummins, 2005; Patsiaouras, 2008; Tsitsanoudi-Mallidi, 2017).

However, in order for the individual to be able to evaluate their belonging to a group with which they have identified, they have to make a social comparison with another group. Through social comparison, the individual does not only classify their "self" within a category but also attempts to classify the "other", whom they perceive as the bearer of a property, thus creating assumptions around their characteristics, predicting their attitude, and organizing the behavior of the "self" towards this "other" (Goffman, 1976; Gkotovos, 1996; Dragona et al., 2001; Cummins 2005).

In short, the individual engages in social categorization which simplifies our complex life and is a functional way of communicating with the "other". However, the result of this social categorization is stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, and racism towards the "other" because the main concern of every individual is to protect and strengthen their position against others who are disadvantaged due to particular circumstances (Vagena-Paleologou, 2005; Chasidou, 2015; Tsironi, 2017).

Stereotypes are generalizations that are unsubstantiated; they represent exaggerated and unfair descriptions, interpretations, and evaluations of someone "other" as a member of a particular social category (white; Young; Teacher; Asian). They also constitute a tendency to assign certain identical characteristics to groups of individuals and their function is to justify our behavior in relation to that group (Rattansi, 1992; Gkotovos, 1996; Dragona et al., 2001). For example, the perception that the Turks are a "perennial enemy" of the Greeks is a stereotype that stems from the historical events we have been taught in school and which attributes to the whole Turkish nation the label of the enemy, all in order to preserve our own existence vis-à-vis them.

Prejudice is said to be a specific category of stereotypes which is negatively charged emotionally and also characterized by a hostile and aggressive nature (nationalism; religious fanaticism; homosexuality). It is an attitude of the subject towards the "other", which is usually based on stereotypical thinking and predisposes the subject favorably or unfavorably towards it. While "stereotypes" tend to portray the "other", prejudice expresses the subject's readiness for a negative or positive attitude towards the "other". Prejudice reveals a person's psychological attitude towards someone else who bears an identity different from their own. More often than not, we see that when a person who is different from the rest makes efforts to integrate within a homogeneous group, this causes negativity and antagonism from the group members towards them (Rattansi, 1992; Gkotovos, 1996; Gerogiannis, 2006; Patsiaouras, 2008).

Racism stems from stereotypes and prejudice that individuals of some particular group hold about members of other similar groups, but it acquires its essential dynamics when stereotypes and prejudice lead to social discrimination (Tsironi, 2017). Racism emerges as a successor to xenophobia, since it constitutes a way of justifying both fear of the "other" and the interests that are linked to domination or exploitation. Moreover, racism is a global social phenomenon because it is present in every corner of the planet and at all levels of human activity, starting with migratory flows and the provision of labor to countries in need of cheap labor to accelerate development (Vagena-Paleologou, 2005).

In addition, racism is history-specific and presents itself in a different form each time, depending on its geographical, cultural, ideological and material location. That is, it appears under certain circumstances and in different forms within the context of a particular society (Wacquant, 2008). The contemporary form of racism no longer refers to the level of color, race, and gender, but

makes primary reference to the point where cultures are differentiated, where we see that "outsiders" are perceives as holding lower status than natives. On the other hand, discrimination refers to the strong differentiations which clearly lead us to the conclusion of racist action, where this "other" is treated by the members of a group in a way that reveals a clear negative attitude towards them because of their different traits (Vagena-Paleologou, 2005; Patsiaouras, 2008).

All concepts mentioned above—"stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, and racism"—are interrelated but not identical. Prejudice and discrimination resulting from negative stereotypes, such as racial stereotypes, for example, have more important consequences for inter-group relations than positive ones and therefore are the ones chosen to be studied. Finally, many scholars who have attempted to define the concept of "racism" consider it identical to the concept of "prejudice" since they state that racism is a race-based prejudice and therefore is characterized by extreme positions related to the inferiority of people belonging to different races (Gerogiannis, 2006).

V. Xenophobia in Greek Schools

Xenophobia is a phenomenon with universal characteristics, which research approaches by focusing on its individual aspects or manifestations, such as the local, national, or temporal level. The word "xenophobia" consists of two Greek words, "xenos" and "phobos", and as a concept encompasses the field of development and social dissemination of hostile attitudes towards ethnic minorities, immigrants, and refugees. It often refers to the collective negative disposition to accept in society new members who present different elements from those of the receiving society (Laliouti et al., 2017; Tsironi, 2017).

According to Yialketsis (2009), Alain Touraine explains the phenomenon of xenophobia as a reaction through which the contradictions of an increasingly fragmented and insecure society are outlined. He also suggests that xenophobia is also born out of an identity crisis, when this identity perceives threats that are not immediately recognizable. Furthermore, the issue of xenophobia is closely linked to racism and ethnocentrism; contemplating its historical context, we see that the history of the world has often been dominated by the rejection of the other, the "barbarian", the one that is different. Let us not forget that the Ancient Greeks considered all foreigners "barbarians" and suitable for slaves (Tsironi, 2017; Karakitsou, 2019).

Xenophobia, which is mentally construed as an elaborated fear, is related to the origin and legitimacy of something evil, always looking for someone guilty or else the "root of evil" (Vagena-Paleologou, 2005). The social transmission of fear suggests that a fear can be established indirectly, through observation, viz. without the person who is afraid having had a traumatic experience (Boulougouris, 1996). This fear comes from the violent invasion and imposition of the "foreign", the "other" on the "us", and is reflected in customs and habits as well as in religion, culture, and lifestyle in general (Boulougouris, 1996; Cummins, 2005; Yialketsis, 2009; Karakitsou, 2019).

Xenophobia is based on the ideology that humanity is by nature classified into many social categories, some as large as a social class, race, religion, ethnicity, gender and others smaller such as political inclusion groups, sports groups, and generally both organized and non-organized groups. Through these categories, humanity itself highlights the ways in which the "other" is distinct and inferior to the "self". This "other" poses a threat to national identity or public order (Dragona, Skourtou & Fragoudaki, 2001; Cummins, 2005; Karakitsou, 2019).

For each of us, the above social categories constitute in-groups, to which we belong, and out-groups, from which we are excluded. As members of either one or the other, we tend to overemphasize both similarities between group members and differences between members belonging to different categories. It is through this categorization that xenophobic ideology is born, and individuals who espouse it may engage in acts of violence and hatred (Dragona et al., 2001; Cummins, 2005; Karakitsou, 2019).

Besides, it is common in developed societies for the identity of a group to be based on the non-acceptance of the identity of others. In our case, these "others" are migrants, refugees, and ethnic minorities in general, who experience daily social exclusion from the dominant classes that seek to maintain their power by oppressing these minorities; xenophobia thus becomes one of the main obstacles to their integration in the host community, it affects them psychologically, limits their employment opportunities, and ultimately turns them into social pariahs (Patsiaouras, 2008; Tsironi, 2017; Karakitsou, 2019).

Today, globalization and multiculturalism are phenomena that put national identity in question and can lead to the collapse of the ego, which is why we seek to blame those who have inadvertently and by force invaded our everyday life and are different from us in some way or other (Dragona et al., 2001; Cummins, 2005; Yialketsis, 2009). While we live in a modern society where

technology and information are flourishing, we do observe the rise of xenophobic phenomena that take us back to the ancient era of "barbarism". This can be explained if we consider that, apart from being modern, our society is now open and dynamic, with multicultural contacts constantly increasing (Vagena-Palaeologou, 2005; Tsironi, 2017).

Although the phenomenon of xenophobia goes back centuries—in contrast to racism which is a modern, post-19th century phenomenon—we observe that xenophobic ideology still exists, triggered by stereotypes and prejudices of the past as well as by the strong power of public discourse and mass media that do not miss the opportunity to emphasize the negative elements of "foreigners", presenting them as a national threat and reporting every incident of violence related to minorities (Androussou, Askouni, Magos, Christidou-Lionaraki, 2001; Vagena-Paleologou, 2005; Patsiaouras, 2008; Tsitsanoudi-Mallidi, 2017).

The Greek educational system was until recently characterized as monocultural and ethnocentric in character; following the massive influx of immigrants and refugees in our country in the past years, it has changed and can now be described as multicultural due to the concentration of a large number of culturally diverse pupils. This inter-classroom differentiation is clearly documented through racist and xenophobic practices and behaviors. The phenomenon of racism is institutionally evident within the educational infrastructure of the school as regards textbooks, the curriculum, the administration, pedagogical practices as well as teacher training (Gkotovos, 1996; Tsironi, 2017).

Bullivant (1986) states that the current curriculum does not encourage, does not help in smoothing out these differences, nor does it foster or enhance equality in educational and life opportunities for children of different ethnic backgrounds. This is because factors such as the economy, society, religion, politics, and even race thoroughly influence and control these equality opportunities; we see that, within the now diverse society, dominant groups try to prevail in every way and at every cost over minority groups (Pechtelidis, 2004; Vareli, 2014).

According to the EUMC (European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, 2005), Roma and Travelers are considered the most frequent and vulnerable groups in Europe that face racism and discrimination in education due to their frequent movement as modern nomads. In Greece and in addition to migrants and refugees, several marginalized groups such as Roma, Pomaks, Gypsies, and the Muslim minority of Thrace are treated differently, resulting in reports of disproportionate numbers of Roma pupils in certain school grades (Patsiaouras, 2008).s:

Racist and xenophobic phenomena are observed daily in Greek classrooms due to the massification of pupils who speak foreign languages and practice other faiths. Racist manifestations have to do with racial discrimination, ethnic origin, acceptance of different languages and religions, while xenophobia is reflected as the fear of accepting the "other". As is the case in society at large, pupils perceive their foreign peers as a "threat" to their language, their history, their religion, their customs and traditions and, more generally, to their later development in terms of education. This is why several incidents of racism and xenophobia sometimes occur in the absence of teachers and other times are known and dealt with accordingly—or not—after racist behaviors of teachers or tolerance of racist behaviors of pupils have been recorded (Vagena-Paleologou, 2005; Patsiaouras, 2008; Citizen's Advocate, 2013; Laliouti et al., 2017; Tsironi, 2017; Kardamilioti, n.d.).

According to the results of the UNICEF survey (2001), conducted in Athens and Thessaloniki by Kapa Research S.A., racism and discrimination in Greece are implanted from childhood in primary schools, the teachers being the main culprits; at older age groups, there is greater tolerance due to the fact that there is better educational training (Patsiaouras, 2008). The same research on the opinions of pupils, teachers, and parents pertaining to the degree of tolerance and acceptance of foreign pupils in Greek schools bore another finding, namely that there is a strong relationship between the degree of acquaintance and interaction. This is attributed to the fact that a higher degree of approach results in a lower level of xenophobia between Greek pupils and foreign peers. Moreover, children tend to move along the lines of their parent's educational profile; that is, the higher the level of parent education, the more tolerant and receptive children are compared to those whose parents have a low level of education (UNICEF, 2001).

The Greek educational system, however, is called upon to actively participate in the process of shaping the appropriate conditions for the acceptance, recognition, and respect for cultural pluralism and diversity, all the while preventing the manifestation of racist and xenophobic phenomena (Tsironi, 2017). To achieve this, teachers and educators themselves need to receive education and re-education, if necessary, through programs specifically designed to address such phenomenal; such an approach will enable the teacher to help children learn the basics rather than aiming to improve their performance and grades.

Also need is a restructuring of the curriculum and the school textbooks to aim at understanding and accepting diversity and the new cultural reality (Patsiaouras, 2008; Vareli, 2014).

The reason why, according to Tarc (2006) and Slee (2006), is that educating and re-educating of people in general can help to confront racism and xenophobia and to regain our lost humanity and kindness. Education and the proper use of language can and should help to improve people's understanding and perception of diversity.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Xenophobia as a concept is often used and perceived as a negative attitude held by some towards people or groups of individuals who are somehow different from themselves or from the group to which they belong. Xenophobic attitudes are not new nor are they likely to disappear in the foreseeable future; society has changed and is characterized as multicultural and therefore different groups of people are confronted on a daily basis and are called upon to co-exist. It is therefore perfectly understandable why the phenomenon of xenophobia is truly a social problem (Harrison & Faye, 2005; Yialketsis, 2009; Karakitsou, 2019).

In the context of this social problem, education is called upon to play a very important role, with the teacher as the protagonist confronted with racist attacks in the classroom that stem from fear and denial towards anything "foreign". He or she is called upon to deal with them by maintaining the proper functioning of his classroom and by following the educational program prescribed by the state. Therefore, teachers who practice a philosophy of reconstruction believe that it is their duty to be social activists. With this in mind, they try to implement educational practices inside the classroom that promote all pupils without exception, both socially and educationally (Pechtelidis, 2004; Kardamilioti, n.d.).

First and foremost, what teachers should to be able to keep racism outside the classroom is to choose texts from suggested literature that promote interculturalism, given that many school texts continue to promote monoculturalism in the presentation of knowledge. Moreover, educational practices such as collaborative learning groups are also considered an effective learning tool, because group work creates a micro-society where individuals different from each other are invited to interact by exchanging ideas, experiences, and beliefs, the common denominator being the effective completion of the task.

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning that, over the years, there have been many programs aimed at teachers that act as manuals for dealing with xenophobia in the classroom. Through the implementation of these practices, teachers have the ultimate goal of teaching pupils to form a personal opinion and awareness of the issue of xenophobia and its consequences, thus respecting diversity.

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