

Being, Learning and Becoming at the Borderlands

**An ethnographic narrative research study looking at
educational experiences of the Western Thrace
minority group in Rodope, Greece.**

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Acknowledgements

When I started this long PhD journey I believed that conducting this research would bring about a positive change in a small scale in a small part of the world. Some years later, I see that this work has given me the title of Dr, some skills and character, great reads that changed the way I think and see the world, some life experiences that I treasure, many new friends and places to be. It has benefited me greatly alongside breaking me many times and has definitely changed me. Can these mini miles of pages of mine and others' change something in Western Thrace? Can writing from an academic desk change people's real, non-paper lives for the better? If it does not, what is it that we do wrong?

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Abstract

This thesis is based on an ethnographic narrative inquiry with members of the Western Thrace minority group in Rodope, Greece. The study contributes to debates about minorities and education in Thrace, investigating how research participants' ethnic and religious identifications, constructed as 'Otherness' have influenced their experiences in education.

Drawing mainly on the Bourdieuian theory of habitus and grounded on the concept of 'narrative imagination' (Andrews, 2014), the study explores the interrelations between being, learning and becoming. It investigates how participants' sense of self and belonging and their aspirations play out in their educational narratives. The analysis is guided by issues of access and belonging to various spaces, physical and symbolic distances and movement between spaces.

Data are drawn from three sources: narrative interviews with young and old people from Rodope, state archives from the 1950s and 1960s, and field notes from public events about minority education. This compilation of historical and contemporary, public and private narratives elucidates degrees of distance on the one hand, between the grand narratives of the Greek State and the minority group's formal advocacy networks and on the other, the largely unheard small narratives that circulate in private spaces.

The study argues for a holistic approach which takes conditions of being into the discussions of learning, while also opening up the understandings of what counts, for group members, as learning and learning spaces. Moreover, the thesis contributes to the unpacking of the notion of 'minority': it problematises the way the term is used in public discourse, and elucidates aspects of intra-group heterogeneity and power hierarchies. By breaking out of the normalised discourses and agendas the research suggests that the small stories might bring a change in the established way of doing minority politics in Thrace.

In loving memory of Zoe Stella Curry

“Αυτά που λένε τα βιβλία σχέση δεν έχουν με την Θράκη. Μέσα στο ένα τσουβάλι ρύζι θα έχει και μαύρο. Υπάρχει μια κινέζικη παροιμία: Μέσα στο άσπρο ρύζι να μην έχει άσπρη πέτρα, εκεί είναι ο κίνδυνος” (Lokman)

“What books say have no relation to what is in Thrace. In a sack of rice, you might find some black too. A Chinese proverb says that the danger is to find a white stone in white rice” (Lokman)

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List of Abbreviations:

AA: Ascendant Number of folder (used in archival references)

AP: Registry number (used in archival references)

EP: Confidential registry number (used in archival references)

CCT: Coordinating Council of Thrace

ELIAMEP: Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy

ELTA: Hellenic Post

EPATH: Special Pedagogic Academy of Thessaloniki

ESYE: Hellenic Statistical Service

EYP: Greek intelligence Service (former KYP)

GAK: General Archives of the State

KEP: Citizens' Service Centre

KYP: State Intelligence Service

MFA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MIT: Turkish National Intelligence Organisation

MOK: Educational Association of Komotini

MP: Member of Parliament

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

PEM: Project for Reform in the Education of Muslim Children

SYRIZA: Coalition of Radical Left

TEI: Technological Educational Institution

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Introduction

This thesis aims to shed light into the journeys of people, who belong to an ethnic and religious minority group, into being, learning and becoming. This is a story of mainly ‘minority’ voices talking about the way that otherness and education interrelate in informing understandings of self and belonging. The setting is Rodope, a prefecture of Western Thrace in Greece where Christians and Muslims, Greeks and Turks live together and apart.

The question that this research sought to answer is:

- ◆ How do experiences in formal education (learning) for members of the minority group in Western Thrace interrelate with their sense of identity (being) and their capacity to aspire (becoming)?

There have been some important studies so far regarding education and the minority group in Thrace. The contribution of the current study to these debates is that it zooms out from the big picture and focuses on the protagonists. It explores personal stories of ordinary people in Rodope, while maintaining a focus on how these relate to the community master narratives in the area of both minority and majority. The thesis is a result of a year-long ethnographic narrative inquiry that I, as a majority Greek, non-Muslim, non-Thracian researcher conducted based in Komotini, the capital town of Rodope, from September 2012 until October 2013. The focus both during my data collection and analysis has been stories (I use the term interchangeably with narratives). I looked for them in three different domains: public with my focus being on the collective, private where I explored the personal, and historical archives where I traced the way the state gradually built its national narrative while designing, mostly in secret, policies for the minority group. In the thesis, I weave together parts of all three narrative domains.

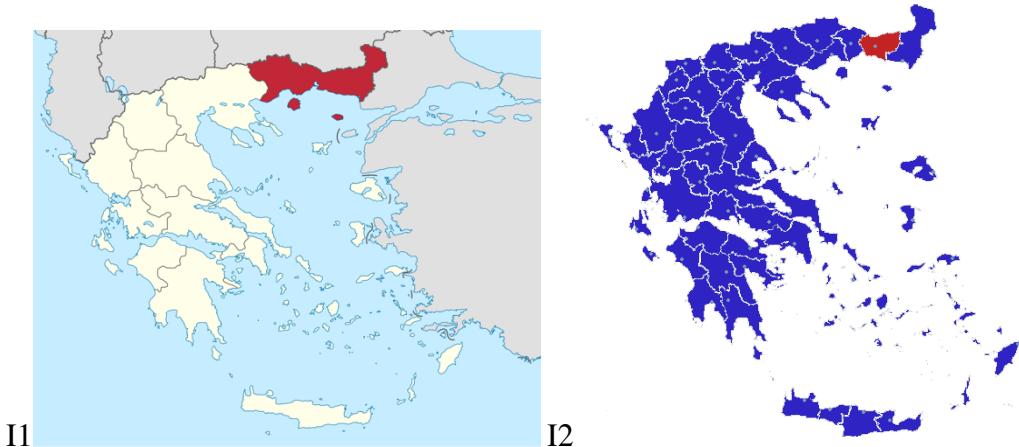
Western Thrace is at the North-Eastern Greece, bordering at North with Bulgaria and in the East with Turkey. It consists of three administrative prefectures: Xanthi, Rodope and Evros and is the home to the only group in Greece that has an official status as a minority. For the Greek authorities the official name is the “Muslim” minority group, for the dominant minority elite, this is the “Turkish” minority group whereas many researchers have called it “TurkoMuslim”.

These names indicate that Islam and Turkish-ness are the major axes of otherness and ‘minority’ identity in Western Thrace. ‘Muslim’ is a term that connotes the Greek State’s negation of the Turkish identification of the group while it takes by default that religion is the main identification for the group’s members. The name ‘Turkish’ although fair since it is chosen by most people from the group to emphasise their main identification; is not quite precise as it conceals a number of people in the group who do not necessarily identify themselves as Turks; namely those who identify as Pomaks or those who maintain their Romani identity. Both names although practical and telling entail to a smaller or larger extent some sort of oppression and negation which is not surprising for any attempt of labelling a large number of people externally. I use the term Western-Thracian minority group aiming to deload the name from its highly politicised and sensitive connotations and avoid the binaries Christian -Muslim, Greek-Turkish.

My time in the field pointed clearly to adopting a spatial/geographical language as an alternative system of social mapping. It was all about the border-rivers, the mountains, the plain, the roads, the passages, the access and the non-access, the conditional or partial access. It was all about boundaries; linguistic, geographical, social, physical, imagined, feared or tangible. It was all about belonging and adaptability.

“Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition” (Anzaldua, 1987: 3)

I see Western Thrace as a borderland taking its character by two ‘hard’ aquatic external borders and various ‘soft’ internal boundaries of various textures. In its Eastern end, lies the physical border; the river Evros/ Maritsa (depending from which bank one names it) separating Greeks from Turks; Greece from Turkey. It is a space where you can feel the transition from one to the other physically. A series of symbols and rituals mark the transition, also a large number of Thracian stories with great importance to their owners/tellers have taken place here. In its West end, there is another physical border, softer than the previous one; the river Nestos separating Western Thrace as a distinct region from the rest of Greece. A transition point from the ‘abnormality’ of the borderland to the normality of the mainland. The Thracian borderland is also physically defined from North and South by the Rodope mountain range and the Thracian Sea respectively.



I1. Western Thrace in red (From commons.wikimedia.org)
 I2. Rodope in red (From mycosmos.gr)

The minority group was created as a minority in Greece following the GrecoTurkish war in 1922 and the Peace Conference in Lausanne where it was agreed that a compulsory exchange of populations would take place between the two countries. However, Greeks from Istanbul and Muslims from Western Thrace were exempted from the forced dislocation and remained as minority groups under the protection of the Lausanne Treaty (1923).

The number of the Western Thrace minority members is estimated to be about 100,000. The last national census in Greece that collected information about

religion and mother-tongue was in 1951. Ever since, as Askouni (2006: 42) underlines drawing on the methodological report of the then ‘National Statistical Service of Greece’ (*EΣΥΕ*) on its 1961 census these elements were presented by the authorities as insignificant due to the “high homogeneity of the population”. By contrast, the confidential state archives of the time suggest that the authorities were extremely concerned to know these numbers while preventing them from becoming public knowledge and so in 1961 a secret unofficial census was organised in Thrace.¹

According to the 1951 official report, the minority group counted 105,092 members “making up approximately 1/3 of the population in Western Thrace” (Askouni, 2006: 44). More recently, in 2008, an official Greek report to the United Nations² estimated the number “around 100,000”. Rodope, the prefecture where I conducted the study, has the highest concentration of the minority group that makes numerically the majority in the area. According to the 1951 census, 55% of the minority resided in Rodope (making up 56% of the Rodope overall population), 38% resided in Xanthi (making up 45% of the Xanthi overall population) and only 6% in Evros (4% of the overall population in that prefecture). A study by the Academy of Athens (1995) does not show significant changes in this composition in the recent years.

The thesis will touch upon various aspects of the intra-group diversity, but it’s necessary to refer here to the three most apparent ethnic and linguistic sub-groups. Those who identify as Turks consist the most numerous and dominant part of the minority population whereas over the last decades more and more members of the group through enculturation speak Turkish from their early years and/or develop a respective identity. Then there are those who identify as Pomaks, a transnational Slavophone group, that in Greece its traditional residential zone has been the mountainous areas by the Bulgarian borders. The third sub-group consists of Roma people. All three sub-groups have further sub-

¹ AA 104, 52/7 CCT, 52d meeting, 15/5/1967 p.6

² Greece’s Periodic Report on the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (2008) available at <http://www.ohchr.org> accessed 2/5/2016

divisions. For example, in Komotini only there are two sub-groups of Roma that live in two different sub-urban zones. Pomaks, on the other hand, might be subdivided to the mountainous or ‘pure’ Pomaks and the urban Pomaks (Aarbakke, 2012). Here the lines are blurred since many families are said to have been Turkified in the course of time especially through internal migration (Demetriou, 2004). The existence or not of these three different intra-group identities and the very reference to ‘sub-groups’ is highly contested since there is a political interest around these, as well as a vast complexity over how these different belongings and identifications have evolved and been negotiated. In the nationalist framework of politics, it seems that the more the Greek state denies the Turkish character of the group, the more the group’s Turkish elite denies any ethnic heterogeneity within.

Because living in Western Thrace, for the largest part of the last century, has been in great uncertainty due to various nationalist clashes, wars and shifts in its governance, investing in formal education was not a regular practice. After the consolidation of peace in the region at the end of the 1940s, the education of the group started getting higher in the state’s agenda, but from a nationalist rather than a pedagogic point of interest. Until the 1990s, the state followed an overall discriminatory and oppressive policy against the group which reflected directly in the conditions that this created for the education of the minority. Educational attainment has been extremely low with high drop-out rates especially for girls and mountainous residents (Askouni, 2006). As regards access to higher education, this was a privilege for very few from the group that pursued it mainly in Turkey. The situation started changing slowly when the state abolished the overt discrimination against the group and from the mid-nineties started taking a series of affirmative actions to address the social inequality in the region. The change of policies came with the realisation on behalf of the state officials that discrimination only “pushed the minority in the arms of Turkey”, the pre-eternal Greece’s foe.

While in Komotini, I was taking part, observing and noting down stories that would unfold in various public spaces of the town. In parallel to recording the

public stories I would witness (and co-construct through my coding of them), I was creating a safe private space where I was inviting individuals to narrate in their terms their stories of ‘education’ (equally co-constructed as the stories were told for a specific purpose and were addressed to a specific listener, me). Meanwhile, I was researching the stories in print at the historical state archives (GAK) of Rodope through the, most often confidential, voice of authorities from the late 1940s until the end of the 1960s. This was a one-way narration in a quiet and dusty space where I was the uninvited reader of stories that were not meant to be told to me or the general public.

Theoretically, my analysis takes the lead from Bourdieu (1977, 1990) and his conceptual framework around ‘habitus’ and symbolic power that helped me identify in the narratives the way conditions of being and experiences in learning in Thrace interrelate shaping up meanings for people in the minority group regarding their identities, belongings and aspirations. A constructivist approach is taken regarding identities drawing mainly on Jenkins (1996) and Yuval-Davis (2006). Moreover, the concept of the “capacity to aspire” (Appadurai, 2004) in combination with the concept of “narrative imagination” (Andrews, 2014) and the broader Bourdiean framework allowed me to explore further the way experiences of being and learning enabled or disabled the aspiration of various becomings.

A spatial filter has been applied to the analysis of the data and reflects in the thesis’ structure. The first chapter looks at the marginal geographies of Rodope, physical and symbolic, aiming to give an intro to the story that allows the heterogeneous character of the group and the multiplicity of experiences within it to emerge. With this in mind, the second and third chapters take respectively a focus into the minority and majority schooling spaces in Rodope exploring the stories they make both in public discourse and in personal narratives of experience. The last chapter of analysis, the exodus, follows the research participants out of Thrace and looks at their experience of outer crossing the borderland and in crossing higher education both in Greece and Turkey.

Chapter 1

Context

“Life here is a big joke. I just laugh when I see all this. It is a big comedy. Comedy and they cry” (Burak).

Burak is a man in his forties who was born and grew up in Rodope knowing that he is ‘minority’. In the quote above he summarised in a few words how he perceives life in Thrace as a big joke (“*i zoi edo einai mia megali plaka*”). He can do nothing, but laugh, yet, there is a deep pain within this ‘comedy’, “Comedy and they cry”. I chose his quote for two reasons. Firstly, because I think it reflects very well the situation in Rodope and all its surrealism, as I felt it myself during fieldwork. Second, because this seemingly innocent differentiation between how things are named or discussed (“comedy”, “big joke”) and how things are felt or known deep down (“and they cry”) is for me almost the gist of the Rodopean context. The distance between what is said in the air, usually a euphemism and what is kept silent inside, usually something that hurts.

The chapter has three sections but is divided into two main parts. The first part looks at how the relations of the group with the Greek state have evolved over the decades defining both the conditions of existence for the group as well as its access to educational opportunities. In Bourdieu’s theory of habitus (1977: 72), “the structures constitutive of a particular type of environment” or put it simply the “conditions of existence” (ibid.) play a paramount role in the way people who live in these form their dispositions, representations and practices. The first part, therefore serves the need to outline the particular type of living and learning environment for the group. It does this starting from the early fifties until nowadays. Chapters four and five will continue the discussion started here.

The second part tries to achieve the same aim, through different means. For building it, I draw mainly on the state historical archives and some contemporary voices from both minority and majority Komotinians. The focus moves to the relations between the two communities (minority and majority) and the politics of memory and belonging. Two minority men in their mid-thirties, Cenk and Melik, and Lokman, a minority Komotinian man feature in these sections and the reader will meet them again later in the thesis³. I present their voices here because their views come strongly also later in the thesis and because all three felt very passionate about issues of memory and belonging regarding their lives in Rodope providing insightful accounts.

The starting point for the second section is the symbolic legacy of the Treaty of Lausanne and the way the two communities have developed primary aspects of their collective identities around it. The third section will describe the changes through the years that the first section outlined through participants' voices looking at how nationalism has informed intercommunal relations. As Andrews (2014: 87) argues, "Stories always exist in relation to other stories, of individuals and communities, and they rely upon these bonds in order to be 'tellable'". Understanding better the way that two communities have formed their collective memories and narratives will provide a context for understanding better the discussion especially in chapters six and seven that explore the personal stories minority people built about their interactions with the majority as well as the way they experienced mobility across minority-majority and Thracian-non Thracian spaces.

³ Cenk's commentary comes again in chapters six and seven. An important personal story of his is presented in chapter six (pp.186, 192). Lokman's personal story comes in chapter six (pp. 186, 192) and appears also in pp. 32, 34, 51

1.1 Learning and Being for the Western Thracian minority

1.1.1 The foundations of Minority Education

Compulsory education in Greece consists of six years primary schooling (*dimotiko*) and three years elementary schooling (*gimnasio*) whereas from 2007 (Law 3518/2006) kindergarten became compulsory too. After *gimnasio* one may choose to continue to high-school (*likio*) which can be general or technical. Pupils who wish to enter higher education opt for the general high-school. At the end of it there are general national exams (*panelladikes*) that pupils sit in and according to their performance they may succeed or not to university. Every pupil needs to fill in beforehand a list with the university schools s/he wishes to get to in order of preference. The way this list is compiled, along with every university school's minimum entry standards and pupils' performance in the exams define the outcome. There is a long lasting tradition in Greece to attend afternoon classes with private tutors called *frodistiria*. In *frodistiria* students pay private tutors to repeat the lessons they had at school. These extra lessons are meant to prepare pupils better for the *panelladikes* exams as well as to equip weaker pupils so that they do not fail at school and help them improve their marks.

According to the Greek constitution (Article 16 §2) a principal mission of formal education, amongst others, is to develop the “ethnic and religious consciousness” that define the identity of a Greek. This statement therefore poses a challenge for pupils in Greek formal education who have a different ethnic and religious consciousness from the norm that is implied in the Constitution. In Western Thrace along with the mainstream formal education that follows the national standard there is also provision of ‘minority education’.

The right to minority education exclusively in the region of Western Thrace has been stipulated in 1923 by the Treaty of Lausanne under its third section, ‘Protection of the minorities’, which concerned the exempted populations from

the forced exchange. Minority schools are meant to serve the right of the minority populations to have primary education in their own language and to exercise freely their religion in these institutions. Articles 40 and 41 of the Treaty describe the rights of the ‘non Moslem’ minorities in Turkey and article 45 specifies that the same apply in Greece for the ‘Moslem minority’.

ARTICLE 40.

Turkish nationals belonging to non-Moslem minorities shall enjoy the same treatment and security in law and in fact as other Turkish nationals. In particular, they shall have an equal right to establish, manage and control at their own expense, any charitable, religious and social institutions, any schools and other establishments for instruction and education, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their own religion freely therein.

ARTICLE 41.

As regards public instruction, the Turkish Government will grant in those towns and districts, where a considerable proportion of non-Moslem nationals are resident, adequate facilities for ensuring that in the primary schools the instruction shall be given to the children of such Turkish nationals through the medium of their own language. This provision will not prevent the Turkish Government from making the teaching of the Turkish language obligatory in the said schools. In towns and districts where there is a considerable proportion of Turkish nationals belonging to non-Moslem minorities, these minorities shall be assured an equitable share in the enjoyment and application of the sums which may be provided out of public funds under the State, municipal or other budgets for educational, religious, or charitable purposes. The sums in question shall be paid to the qualified representatives of the establishments and institutions concerned.

ARTICLE 45.

The rights conferred by the provisions of the present Section on the non-Moslem minorities of Turkey will be similarly conferred by Greece on the Moslem minority in her territory.

I3. From the Treaty of Lausanne

Muslim elementary schools have been functioning in Western Thrace since the Ottoman times when the various religious communities (*millets*) were governing their own schools. Today approximately 179 minority primary schools operate in Thrace. Taking into account that they are dispersed in rural areas, they usually cater for a small number of pupils and most often are multigrade of two or sometimes three classrooms. As regards minority secondary schools there are only two: *Celâl Bayar* in Komotini and *Muzaffer Salihoglu* in Xanthi founded in 1952 and 1964 respectively. In addition, there are two madrases (Islamic schools) one in Komotini (re-opened in 1049) and one in *Ehinos* (re-opened in 1956). These schools have nowadays equal status to other Greek Christian religious secondary schools. Madrasas have been functioning historically in the

region. In 1920s there were 16 madrases in Thrace (Aarbakke, 2000: 169), originally for providing religious personnel.

Although a year in kindergarten has become part of the now 10 years' compulsory education in Greece there is not any formal provision for children from the minority other than the Greek kindergartens. The Greek authorities do not want to establish bilingual structures in the model of minority education and do not authorise the establishment of private bilingual kindergartens by the minority associations either. Minority schools are bilingual, the curriculum is divided in subjects taught in Greek delivered by Christian teachers⁴ and subjects taught in Turkish delivered by Muslim teachers. The two languages are also taught. The details of minority schools' operation have been gradually developed according to the Treaty of Lausanne and later bilateral agreements between Greece and Turkey (Cultural Agreement of 1951, the Educational protocol of 1968, the agreement of 2000). Two main laws regulated the operation of the schools; one was conferred in 1954 and the other in 1972. It took several decades until the curriculum was standardised across all minority schools in Western Thrace. In 1930, for example, Greek was taught in only 30 out of 305 minority schools and became obligatory only in 1937 (Aarbakke, 2000:132). By 1969 in 30 minority schools the whole curriculum was still taught only in Turkish (Tsitselikis, 2012: 473).

According to Merry (2006: 108) International Law apart from its "capacity to define identity" is often localised in its application: "As ideas from transnational sources travel to small communities they are typically vernacularised or adapted to local institutions and meanings" (Merry, 2006b: 39). An expression of the vernacularisation of 'Lausanne' has been the principle of reciprocity which in a few words means that the Greek State policies for the W. Thrace minority group have been mirroring the treatment the Greek minority had in Turkey reflecting the broader diplomatic relations between Greece, Turkey and Cyprus.

⁴ The first exceptions of Western Thracians of Muslim background teaching in the Greek part of the curriculum started cracking this long established legal convention.

State confidential archives dating between the 1950s and the 1970s reveal eloquently that most of the details and main features of minority education were decided and designed by politicians, ministers of the exterior, personnel from the Greek army and the National Intelligence Service (KYP). The policies were addressing less the educational needs of the pupils in Thrace and more the state's strategic designs concerning the geopolitical security of the borders with Turkey and the welfare of the Greek minority in Istanbul. These archives demonstrate how minority education has been designed as a main arena where the antagonism between the Greek and Turkish nationalist ideologies could find expression at the expense of the minority pupils' right in decent and meaningful education.

In order to understand better the way minority education historically evolved in W. Thrace from 1923 until nowadays it is important to take into consideration the historic intra-minority division between Traditionalist Muslims and Kemalists and the broader historic context of the Greco-Turkish diplomat relations. Traditionalist Muslims or conservatives were fond of the traditional Islamic lifestyle and considered threatening the modernist Westernising visions of *Mustafa Kemal*, which they opposed. On the other hand, Kemalists supported *Mustafa Kemal*'s ideals about building the Turkish state in the secularist model of Western nation-states.

The opposition between these two ideological camps, especially in the first decades after Lausanne, influenced many aspects of minority's life including education. According to Tsitselikis (2012:456), "Education became the main field of ideological confrontation between Kemalists and Islamists due to Greek and Turkish policies of interference after the war". Greek authorities in the 1970s would refer to the 'Old-Turkish' and 'New-Turkish' schools (ibid.) A very small minority village could have two different schools: one for the traditionalists and one for the Kemalists. These schools would use different script, Arabic and Latin respectively whereas, traditionalist schools would be closed on Fridays instead of Sundays. The Greek State has played the card of this division aiming to perpetuate it and historically invested in strengthening the religious identification of the group in the hope to weaken the ethnic one in direct contrast

to what Kemalism aimed to do. Every opposition to the Kemalists in Western Thrace was believed to secure a less Turkified Thrace. In this context the traditionalists were supported and empowered by the state against the influence of the Kemalists that the state attempted to restrict. A reflection of this is that medrese the Islamic secondary school in Komotini is a Greek public institution, whereas *Celâl Bayar* has private status belonging to the minority community rather than the State.

1.1.2 The golden age

On the other hand, all Greek policies regarding minority education have been framed by the Greek-Turkish relations. When the two minority groups that resulted from Lausanne were in numerical equivalence, Greece was keen to protect and advance the interests of the Greeks in Turkey. In order to serve this purpose, the state was positive towards the minority group in Thrace ‘flattering’ Turkey (Aarbakke, 2000). This period is remembered in Thrace as the “golden age”; the years of friendship and positive approach between the two countries. It was during this time that the first minority secondary-school, *Celâl Bayar*, was established in 1952 in Komotini with the presence of the then prime minister of Turkey, *Celâl Bayar*, after whom the school was named. The day of the ceremony Komotini was filled with Greek and Turkish flags in celebration. In 1954 local authorities were ordered from the government to use the terms ‘Turk/Turkish’ instead of the term ‘minority’.



I4. Celebrating the establishment of *Celâl Bayar*
(Source: *Filioi laografias, paradosis kai Istorias tis Thrakis*- facebook group)

Within the same positive context, the two countries also signed the 1951 Educational Agreement to encourage co-operation and exchanges. These developments had enabled a number of people in the group to have positive experiences in learning and develop educational aspirations as chapter five will discuss. On the grounds of the 1951 agreement, 'minority' Thracians were given the chance to get scholarships from Turkey to study/get trained there as teachers under the condition that the beneficiaries would return to Western Thrace to serve in minority education. These teachers are called in Greek '*prosontouhoi*', the word meaning someone who has an asset. I assume the term was selected to distinguish this category of teachers from the low qualified ones that served in schools before. The first exams for the selection of the trainees took place in 1955 and in the early sixties the first '*prosontouhoi*' returned to Thrace (Huseyinoglu, 2012). In addition, the agreement allowed Greek and Turkish teachers, '*metaklitoi*', to serve for short periods in the respective minority schools in an exchange scheme. Mavrommatis (1998) notes that training of local teachers in Turkey or a short appointment of Turkish nationals in W. Thrace was taking place also in the 1920s and 1930s but not in the systematic way that was initiated in the 1950s after the agreement.

1.1.3 The stone age

The golden age did not last for long and the atmosphere reversed. The mounting tension in Cyprus in the 1950s and 1960s, the mini-pogrom that Greeks of Istanbul suffered in 1955 (*Septemvriana*) with the further diminishing⁵ of the minority there after the expulsions of many Greeks from Turkey in 1964, and eventually the Turkish invasion in Cyprus in 1974 ended the short-lived friendship between the two countries while making the Greek state extremely suspicious and fearful for anything related to Turkey. After all the losses the authorities got extremely alarmed about a potential loss of the Western Thrace to Turks since there was a strong Turkish presence there. On the other hand, with the Greek minority in Turkey being almost extinct Greece did not find reasons any longer to protect the rights of the minority group in Thrace. State confidential documents of the time suggest that all previous policies for the minority were designed targeting by principle the Greeks in Turkey: “The minority policy for forty years aimed to the relief of the Rums”⁶. Not only were benefits for the W.Thracian Muslims unnecessary, but retaliations would feel just by the authorities in the spirit of ‘reciprocity’.

Tightly related to what an informant called the “stone age” is the Coordination Council of Thrace⁷ (CCT) (*Sintonistiko Simvoulio Thrakis*) which was established by the authorities secretly in 1959. Although the central state policies regarding the minority in Thrace were designed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) various other bodies would act in Western Thrace in order to monitor the group, inform the central authorities and implement the policies. CCT’s aim was to co-ordinate better the communications between Thrace and Athens and locally between the three prefectures. After sixty-one secret meetings the CCT stopped operating in 1969 and its jurisdictions were

⁵ According to Tsitselikis (2008), Rums in Turkey have diminished from 120,000 in 1923 to about 4,000 in 2007.

⁶ AA 104, CCT, 42nd meeting, 4/2/1966 p.2

⁷ CCT consisted by: The three prefects of Thrace, the Director of Political Affairs of Thrace, the head of the Constabulary, a representative from the State Intelligence Service (KYP), military officers and in later meetings also the Director of Minority Schools. For an analytical presentation, see Iliadis (2012).

transferred to the Ministry of Northern Greece.⁸ The Junta regime (1967-1974) continued the policies of discrimination and oppression that kept on going until the 1990s.

During that period, the first and foremost aim for the state was to safeguard national security. Any expression of Turkishness in Greek territories or development of links with Turkey were considered a direct threat to it. Therefore, Thrace became a “sensitive” region in this regard and slowly a large network of parastate mechanisms and secret Intelligence developed in order to monitor the ‘perilous’ presence of the minority and ‘Turkey’s appetite’ for the region. Every expression of Turkism was banned, schools were reversed to their previous name as ‘minority’, anything named Turkish became illegal, and a long period of discriminatory and oppressive polices against the group started. Yagcioglu (2004) provides a thorough overview of these. To sum them up briefly these included: Deprivation of citizenship, expropriations of lands owned by Muslims, denial of minority members’ right to buy and sell land or houses, set up businesses and getting credit or loans from Greek banks. Difficulties in buying tractors and getting driving license. Restrictions in freedom of speech, movement and in cases religious expression. Obstacles in voting, deprivation from the right to be employed in public sector and also from public goods and services in mono minority populated areas (Yağcıoğlu, 2004: 174-186).

The Treaty of Lausanne offered an excuse to the authorities for denying the Turkish character of the group. The only problem was that the same Treaty had obliged Greece to have minority schools where Turkish is taught and half curriculum is delivered in Turkish. Minority education, was therefore for the authorities the Achilles’ heel where Turkey could hit for taking over the territory according to their perceptions.⁹ All communication channels previously opened with the 1951 Educational Agreement and the 1968 protocol started closing one after the other. The import of textbooks from Turkey stopped¹⁰ leaving pupils

⁸ AA 104, CCT, 61st meeting, 12/2/1969

⁹ More on this will be discussed in chapter five.

¹⁰ Mavrommatis (1998: 229) offers a thorough account of the adventures around the import in Greece of Turkish textbooks. Along with various bans and delays in imports, and/or distribution of the Turkish textbooks to schools, censorship controls were consistently applied in order to

for decades with the old previously imported copies from 1956, censorship and high controls started at the borders. Many subjects in Celâl Bayar were not taught because the teachers of that specialisation could not come to Thrace.

One of the strategic measures of the Greek authorities for gaining control over minority education eliminating Turkey's influence was the establishment in 1968 of the 'Special Pedagogic Academy of Thessaloniki' (*Eidiki Paidagogiki Academia Thessalonikis*) (EPATH) that aimed to train the 'Muslim' teaching personnel of the minority schools. EPATH is considered in the minority master narrative one of the most insidious and devastating acts of the Greek state against their educational rights. By law EPATH graduates were prioritised for appointment in minority schools whereas *metaklitoi* got reduced and most of *prosontouhoi* were slowly warded off. This new era marked by the discriminatory state policies signified as well poor conditions for learning for people from the minority and limited aspirations since they could not see any future in Greece under these circumstances. Indeed, most of those who had the means migrated to Turkey. Excluded from channels of economic participation and political representation in Greece, the minority invested its savings in Turkey, received secondary and higher education there, and sought to exercise influence and pressure through the support of the 'kin-state.'

The findings of a survey¹¹ which was conducted in minority schools in 1997 reflect how all the above conditions disadvantaged learning for members of the group over the precedent decades. Amongst other questions pupils were asked about the occupation and educational attainment of their parents: "The vast majority of parents at best had graduated from primary school. Very little is the percentage of those who continued schooling after primary education (7.5% for men and 1.6% for women)" (Askouni, 2006: 157). Regarding tertiary education only 2.6% of the fathers and 0.2% of the mothers had a university degree. Askouni (*ibid.*) underlines that the low educational attainment does not relate only to the political situation but also to the rural and low socio-economic status

diminish any reference to Turkey from these books. This would mainly be through tearing apart of respective pages or applying a black sticker on them.

¹¹ The survey was conducted by PEM (p.21).

of the group. According to the same survey “nine out of ten pupils in minority schools are children of peasants, labourers and technicians” (ibid.: 153). As regards the younger generations another survey revealed that “for the generation that graduated from the primary school in 1996-97 the drop-out rates during the three years of secondary education is estimated to be 65% when the national average for the same educational level is around 7%” (Askouni, 2006: 281)

1.1.4 The post-1990s

Between 1988 and 1990 the tension between the two communities in Western Thrace reached its peak. Sadik Ahmet a minority MP and doctor has been a protagonist of these events that led to a new page in the state-group relations. Aarbakke (2000: 357) characterises him as “the most prominent leader in the history of the minority”¹². Sadik Ahmet has been a controversial personality: The Greek master narrative treats him as the ultimate expression of Turkish nationalism in Greece, the minority master narrative treats him largely as a hero, but within the group there are also voices that regard him as ‘fascist’ and ‘dictator’. Sadik Ahmet was the first that started mobilising members of the group very actively on resisting and protesting the Greek oppressive policies with the spearhead being the state’s denial of the group’s Turkish identity. More importantly he brought the issue to the attention of central European bodies. For his activities, Sadik Ahmet was prosecuted by the Greek state and was sent to trials.

In this atmosphere when it became known in Rodope in 1988 that the Supreme Court of Greece decided to close down the minority associations (Papanikolaou, 2007) the largest minority demonstration in the history of Western Thrace took place in Komotini on 29 January 1989. The following year, when the minority was mobilised to commemorate the 1989 rise, Greek parastate powers with the support of the local church that was stirring up the inter-community clash, and members of the local majority organised a mini pogrom in Komotini destroying minority property and attacking minority people on the streets. The

¹² Aarbakke (2000) offers an analytical account of the phenomenon Sadik Ahmet.

unprecedented nature of these events led the government to decide on the revision of its minority policy which was announced in Thrace in 1991 by the then Prime Minister, Mitsotakis, who declared that the principles of “legal equality and equal citizenship” (*isonomia-isopolitia*) would be applied thereafter. These policies started taking effect a couple of years later.

As Aarbakke (2000: 547) notes the new era took shape through the “new catchword for solving the problems”, “development”. Anagnostou and Triandafyllidou (2005) explain how the turning point coincided with Greece absorbing large structural funds from Europe. Therefore, in the frame of revising the national strategies for Western Thrace, a significant part of these funds was streamed for developmental causes in the region.

A project for the improvement of the educational experiences for the minority, that was supported by the EU structural funds was the ‘Project for the Reform of the Education of Muslim Minority Children’ (PEM). For the first time it was academics and scientists of education with a democratic agenda that were given the responsibility to redesign the Greek curriculum of the minority education. PEM started in 1997 and concluded in 2014. Since then some of its activities continue on limited funds. PEM has changed significantly the landscape of the learning experiences for the minority pupils, not only with its interventions in minority schools but also with its community engagement centres (KESPEM).¹³ One major change that PEM brought about is that for the first time the Greek text-books for minority children were designed especially for them replacing the previously used primers that were identical to primers used at national level for Greek native speakers.

Apart from PEM, the other major change that enabled educational aspirations within the group and provided further opportunities for learning was the introduction of 0.5% quota for the admission of minority students to Greek Universities (Law 2341/95). The first year of the action in 1996 two hundred university placements were offered to minority pupils graduating that year from

¹³ More information on PEM’s web-page <http://www.museduc.gr>

school, however only forty-eight applied. The mid-nineties positive state policies started bearing fruits mostly in the 2000s. Askouni (2006) reported how the figures in education for the minority group started changing. More and more pupils remained in secondary education, gender imbalance started improving and gradually the quota for the university admissions became more and more popular when the first beneficiaries started graduating from the Greek universities. Lastly, a recent positive step was the abolition of EPATH in 2014.

1.2 The Lausanne mythology, cultural trauma and contested belongings

This section will look closer into the way that Lausanne has informed the collective identity of both the minority and majority in Rodope, as well as the Greek national narrative. As shown before, the group was created under the collective identity ‘minority’ in 1922 in Lausanne. In the master narrative of the group, ‘Lausanne’ is their ‘constitution’. It is the fundamental legal text that acknowledges internationally their status as minority specifying their rights. By contrast, in the national and majority narrative, Lausanne is the argument used for denying the Turkish identity of minority Thracians or the group at large based on the Treaty’s religious rather than ethnic terminology. Lausanne has become in discourse a field for the struggle for the rights and identity of the group, functioning especially for the latter as a sort of totem. I borrow the term from Freud (1913) adjusting it to this context, Lausanne operates as a sacred symbol which represents the origins of a group and functions as guide and rescuer. Its sacred character makes it untouchable by the members of the group, whose collective identity highly derives from the members’ shared relation to it. In the most public events I attended in Komotini, Lausanne was recurrent in everyone’s talk defining the tone of discussions.

Moreover, the way Greece and Turkey formed their national narratives around Lausanne is very different. In the Greek master narrative, Lausanne stands as a signifier of a biblical loss. By contrast, for Turkey it marked a glorious victory and a bold step into the nation-state building that *Mustafa Kemal* had designed: “Whereas Greek official historiography looked upon the events which led to and were associated with Lausanne as a collective tragedy and sanctioned them under the rubric of the Asia Minor Catastrophe, Turkish scholarship viewed these events as a triumphant recreation and epitomised them as the National War of Independence” (Yıldırım, 2006: 46).

One important layer of the significance of ‘Lausanne’ in the W.Thracian context is the cultural trauma that minority and majority populations of the region, as

well as the Greek state, have associated with it. According to Eyerman (2001: 2), “Cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion”. Whereas, Alexander, et al. (2004: 11) argue that: “Traumatic status is attributed to real or imagined phenomena, not because of their actual harmfulness or their objective abruptness, but because these phenomena are believed to have abruptly, and harmfully, affected collective identity”.

The first agreement that was reached at the Peace Conference of Lausanne was the forced exchange of populations between the two countries. In the era of nation-state building out of the old Empire times such exchanges were not new¹⁴ but this was the first time that such measure was compulsory without any previous consultation with those affected. A big web of people got uprooted from either side of the Aegean and crossed it in different directions leaving behind their homes, the tombs of their beloved, and their belongings. This was considered by the Lausanne delegates necessary for clearing up and make as neat and homogeneous as possible the two states according to the newborn nationalist ideals of the time.

It was not only the state that constructed a narrative of “catastrophe” around Lausanne. The Western Thrace Muslim populations have been treated in the post-Lausanne era, as foreigners on what they knew as their very own land, as the following subsection will illustrate while the people who constituted since then the majority belong mainly to those who got forcibly uprooted by their once homelands during the exchange or earlier. All three parties constructed themselves as victims to one degree or the other while Lausanne signified for all a loss of some important part of their identity. It is important to bear in mind these broader and almost timeless symbolic meanings that hold most of the collective narratives and memory in Rodope in order to understand the way majority, minority and the state interact with one another.

¹⁴ Voluntary population exchanges were encouraged in 1913 between Bulgaria and Turkey, in 1914 a between Greece and Turkey and in 1919 between Greece and Bulgaria (Kitromilides, 2008: 255)

In his seminal work on collective memory, Halbwachs (1992:42) stated that “our recollections depend on those of all our fellows, and on the great frameworks of the memory of society”. It is important to understand how the Lausanne trauma has shaped collective memory since it is within this frame that individuals construct and imagine their personal identities and sense of belongingness.

In the hegemonic Greek historiographical accounts, the ‘liberation’ of Thrace followed its long ‘enslavement’ by the Turks. The Thracian lands are commemorated as Greek, stolen for a long time by the Turks until eventually a small part¹⁵ of them were taken back. By contrast, within minority circles the issue is understood in completely different terms: Greeks became the new owners of a land that was for long owned by Muslims. In the new era the historical residents’ rootedness to the land was forgotten, muted and negated.

In the context of the national narrative of cultural trauma around Lausanne the descendants of the Ottoman Muslims that remained in the Greek land (the minority group) are seen as living reminders of the loss, the past of slavery and more importantly the continuous threat of a potential re-loss. Majority Komotinians I interviewed stressed particularly an attitude of blame Thracian Christians have towards the Thracian Muslims: “The majority is afraid of the Turkish imperialism. This has made them consciously or unconsciously to blame the minority as if it is their fault, as if they are bearers of the Turkish threat themselves”.

Another Komotinian Christian man I met was more eloquent: “Most of the Christians here are from Eastern Thrace, from *Smirni* (*Izmir*) and *Pontos*. These people, treat the ones they found here as if it is them to be blamed for the situation. My grandfather is from Eastern Thrace, we are all from there, they expelled us from there, they slaughtered us. These here (the Muslims) have everything; they have schools, mosques. When I was little, I used to hate them”.

¹⁵ Eastern Thrace was lost and also did Asia Minor, Istanbul etc. In Greek nationalist imaginary the lands that have been lost for good have been named and remembered all together as unredeemed patriae (‘*alitrotes patrides*’)

This Komotinian man, with the use of the pronoun “us”, included himself in a suffering (“they expelled us”, “they slaughtered us”) that he never experienced as he was unborn. Hirsch (2008: 106) coined the term postmemory that “describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experience of those who came before, experiences that they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up”. The way majority people in Komotini talk as if they directly suffered the trauma of their ancestors points to the strength and the volume of the stories and images that have been passed down in their community.

The majority’s postmemory of fleeing as refugees seems to be marking significantly the relations between the two groups. The fear of reliving the past trauma shapes their contemporary meanings especially since the recurrent crises with Turkey as well as the Greek national narrative make the threat to feel omnipresent. A majority informant whose grandfather fled to W.Thrace as a refugee of the GrecoTurkish war, after he mentioned that some minority people he knew were fond of the W.Thracian flag¹⁶, said: “I told them, I left once, will I leave again from here? How do you see it right?” Another majority informant said: “We have been refugees here, and we do not want to become refugees ever again”. The land experience; the displacement from a homeland and replacement in a land to be shared with people who are considered to be affiliated with the perpetrator of the initial trauma, seems to be a major axis around which majority shapes its collective identity.

According to Ricoeur (1984: xv) the crafting of memory is constituted by “excess of memory here, and an excess of forgetting elsewhere”. Greek national and Thracian majority master narratives are characterised by an excess of memory of all the atrocities that have happened between Greece and Turkey¹⁷

¹⁶ This flag was the symbol of the ‘Temporary Government of Western Thrace’ (*Garbî Trakya Hükmeti Muvakkatesi*) in 1913. An independent state for a few months when guerrilla forces resisted to Bulgarian occupation of the lands as it was agreed after the Second Balkan War. See (Aarbakke, 2000: 20-21). Today I understand that is used by some people as a symbol of the minority nationalism.

¹⁷ To set an example of the excessive remembering, in a conference held in Komotini in 2013 on the occasion of the “90 years after the Treaty of Lausanne” a majority Greek MP of Rodope,

and excessive forgetting of the ties minority has to the land as well as the Ottoman past. For the minority the sense of their Ottoman roots features strongly as part of their collective identity. However, for the Greek nationalism this aspect of Western Thracian identity needs to be muted and forgotten. Not only it reactivates the trauma of ‘slavery’ by the Turks, it also signifies the disruption to the continuity of Hellenism that the official Greek historiography claims.¹⁸ .

The contrast between the dominant national and majority narrative in Western Thrace and the counter-narrative of the minority community is explained by the difference between the way dominant majority actors have constructed ‘history’ from the top and the way the collective memory of the group is constructed from below using different stories (Selbin, 2010). A young minority man, Cenk, touched upon this gap: “Grandfathers did not teach their children what they saw with their eyes. There is no common history. This was a political choice and has consequences on my culture. Eight hundred years we have lived here and we keep on living and the last sixty years we became...there is still an open wound, since you do not come together, provided that you want to”.

Cenk uses words that refer to cultural trauma (“consequences on my culture”, “open wound”) and explains how the memory that was passed down to younger generations by the majority omitted, by “political choice”, elements that he and his community still remember. Therefore, two collective memories have been formed built from different materials; what one community chooses to remember the other chooses to forget. According to Cenk this narrative gap generates the distance between the two communities “since you do not come together” that further perpetuates the cultural trauma.

Stilianidis, during his talk with the title: “Thrace, model of a pluralistic, open, democratic society” dedicated the first four slides of his powerpoint presentation for projecting images from the 1955 September events in Istanbul. Melik, a research participant from the minority had told me during our interview: “Hundred years later they bring in front of me the Asia Minor Disaster, Cyprus, the 1955 that every year they take out of the freezer to reheat it and serve it to us. I did nothing for this disaster, for them to look into my eyes and talk about *Septemvriana*.

¹⁸ Hellenes are represented as a nation with continuity from the ancient times to the Byzantine until the modern years.

Belonging seems to be the issue at stake: “Eight hundred years we have lived here and we keep on living and the last sixty years we became...” The trauma that Cenk feels that his ‘culture’ and community experiences is related directly to the denial or forgetting of their belonging to the region. A majority Komotinian told me: “The region has been for six hundred years in Turkish hands. In the outskirts five villages were Greek and all the rest were Turkish. All the plain was in their hands”. In this story the land is owned by the Greeks but has been for two long “in Turkish hands”. Karakasidou (1995)¹⁹ notes that “At the time of the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne, more than two-thirds (67%) of the population of Western Thrace were Muslims, who owned 84% of the land. Less than a fifth (18%) of the population of Western Thrace at that time were Greeks, mostly traders, and whose land holdings amounted to only five percent of the region's total. The remainder of the population was comprised of Bulgarians, Jews and Armenians”.

Not only ownership of the land had to change for this to become ‘Greek’ but also the story about land’s ownership had to change too, erasing from memory the figures that Karakasidou cited. The practical and financial interest for shifting land ownership is apparent. As regarding the symbolic interest majority narratives suggest that a need for defence was associated with it. The Christian refugees had to defend their place in the locality as masters and not strangers, as well as, to counteract the fear and pain they have already experienced by the conflict with the Turks (“they had lost their home once, were not willing to lose it twice”). The change of both the story about the ownership and the actual ownership of land had generated a sense of injustice that has since then grown within the minority community narrative.

“And we heartily welcomed them²⁰”, said Melik, “I remember old men used to say, ‘My son, it was you that gave us water, and bread to eat’. They had gratitude for the local Turks who hearty welcomed them, that did not cast them away. In Athens they did not want them”. Melik points to the elements of the story that

¹⁹ <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/ourpublications/csq/article/vestiges-ottoman-past-muslims-under-siege-contemporary-greek-thrace>

²⁰ The Greek refugees from Turkey

old men selected to remember and pass them down to younger generations, so that he himself today informs his personal story by this collective narrative. “We welcomed the refugees from Asia Minor, they had been through a lot, until they started taking our lands”, Melik added bringing the discussion to the point. Losing belonging was not only a symbolic matter of negating Muslim’s ties with the lands, it was also a shift of physical ownership. The process of “taking our lands” happened in two phases. When the first refugees came lands and properties, Greek and Turkish alike, were taken for their resettlement.

Aarbakke (2000: 54-55) gives an account of the first settlements as regards Muslim properties: “In the beginning the Greek authorities took a series of provisional measures in order to provide for the basic needs of the refugees. They requisitioned rooms for housing and land plots for cultivation. In 1923–24 the Greek government utilised 8,245 rooms in rural houses and 5,590 rooms in urban houses belonging to Muslims for the shelter of the refugees. It also housed refugees in 127 mosques and schools and 667 stables and granaries belonging to Muslims.”

Later the issue was passed to the League of Nations’ Greek Refugee Settlement Commission which “returned to the Moslem owners all the estates which had been requisitioned, except the large estates referred to above, i.e., 14,000 Turkish houses and over 100,000 stremmas of cultivable land” (League of Nations, 1926 in Aarbakke (2000:55).

Decades after the settlement of the Greek refugees the demographics, especially in Rodope, were still concerning for the authorities that reached the point to subsidise Greek births.²¹ Officials of the CCT were also worried because “the Greek populations in Thrace are not locals” (*gigeneis*) and the spirit that is tied to the land (*hthonio pneuma*) is not strong enough”.²² What translation in English cannot confer is the selection of words that strongly mirrored the high significance of the inherent ties with the land that were lacking in the case of

²¹ AA 104, CCT, 52nd meeting, 15/5/1967 p.6

²² AA 104, CCT, 42nd meeting, 4/2/1966 p.5

Greeks. CCT, in order to solve this problem, developed a twofold strategy first, to build a new story in which the Greeks were inherently related to the Thracian land and second, to assist Greeks to buy Turkish estates and properties as well as to Hellenise the landscape.

For the symbolic aspect of this strategy excavations would start to prove that the land is “Greek”²³, while a new association would be founded named Educational Association of Komotini (*Morfotikos Omilos Komotinis*) charged with role to build a Greek narrative,²⁴ a greek folklore tradition and consciousness for the Christians about the Greekness of the land. In these lines it was decided: the foundation of more churches, and the creation of literature and events that would promote, teach and boost Greekness in W.Thrace.²⁵ In 1959 a special committee was constituted²⁶ to change places’ names from Turkish to Greek.



15. Christian refugees from Eastern Thrace build their church in Evrenos, a village that from Muslim became mixed-populated. Date of picture: 1952. Source: GAK Rodope

²³ AA76, Prefect of Rodope, AP 641, 18/5/1967 Confidential

²⁴ AA83, Prefecture of Rodope, Division A, AP 466, 31/10/1959 Confidential

²⁵ AA88, CCT, AP 50, 16/1/1969 p.3 Confidential

²⁶ AA 84, CCT, 1st meeting, 3/11/1959 p.5

The second strategy was to expropriate lands from Turks. In the 47th meeting of CCT in 1966²⁷, which followed up previous meetings regarding land issues, it was discussed the amount that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) would stream into the Agricultural Banks of Thrace. This money was agreed on the 44th meeting²⁸ to be given to Christians “in the form of loan granted by the Agricultural and other banks, with a twenty years paying back period and 2% interest”. The loans would be approved by a committee and could cover even the full cost of purchase of an estate belonging to Turks. Special interest was expressed amongst CCT members for the lands in the plain and yakka areas. First, because according to the document these areas had profitable tobacco crops that had to be transferred to Christian hands and second, because these areas were populated mostly, if not only, by Turks. The second step of the same policy was to transfer and settle Greek populations first in mixed and later in minority populated villages with a simultaneous foundation of churches and Greek schools in those areas. A third measure was suggested to be “copying what Turks did in *Imvros*²⁹” and expropriate Turkish lands for the establishment of State institutions. As Iliadis (2012: 352) notes, “Today, the Democritus University of Thrace,³⁰ the local prisons and a military camp are built on lands expropriated from minority members”.

Melik said, “My grandpa never, never took it down, never accepted it. And then you expect these people to hang out together even if they do, it will be fake. Take a minute to imagine it; some people come to your own soil, the one you had to sell to the State so they can live. How can you hug them afterwards?” However, the lost ownership evidently does not only carry financial but also a deeper symbolic meaning of lost belongingness: “You are the really local, local-local,

²⁷ AA104, CCT, 47th meeting, 6/7/1966

²⁸ AA 104, CCT, 44th meeting, 6/4/1966

²⁹ *Gökçeada* today. *Imvros* and *Tenedos* are two little islands in the East Aegean, they were conferred to Greece with the Treaty of Sevres in 1920 but after the Treaty of Lausanne they became Turkish. However, the Greek populations living on the islands like the Greek residents of Istanbul were excluded from the transfer. Turkey achieved the gradual Turkification of the islands in ways that later offered a model for Greeks to Hellenise Thrace.

³⁰ In a publication by the Academy of Athens with the title ‘Development of Thrace’ it is explained how the university “has been used by all governments as a means to strengthen the Greek presence in the region which is under the pressure of Turkish imperialism, it was meant to hold here the existing population and attract more” (Academy of Athens, 1994: 130).

and the state comes and takes your land”, Melik said and continued “and they dare to say that they are locals, who so damn are not. We call locals those from Asia-Minor but not the others. You say you are from the minority and they tell you ‘ah, that is OK, it is not a problem’. It is not a problem! As if I came ten years ago and you received me, I received you. When did your grandfather come here?” The others, to whom Melik refers are all the other Greek-Orthodox populations that were settled later in Thrace in order to boost the Greek demographics, for example *Sarakatsani* in the 1950s and expats from former Soviet Union in the late 1980s.³¹

The mainstream majority discourse, however, as it was pointed earlier has it different: “Our region has the historic record to be under Ottoman rule for six hundred years. Western Thrace had to lift the huge load of the Lausanne Treaty. All the weight is held by Thrace and especially Rodope, whatever that means”, a majority Komotinian told me. The ‘weight’ and ‘load’ he refers to, is the presence of the minority. For him, Thrace is personalised and victimised as the bearer of a burden that resulted from ‘Lausanne’. According to this understanding, the Greek inhabitants of Thrace had to manage the burden. If the Greek State held the responsibility to Hellenise the land, the locals had to deliver this mission themselves in every-day life. Melik said “They had to prove that they are Greeks. How can someone identify as Greek in this region where they do not have deep roots? To become a Greek, you ought not to be a Turk and thus, they became super-Greeks (*Ellinarades*). Someone has a Turkish surname here³² and s/he hates Turks!”.

³¹ During my fieldwork I realised that the latest new-comers were not welcomed neither by some Greeks who were already in the region. According to a Christian local informant they were another burden that Thrace had to bear because of the minority.

³⁰ Very common for all those who fled to Thrace from Turkey and the Black Sea region.

1.3 Inter-community relations, nationalism and making a living

Lokman is a man from Rodope, he is a member of the minority and in his mid-sixties when we met. He, like other men his age, tried to explain to me that there was a time that things were different; minority and majority were closer, “I remember those years, we used to have a very good time together. I was anticipating Easter to see the *tsureki*³³ and the red eggs. Then when there was a wedding, everyone was invited. We had much love amongst us. It was later that we separated”.

Another minority Komotinian, Tunay, in Lokman’s age described the same jolly days in the past linking the deterioration of the inter-community relations with the events in Istanbul and Cyprus: “In 1952 the two states joined NATO³⁴ and they started the great friendship, things were quiet. We were in loving relations together here; we were going joyful to school. I remember they used to project Turkish movies at the open-air summer cinemas of Komotini. After 1955 the enmity and oppression started, the Turkish films were banned. In 1963 Turkish aircrafts went to Cyprus, later we had the Junta regime, in 1967 the situation deteriorated, the pressure started and misery began in Thrace”. Another minority informant of the same generation said: “In the 1970s there were jukeboxes in the Christian small tavernas we were going to, and we could pick discs. Later following an order, they removed all the Turkish discs from the jukeboxes, to diminish everything that was ours”.

These men put in words how from living together with the minority expressing and experiencing freely their Turkish affiliations, “misery began in Thrace” and minority members experienced an attack to everything ‘that was theirs’. The attack started from the state that launched the oppressive and discriminatory policies against the group, but these policies did not meet much resistance from the Thracian Christians. According to a majority informant from Komotini:

³³ Sweet Easter bread

³⁴ North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

“Oppression was making sense; the Turks had slaughtered my family and they would live here as free men?” These words echo the power of the collective process of weaving a narrative that has the power to sustain what “makes sense”. Relating these words to the accounts of Lokman and his friends, the oppression did not make sense grounded on the experiences of sharing space in Rodope and living amicably together, however relating these words to the majority cultural trauma as it was constructed and reinforced by the national narrative oppression “made-sense”. After 1991, when the state officially abolished the oppression a majority Komotinian told me that the local Christians felt almost let down: “They thought, ‘so you make it easy for them? Now it will be us to give them a hard time’. Take for example my auntie she wants to sell an estate but she would not sell it to her Turkish friend”. A minority participant that has the exact age as the majority informant above commented: “Until 1991, the majority was prospering at the expense of the minority, some consciously, some unconsciously. After 1991 they lost their vested rights and felt that they had become victims of injustice because after all these years they did believe that these were legitimately theirs”.

However, during the stone years, some members of the majority wanted to support the minority against the oppression: My minority informant in his late sixties said: “There were some leftists who in private conversations were very supportive of us, but when I would say let’s organise together a demo, a protest, sign this manifest with us, then they would step back. In public they were muted, amongst us they would agree”. He further explained: “In every society, it is the economic circles that are the most important and pull wires. The economic elite of Komotini, all the merchants, had formed here the ‘Akritas’ organisation that was giving the guidelines. So if they would see you taking a stance publicly, they would say: “So you support Ahmet? Fine! Go elsewhere for primary material. I do not sell to you”. Then this person had to go and buy what s/he needed in another city. They wanted us to leave and those who wanted to support us were afraid that they might lose their job etc.”

Direct state intervention also informed the way the Thracian majority shaped its meanings and relations to the minority. In a meeting in 1966, members of the CCT discussed how the financial interest, that Christians were yielding from the minority, compromised the national interest. The authorities had to intervene to turn the minority Thracians from an exploitable victim to a national threat: “It is of primary importance to achieve co-operation with the Greek element of Thrace. Ours³⁵ are used to consider and treat the Muslims as a subject for financial and political exploitation and not as a problem. Fortunately, there have been already some concerns. It is only to our benefit and in no case to our loss to use these people. The CCT is agreeable on this”.³⁶

For making this transition to treating the minority as a problem as well as an opportunity for financial/political benefit, a counter financial gain had to be created as an incentive for the local majority to ‘co-operate’ with the State. Thus, nationalism from an abstract ideology turned into a local business network. The Greek State and the Turkish consulate representing the major nationalist centres with their subsequent visible and invisible branches would hire paid employees to serve their interests and counteract one another. This is what Papanikolaou (2007:144) named in her thesis “The ‘network of salaries’”.

Lokman, who had previously described the rosy days, put it very bluntly explaining how nationalism provided the locals with the opportunity to make money and ever since the good days are gone in Rodope. “What did they do in order not to work? They became spies (*roufianoi*). And this person (the spy) wants us always to have problems between us, because this is how s/he wins her/his bread. And this good chap here is poor (he pointed to his friend who was there), but if now it would have been possible for him to become a spy, they would tell him: ‘Congratulations! We will benefit and give money to you’”.

In a poor agricultural area with high rates of unemployment getting into the nationalist business can be a precious chance for someone to improve his/her

³⁵ Meaning the Christians/Greeks (‘*oi imiteroi*’)

³⁶ AA 104, CCT 42nd meeting, 4/2/1966 p.7

standard of life. Meanwhile the undercover way that the nationalist business operates almost everyone locally turns into a suspect of being employed for either the Turkish or the Greek branch. The whole discourse about secret salaries and especially secret agents is so prevailing that Melik and his friend, Cenk, joked illustrating how they feel about it. Melik said “Every family here has a file: ‘this person’s family traditionally love Turkey’, ‘this other one loves Greece’, this one goes this side, the other one that side. This is their job; to know how many chickens I have, how many eggs my chickens lay and which of my chickens fancy which chicken”. His friend added joking about the financial benefits: “Ah if EYP³⁷ would approach me I would talk to them about you and then with the money they would pay me I would invite you out every day. Then I will go to MIT³⁸ to grab some money from there too”. He then looked at me and said, “We are so used to these things here”.

It is important to contextualise the whole minority espionage discourse in the broader atmosphere in Greece during and after the Civil War when the practice of secret intelligence was flourishing. In the state archives of Rodope the folders I browsed spanning from 1945 to 1970 include not only countless documents of espionage about minority people outlining the sort of feelings they were believed to have for Turkey or Greece, but also countless files of espionage for majority people, especially public employees, speculating whether they were communists or loyal to the authorities (*‘nomimofrones’*). Some majority Komotinians whose families were of leftist ideology had described to me the poverty³⁹ in which they used to live, sometimes similar to that of the minority households that were by default poorer. Both groups, minority and communists were institutionally discriminated against and under surveillance.

A majority Komotinian, who had this experience in his family commented: “The oppression of the minority was unofficial, it was not outspoken it was happening by its effects, not by announcement. It was a method with which half the

³⁷ The Greek National Intelligence Service

³⁸ Turkish Intelligence Service

³⁹ For long after the end of the Civil War, leftists were unofficially deprived of employment opportunities and the authorities, like they did with minority, also used to keep ‘a file’ about them

community was torturing the other half. We, the leftists, had long experienced this situation we had learnt to live with this scamp behaviour of the ‘loyal’ to the nation (*tou ethniki ofrona*), we knew first hand that people are not equal. So I found myself in a position to apologise to the minority for something that I had extremely suffered myself. My family and I we were condemned to gloomy poverty. The only thing that was flourishing back then was the spying (*‘i roufianologia’*).⁴⁰

Nowadays, ‘i roufianologia’ is part and parcel of life in Rodope. I hardly remember any day during the year I spent in Komotini that I did not hear something relevant. However, the current discussions most of the time are based on speculations and a prevailing very heightened suspicion. Concrete evidence and detailed documentation of espionage and the secret salaries is found in the historical state archives. The huge amount of money streamed into the local nationalism business is described in the meetings of the CCT. In its sixth meeting⁴⁰, for example, CCT acknowledges the need for funds for both the “collection of information” and the “financial support of certain people from the majority who collaborate with our authorities”. The argument is strengthened by the remark that, “the Turkish consulate has ample means for respective purposes”. In an another meeting⁴¹ of the same year CCT discussed the “special subsidy” for the Greek teachers who would serve at the minority schools or in mixed villages, this “special subsidy” should be granted with official receipts named as “subsidy of special living conditions”.

In the 5th meeting of CCT, in 1960, the members are informed about the MFA funds available “for these purposes”. One of these was to find the ‘right Muslims’, especially influential Pomaks, who would be paid in order to counteract the Turkish propaganda locally.⁴² In the next meeting, it was decided that the Constabulary and the Intelligence Service would be responsible for identifying and recruiting these people under absolute secrecy.⁴³ A single folder⁴⁴

⁴⁰ AA 84 CCT 6th meeting, 8/5/1960 p.7

⁴¹ AA 84, CCT 1st meeting, 3/11/1959 p.4

⁴² AA 84 CCT 5th meeting, 27/4/1960 p.2

⁴³ AA 84 CCT 6th meeting, 8/5/1960 p.7

⁴⁴ AA 86

in Rodope State Archives contains three hundred pages all about the money streamed to Thrace in the period between 1959 and 1961, the causes and the beneficiaries by name. Some of the causes are named ‘people and information’. Amongst these is a letter sent in 1961⁴⁵ from the MFA to the Prefecture of Rodope. The MFA responded that it could not increase the fund ‘for information’ from 36,000 drachmas for fifteen months to 300,000 for eight months as it was requested from the Thracian authorities.

As Papanikolaou (2007:145) notes referring to this ‘network of salaries’, such mechanisms “help create a culture of fear and suspicion”. Indeed, this culture facilitated the ‘separation’ between the two communities. The degree of espionage and respectively suspicion was described nicely by a minority informant: “In the 1980s there were so many people working for the Intelligence Services. Imagine those times there were not mobile phones and the land lines were only few. A chat would crack in the kafeneio about national issues and the police would get in, in the next ten minutes! People until nowadays have no trust not even to those of their kind, let alone for the others”.

Conclusion

The context of the minority-majority and minority-State relations in Western Thrace, as well as, the Greek-Turkish relations is dense, rich and complicated. I aimed to avoid repeating a dense and dry account of a bulk of information. I instead presented the context in the way it presented itself to me during my fieldwork. I selected to focus on the areas that I understand as significant for understanding and embedding the stories to follow in the thesis, as well as, those that give the reader a glimpse of the atmosphere in Rodope.

The chapter outlined how the national interest in Thrace is the primary concern of the State that has historically constructed the minority group as Turkey’s potential ally in claiming the territory. In this sense, and with regards to education there is friction between the Greek Constitution that views education

⁴⁵ AA 86 MFA AP Δ943-41, 10/10/61

as a means to build ‘ethnic and religious consciousness’ and Lausanne, the group’s constitution that aims to protect the free expression of their identities. Grounded on this distance and the polarised antagonism of Greek and Turkish nationalisms in the region, education has become the main arena for this conflict to be played out, especially through the process of the ‘vernacularisation’ of Lausanne translated as ‘principle of reciprocity’. Chapters four and five will build further on this.

At the realm of understanding and forming personal and collective identities, in other words, beings and becomings, the chapter focused on the way the intercommunity relations and the accommodation of the group by the State have shifted over the last decades. The argument about the cultural trauma constructed around Lausanne for all parties, the counter-memories around it as well as, the ways that this trauma defined the later politics of land and hence belonging in Rodope, point to the way collective identities for Christians and Muslims have been historically built. The seeds of the feeling of dependency and powerlessness within the group also emerged through this process and as the later chapters will show often guide minority people’s choices for learning. Finally, it was discussed the way that nationalism has become a major provider of employment in Rodope building on the constructed fear which further maintains the distance between the Muslim and Christian communities. This helps to understand the choices in education of minority members that entail border crossing from minority to mixed or majority spaces (chapter four and especially, chapter six).

This chapter did not draw only on the literature, but also on the historical archives of Rodope and the interviews I had with people in Komotini. In this sense, it also set the tone of how my work will unfold in the later chapters. The ‘confidential’ voices of the State in the past, the current voices in Komotini and the stories they tell in public and in private will elucidate how access to education and meaning making around it have always been evolved having as reference the narrative stock that is available in the community. Melik, Cenk, Lokman and the others have shaped their stories concerning the stories of their grandparents, their neighbours, the stories of their villages and all they daily observe in

Rodope. This chapter aimed to design a line that demonstrated this link from past to present; the narrative thread as it has been woven across generations and different domains of Rodope.

Having an overview of the changes that occurred in the living and learning conditions for the group diachronically as well as, of the cultural stock of narratives in Rodope will provide a reference for gaining a rounder understanding of the participants' small stories and the public narratives in Komotini that I will discuss in the following chapters.

Chapter 2

Methodology

In this chapter, I give an outline of how my research took its shape through my experiences in the field and the data I collected. In the first part I discuss issues of access, important decisions I made while in fieldwork and limitations I faced. I then move my discussion to the choice of a narrative methodology for the project and I give some details about the interviews I conducted and my archival research. In the end, I discuss the way I treated the data, how I went about their analysis and the way that I present them in the thesis.

2.1 Ongoing negotiations of the research plan

I selected to work in Thrace for my PhD because I was interested in marginalised groups and having completed a Masters in Adult Literacy, I was thinking to study the literacy practices of Thracian Pomakophones. Reading the literature, I noticed the deficit perspective from which the minority group is usually presented regarding their educational attainment. I also realised that I didn't find any study about the cohort of students who took advantage of the affirmative law and entered universities in Greece. I thought that this was a gap worth exploring and I made a new research plan aiming to understand the experiences of the young people from the minority group at the Greek University and the new meanings these created for the individuals and the group. The plan I designed while I was in England was quite ambitious. I wanted to cover both Xanthi and Rodope prefectures of Thrace, and to speak not only with university students but also minority pupils attending mainstream high-school so as to have two angles of looking into the transition to university; first as aspiration and then as actual experience.

In my initial visit to Komotini, in August 2012, I met a non-Thracian Greek teacher who introduced me to some people and showed me around and a

minority member who was willing to help. He was the first one who pointed out how ambitious and unrealistic my first plan was. He said people from the group have no trust or willingness to speak to researchers, especially Greeks, so he could not see how I would make it. Taking this into account, I decided to focus my study solely in Rodope thinking that by spending more time in one place, I could be known better by people and hopefully gain their trust. I also dropped the idea of talking to pupils under eighteen, since I did not want to cause any worries to their families. Moreover, I decided not to conduct research in schools, even as an observant. Since it is the State authorities that grant permissions to researchers for entering schools, I feared that people, who are not familiar with these processes, might think that I am a State employee and therefore assume that I serve its agenda.

I returned to Komotini for my fieldwork in September 2012. During the first months, I found it very hard to secure interviews with university students and those I was introduced to had already participated in a research project that was also looking at the impact of the 0.5% law. My research as it evolved was the product of adaptability to what I experienced as a crisis. Instead of remaining idle, giving up or pressuring people, I decided to improvise and do what I could do under the circumstances while feeling right about it. Thus, I started collecting oral histories of education by any person that belonged to the group, regardless of age or level of educational attainment, by anyone who was willing and interested into sharing their story with me. Moreover, I started spending time at the General Archives of the State in Komotini browsing the files that concerned the minority, thinking at the time that this would not be part of my thesis. Fortunately, after spending ten months in Komotini everything became much more easy and in the last month only I conducted many in-depth interviews with younger people completing the picture with the data that I was initially after.

2.2 Access

For understanding issues of accessibility in the field and the limitations I encountered, it is necessary to start by noting certain characteristics of my identity. I am Greek, I was born, grew up, studied and worked far from Thrace, in other Greek regions and I was raised in a Christian Orthodox family. In 2012-13, the year of my research I was also a single woman without children studying for a higher degree in an English university.

During my pre-fieldwork preparations and also during my first encounters in Rodope the issue of me being insider or outsider concerned me a lot as I was thinking to what degree this would enable or disable my access. However, with time, I became more conscious and aware of my changing positions across what Robinson-Pant (2016: 40) sees as “a continuum between insider and outsider perspectives”. Milligan (2016: 135) argues that “insiderness and outsiderness can be seen as a balancing act between the positioning that the researcher actively takes and the ways in which their role is defined by how others involved in the project, research participants and those further afield, view the researcher”. I would add to this that both the positioning that the researcher takes and the perceptions of others in and out of the research site regarding this positioning are dynamic and situated. These depend on particular contexts where the negotiation takes place or the meanings that are ascribed at each time creating an ever-changing picture to which not all parts involved necessarily agree. In my case, at different contexts, it was different identities of mine that were significant further complicating the continuous shift of positions.

For example, although being a woman, I felt more insider in the male circles than the female ones in the group. Drinking together in the kafeneio was a main practice we shared, whereas I often felt an outsider in female practices. Furthermore, my non-Muslim identity would weigh more in fostering a feeling of my outsiderness during a religious ceremony I would attend whereas, it would allow me to feel more of an insider in a male dominated kafeneio where Muslim women would typically be absent from. Attitudes and perceptions of my

intentions as a researcher were also significant in the way I was classified at different times by people in the field as insider or outsider. Identifying as majority Greek would easily place me in the outsider position with regards to the group and this explained much of my inaccessibility issues at the beginning due to suspicions about my intentions. Once I was understood by some people in the field as sympathetic to the group and its concerns with regards to the State, I felt as they perceived me as an insider, someone they could trust and talk open with.

The fluid way that perceptions and attitudes were shifting my positionality was even more explicit in my interaction with people from the majority in Rodope. Because of my majority, Greek and assumed Christian identity, they often treated me as an insider and would often speak to me in trust about the ‘Others’. Having lived in many different parts of Greece, where I was usually treated as an outsider (*xeni*) by the locals I need to note that it was only in Thrace that I was treated much more readily as an insider by the Christians since shared mother-tongue, ethnic origin, and presumably religion are commonalities that in the area were not taken for granted. However, this positioning was very fragile. In the cases that I would break, what my majority counterparts thought as the established contract of trust between ‘us’: Greeks, majority, Christians, I would instantly turn to an outsider labelled as “a non-local who does not know”. This was when I would disagree or express my discomfort with what I was entrusted about ‘them’ (the minority).

In the following sections I will explain how the local discourse about researchers shaped people’s attitudes about me, as well as, my own attitudes regarding my researcher-identity impacting on my data collection process.

2.2.1 Researchers and spies: Problematising the researcher identity in Rodope

Already in my first couple of months in Komotini I got to know the regime of fear and suspicion and what I call the spy-talk. I am not sure had I entered Komotini for travelling, leisure or business, and not as a researcher, if I would have been so much exposed to it.

First of all, there were the stories about researchers in previous years who, according to minority acquaintances, “were later revealed that they were actually working for the State Information Service”. Then there were some Greek friends living in Komotini who would repeat in a casual way that their phones were under surveillance and that the Intelligence Service might hear what we talked about, even when we were face to face through our inactive mobile devices. I was asked by many people, if I have noticed any sound on my phone, if anyone follows me. I was even advised by someone to go to the Police Station and let them know who I am and what I am doing to avoid being followed by them. In days that I was out with Komotinians or people who have lived in Komotini for years they would point to me various people we would randomly come across in the street saying that they were “secret agents”.

By presenting myself as a researcher interested in the minority group while being a total stranger I was immediately positioned in many people’s perceptions as potentially a spy and I felt that I was under constant evaluation. I remember once in a kafeneio when I said why I was in Komotini, a young man from the minority group, Taşkin⁴⁶, burst into laughing saying: “Nobody in this area is going to open his mouth to you. Because people are afraid. You say that you are a student, you are doing a PhD in England, but how can we know?”

People from the group I was friends with explained how cautious the ‘minority’ is about researchers and the mistrust they have in the research relationship. For example, some friends told me bitterly about a researcher whom “they have even hosted at their home” and according to their understanding things they told her

⁴⁶ Taşkin’s voice comes again in chapters four and five.

"off the record" went public with a personal cost for them in the community. They also felt very intimidated by the way the researcher presented them exoticised and distorted in a stereotypical image that they did not feel that represented them. Another informant said that although a researcher had used an audio recorder at the end changed completely his words ruining the sense of trust in the process. Whereas, someone else told me: 'We want to read your thesis, please send it to us when you finish. There are researchers who come here, conduct their research and then they just disappear and we never hear from them again'.

This brings in another issue in Thrace, what I call over-research. After the 1990s, the area was suddenly flooded by researchers. Some of whom was later proved that had a particular agenda to serve. During my time in the field I heard about four other researchers who were at the same year as me in the area for shorter periods of time. I met with one whom I hosted for a few days at my home joking ourselves about the situation. What struck me personally about this is the very short time many researchers would spend in the field which increased the chances that they all interviewed the very same people who are readily available through the networks of the minority associations etc.

One of my interviewees told me upon my arrival in some minority association premises: "When I told them I am waiting you for the interview they said 'ah, another one now!'" I wanted to discuss this with him and he said: 'We are like experiment animals. I guess one is patient with the first one or two researchers who ask for an interview but after some time will just say leave me alone. You are only the second researcher who approaches me this is why I decided to meet you'.

All this climate of over research that I perceived impacted significantly on my approach. At the time I had formed a very strong image in my mind of researchers being like crows that come in flocks to the area to take their food for their career while intruding into people's life. My initial assumption that my research project would interest people and would be for the benefit of the

community was challenged critically when months after we had first met and became friends Taşkin told me: “People here do not want neither benefits nor loses, they only want to be left alone”. All this information made me question whether my project and I were contributing to this tense climate feeding more into the fears people held for being taken advantage of. For this reason, for a very long time I was not very pro-active about my project trying to manage my role in the least intrusive way possible and get to grips with this situation locally.

2.2.2 The uncertain journey of gaining access

Through my readings before my fieldwork, I had pictured that there are two distinct and antagonistic poles in Komotini that due to their strong power and influence in Rodope could facilitate my access to the community. These were either the Greek state authorities and other influential majority actors in the area, or minority associations and politicians.

However, in the first couple of weeks, I gave up on the first choice when I started realising that being associated with the authorities would raise the suspicions in the group of me being a spy. It took me a couple of months to also neglect the second option when I realised that associations were the mainstream data pool for most researchers in the area while I worried that I would be streamed to talk to certain people who shared their affinities and ideals. Moreover, I started getting hints that people in the group did not necessarily trust the associations, neither were always regarded as their representatives and I was running the risk other people who were not fond of the associations to be reluctant to trust me after they would have known my links.

I had then to improvise on how I would find participants. My basis were the people I already knew whom I hoped to bring me in touch with other people through a snowball method. I soon realised that even if these acquaintances and friends would refer me to their friends to have an interview with me, most of the doors at the beginning of my project were closed. Everyone was reluctant and would rather abstain from my research. Finding the researcher-me problematic, I decided to invest in the Eleni-me, leaving aside for what it proved quite a while

my researcher hat. I came up with the idea that I had to be known for as plainly me as a person rather than as researcher if I hoped to gain some trust gradually.

Taking just the ‘me’ role without concealing that I was there to conduct a research proved quite easy, as the people in Komotini are very hospitable and warm. I gradually started making more and more friends and getting to be known by more people. The expansion circles were from first majority links to later minority and from the neighbourhood I used to live in the town of the centre. Moreover, by attending most, if not all, public events concerning the ‘minority’ and in many cases being the only person from the majority, I was repeatedly meeting the same people. This created a sense of familiarity amongst us and placed me as part of the community’s public life.

The more I was involved in public life the interplays between the Eleni-me and the researcher-me were becoming more complicated. I often found myself uncertain about what degree of my participation was appropriate. I felt that in public settings I should be cautious and conceal my political ideas or personal values and beliefs so that these would not influence my profile as a researcher. One major expectation from me by people in the field was that I was ‘impartial’ doing an ‘objective’ research. This was a widely held belief about what ‘good research’ is.

The first time I faced such a dilemma was three months after I moved to Komotini. I attended a conference there, about the education of the minority group. I felt throughout the event the dense politics of silence over the issues that matter so, in the end, I decided to make a question stirring a very controversial issue around minority education that was in the local press all those days. I made my question, making sure that it would not entail any comment of feeling from my side asking the panel members about their take on it. In this case, I was directly intervening to what I was so far observing knowing that I would bring the presenters out of their comfort zone. However, my question even after being heard in the room never received an answer or any other comment, even a polite excuse for ignoring it.

My ethnographic observations so far in the field had taught me that keeping silent was the usual practice in Rodope, which I felt that needed to be fought against. Therefore, I proceeded to a further degree of intervention by sending a letter about this ethos of silence and muting in a local newspaper. At the time, I was not certain if this was right decision but I found myself later in situations where I was introduced as 'the girl who wrote that letter' and in other cases when I introduced myself people remembered my name from that letter. They already had a reference about me.

Moreover, during my fieldwork there were lots of protests and solidarity events taking place in the area for various causes; against the government policies, fascism prevailing in the society and gold mining development plans. I was participating in all of these making visible my ideological stand but at the same time developing a strong community feeling with those who were also participating. Despite my initial fears that by not projecting a neutral profile, I risked losing the researchers' 'objectivity' in the community's perception and probably some potential participants, in my case it was proved the opposite. I eventually felt that the choice of privileging the Eleni-me at the expense of the researcher-me helped me build a much stronger trust with the people in the community, which turned to the benefit of my research.

2.2.3 Kefil

"The magic word if you want to enter the word of the minority is 'kefil'". It was in early summer that a person from the minority told me this while I was thanking him for his help. He had brought me into contact with many participants who were all extremely willing and happy to take part in my research. He said, "let's say that many people like me and trust me".

Kefil is a word in Turkish, which is all about credibility and trust. It means the one who guarantees for someone else; he or she is the person who is the key to convincing a third party that someone is indeed a person to be trusted. Let us say that there is a scheme of three people: A is the kefil, B is the potential research

participant and C is I, the researcher. For A to be a *kefil* for me, he or she needs to trust me and be absolutely sure about me, my identity and intentions. At the same time, he or she also needs to be trusted absolutely by B. If this is the case, then A (the *kefil*) guarantees for me to B that I am OK and he/she should talk to me, B because he/she trusts A decides to take part in my research. Sometimes a *kefil* may not know me that well but because someone else knows me and said that he/she is the *kefil* for me then he/she also takes the role depending on how much he/she trusts the other person who guarantees for me. It is a chain of trust.

I was lucky enough and some people became ‘*kefil*’ for me. It was thanks to them that I managed to conduct my research. For an ordinary person in Thrace, to talk to a researcher means to put him/herself at risk of getting in trouble. Consequently, the word of a *kefil* was necessary in most of the cases to give me access to people in a trusting frame. Having in mind the regime of fear and suspicion in Rodope, one can understand why people who are not in powerful public positions are very reluctant to talk to a stranger who conducts ‘a research study’. I need to note here that I observed some minority politicians avoid having an interview without knowing the questions in advance and some only accept to return a questionnaire to the researcher with their answers written there. This may happen even if the researcher is from the minority group. What I want to illustrate here is that even the people who are used to giving interviews and have power are hesitant to talk without some safety prerequisites.

Regarding those not involved in the politics of the minority when they are asked to participate in research the questions that come up are: Who is this researcher? What kind of research is this? How will it be used? How can they be sure that indeed confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured? Nobody in the field who did not know me well enough could take at face value my claims: ‘I am a student, I am doing my PhD everything will be anonymous and confidential’. I could not reassure anyone as my own word was of no value in a place where people do not know me and everyone is over suspicious about anything. However, a *kefil* could do this on my behalf and also answer all the above questions that people who are very kind and polite would not ask me.

It was such a case once when a kefil called me on the phone and said: “Eleni, this person agrees to talk to you but he needs to know beforehand if you are going to ask him about identity issues if you will, he does not want to participate”. This kind of discussion/negotiation the potential participant, for example, would hesitate to have with me in advance but could openly share his concerns with his friend, who in turn could openly talk to me about it. So, a kefil would also be the mediator in this kind of negotiation between the participants and me.

A kefil, however, comes with a huge responsibility. My Turkish friend, Cansu, explained to me: “If you can’t keep up with your kefil’s word, your kefil would face the consequences maybe even more so than yourself at times. Your wrongdoing could destroy their credibility and reputation”. This is part of the reason why I am hugely indebted and grateful to people in Rodope who acted as kefil for me.

People who acted as kefil for me were from very different strands of life and political positions from both within the minority and the majority group, and this helped me incredibly to reach different sorts of people. The people who were far from the poles of local power were much more open and interested in participating in my research with the guarantee of a kefil whereas those closer to these poles were always more hesitant as they would risk more if something would go wrong. A typical example for this was a very dear friend of mine from the minority group. He acted as a kefil for me in different situations and helped me in my research not only morally but also making the chances for me to conduct some very rich and in-depth interviews. However, he was very different to me in private when we would meet at my home or his home for lunch or coffee and very different when he would meet me in public in one of those events where all the influential and powerful people of the community were present. My dear, warm, supportive friend was transforming to a distant kind acquaintance.

2.2.4 Front yard and the back garden: limitations

Access is not a one-off procedure that a researcher has to undertake at the beginning of fieldwork and then forget about it. For me it was an issue that had to be negotiated from day one until the end. Although after some months I had ensured some sort of access to certain people and areas mainly in Komotini, obviously the ones easily accessible at first hand, I wanted to expand my access from public spaces to private ones, from older people to younger ones, from male to female participants, from modern Muslim women to more conservative ones -in terms of their degree of affiliation to the Islam principles- from the urban areas to the mountainous villages far from Komotini, where I was living.

Lokman that I had interviewed in December told me later in early spring: ‘You need to get to the ‘*arka bahçe*’ (meaning back garden in Turkish) of the minority for your research. You are now at the front yard of the house, but there is also the garden at the back’. My feeling when he said that was that he implied the Pomaks but I was also worrying about the absence of female participants in my research.

Living in Komotini, being a single majority woman with very poor command of Turkish, it was easier for me to meet men who hang out in public spaces like me, people from the town who frequent in mixed and majority neighbourhoods, people who speak Greek and for one or other reason they were confident to talk to a researcher. For a long time, almost all my contacts were men. My male friends if married would most commonly socialise in the city centre without their wives.

On the other hand, the times I found myself in women’s domain and common meeting point: the household, it was difficult for us to communicate. I spoke very little Turkish and often they spoke very little Greek. I also had a lifestyle very different from theirs since I was not a mother and a wife. Regarding younger women of my age, my first encounters were not very successful since they came across much shyer and reluctant than men, and only towards the end

of my research I was lucky to build some friendships and have some interviews with young women from the group.

During fieldwork I also made a decision to leave Roma people out of my scope. This was on the grounds of making sensible management of my resources including time and connections I had. It was also informed by considering the very different conditions members of this segregated sub-group has regarding development of educational aspirations and experiences that other studies have targeted exclusively.⁴⁷

Another group of people who were far from my reach were those young people who withdrew from school or university. Even in cases that I tried through their relatives, I was faced with a very polite and quiet rejection of the request. I can imagine that the young people I wanted to speak to since they had a small track in Greek medium formal education were less confident to communicate with me in Greek. Therefore, I need to underline that the young participants in my research who talked to me about their educational histories were commonly the ones who succeeded to reach or to complete higher education studies and in no case, they can be considered a representative sample of the youth of Rodope.

I believe that there are two reasons why it was easier for them to come forward and talk to me, although they were still very cautious and careful and guarantees of my integrity were always needed. One is the confidence in mingling and talking to a native Greek since they had this experience from the Greek university, the other is the comfort of their own narratives which were narratives of success.

In total I conducted interviews with sixty-three people: fifty from the minority group and thirteen from the majority. Regarding the minority participants eighteen were undergraduate students at the time of our interviews, ten had recently graduated, eleven were between thirty to forty-five years old, and six

⁴⁷ For example, Troubetta (2001), Mavrommatis, (2004)

participants were over their fifties. Moreover, thirty-three of them were males and only seventeen females.

2.3 Methodological approach: Going Narrative

When I embarked on my research, my primary motivation was to dig out the stories of ordinary people from the minority group about their experiences in education and the ways they developed their aspirations and crafted their respective journeys in learning and becoming. Reviewing the literature, I felt that the views and opinions of teachers, spokespersons, policy-makers, minority rights advocates, politicians, etc. were disproportionately represented in comparison to the space given to the stories of the protagonists: the ordinary people from the group. Czarniawska (2004: 5) notes the configuration between power and narratives: “Other people or institutions concoct narratives for others without including them in a conversation; this is what power is about”. Narrative research would allow me to explore how do people make sense of their educational paths and opportunities? What do they have to say?

My interest was less on opinions and views about the matter of interrelation between education and minority identities in W.Thrace, and more into exploring these through the actual stories of people and the meanings grounded in these stories. This is why I adopted narrative methodology. Cortazzi (2006: 28) emphasises that “narrative research- unlike factual data analysis- focuses qualitatively on participants’ experience and the meanings given by them to that experience”.

Moreover, conducting research, through my majority identity, with a ‘minority’ group pointed to the need for a research methodology that would be more apt to address this power imbalance. Rappaport (1995: 802) considers stories as power resources: “The ability to tell one’s story, and to have access to and influence over collective stories, is a powerful resource” while she notes that “like most resources it is distributed unevenly” (*ibid.* 805). This understanding was in synch with the absence from the literature of ordinary people’s voices and the uneven distribution of the privilege to narrate a story.

While in Komotini, as I explained earlier although my intention was to collect the stories of young minority university students in Greece, due to the challenges I faced I started collecting the stories of anyone who was willing to share them with me. This proved to be a great opportunity for me to explore the intergenerational differences especially before and after 1991. Listening to older, middle-aged and younger people I started discerning the different ways they narrated and the different experiences they had. Slowly, I also started noticing the difference between the stories told in the public events I attended in Komotini and the stories I had the privilege to hear in private. All along this time, I was also having my alone time in the state archives office where a completely different narrative universe was unfolding before my eyes. Therefore, it was all the fieldwork experiences that largely shaped the way my narrative focus was developed.

2.3.1 Interviewing instruments and their impact on the data: Me, my recorder and my notebook.

The first point of contact with most participants was after they had agreed to meet me to send them an information sheet and consent form authorised by the university ethics committee. I would also bring these in the interview making sure that participants know where they stand. Going into the interview, as Chase (2005: 660) argues “to think of an interviewee as a narrator is to make a conceptual shift away from the idea that interviewees have answers to researchers’ questions and toward the idea that interviewees are narrators with stories to tell and voices of their own”. Grounded on this understanding, I invited participants to narrate their stories from school, limiting my interventions while listening to the minimum mainly by giving prompts when needed for the stories to keep unfolding.

The story would usually start at the primary school and would evolve into the last educational experience of the participant. During a narration, my questions were following the story and were not ready made. With a small number of participants, I had to be more proactive. The areas I was triggering them to talk about were their experiences at the different levels of schooling and the

university, their choices regarding education, their relations with people from the majority and learning of Greek. My questions were always open and experience –oriented. It was a strong experience for me to hold space for the participants to recall old memories and to generate meanings sometimes for the first time at the very moment of our talk: “I don’t know, let me think for a minute, I have never thought about that before”.

Building rapport with the participants was critical. In the beginning, I would always have a small talk with them allowing them to relax and feel naturally in the interaction. During the interviews, especially with the young people, I was always trying to bring pieces of my story that were relevant to their experience. I often talked to them about my experience as a student in England; how I experienced studying in a foreign language and relating with people whose cultural codes of communication were not familiar to me.

Referring to and sharing my experiences first was a way for me sometimes to initiate questions when I was feeling uncomfortable about them. I realised better the way my majority Greek identity was constraining me in my questions repertoire when I got acquainted with an English researcher in the area. Some of the questions he used to pose naturally to his interviewees I would never ask for the fear of being misunderstood as provocative. For example, I would never ask female participants about the impact that their conservative Islamic dressing may have had on their school experience. Due to the common majority attitudes on the matter, this could be misunderstood as an indirect questioning and disapproval of their practice on my behalf. Whereas if I were a Muslim covered woman myself, or someone that could not be identified with the Christian majority, I would have felt much more comfortable to dig into potentially controversial issues.

Regarding the use of audio recorder although I was aware that in the general atmosphere of suspicion, it could be threatening I had initially decided to have it with me and ask for permission each time. In the first couple of interviews, I had some ‘yes’ and some ‘no’ and I thought that I would continue like this until I met for a second interview a person who I already knew that did not want me to use the recorder. Because the second time this interviewee got engaged in an

in-depth narrative, I decided that I would not use the audio-recorder again, even if I were allowed, on the assumption that the story would not go to that depth if a voice-recorder was on, being physically a reminder of a non-natural discussion.

For the first months, I was not taking notes either. From the beginning, I understood the emotional charge that the interviews carried and I judged that it was not appropriate to keep notes while people were talking to me. I would go home straight after the interview and I was typing all I was told while it was still fresh in my memory. When later I was reassured by a friend from the group that people would be understanding of my need to take notes I started using my notebook again during interviews. I only returned to the audio recorder a couple of times towards the end of my fieldwork when some participants were already good friends and were feeling trust and comfort. I also used it with some majority participants who did not mind.

However, the 'interview setting' and the presence of my notebook changed completely the way two of my participants talked to me. Having chatted before about their educational experiences, when we had a time allocated especially for this, we named it 'interview' and I appeared with my notebook they felt somehow intimidated and adopted a very 'official' way of telling their story. By contrast, the most rewarding moment of my research was near the end when a participant was narrating to me her and her father's story. While I was taking notes, she commented how important she felt it was that her story was valued and was written down.

During some of the interviews, there have been extremely intense moments, when participants would recall a memory of an event that has played a very important role in the way they have built their identity and they have made sense of their lives ever since. The emotional charge of the narrative interviewing was something I was becoming acutely aware of and was consciously trying to hold a safe space for the participants not only during the interview but also after. This was by being an empathetic listener, not putting pressure, sensing the moments that the teller could become emotional and pause for a while, responding with empathy, respect and silence when needed. I was particularly careful on planning a smooth exit from the interview by stepping slowly to non-research related,

ordinary themes discussion leaving the setting as friends uplifted after a nice chat. I was also proactive in maintaining communication after the interview thanking the participants for their time and contribution again and showing my appreciation.

2.3.2 About the archival research

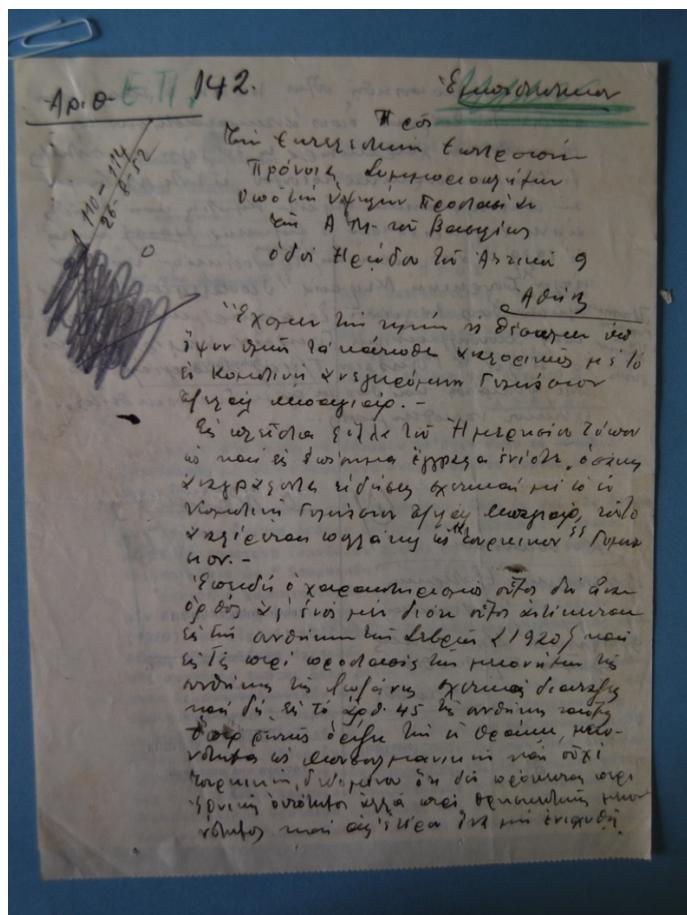
I spent many months in the General State Archives (GAK) of Rodope browsing the folders dating from the end of forties until the late sixties containing files concerning the minority. Amongst the many documents and correspondence, I found from the Prefecture of Rodope the most interesting files were the minutes of the CCT meetings, little pieces of which I also used in the context chapter and I will return to in other parts of the thesis. It is important to note the significance of these files as the operation of CCT was completely unknown until Iliadis, a young researcher, found about it, almost randomly, in 2003 while browsing the General Archives of the State (GAK) in the city of Kavala. After Iliadis based his Masters dissertation on these (2004), ‘iospress’, a team of journalists, published an article about it in 2005 on a Greek mainstream newspaper revealing for the first time to the public the secret operation of CCT (Iliadis, 2012:217; Papanikolaou, 2007: 96). The same year, I suspect not by coincidence, the archival body was transferred to the Archives of the MFA in Athens not available anymore to researchers or public (Iliadis, 2012: 403). It is known, amongst the research community in Greece that MFA has a very strict policy when it comes to granting access to its archives and as some researchers in Greece have argued⁴⁸ this is especially when it comes to issues that are considered by the Ministry as nationally sensitive.

In Komotini, I found to my surprise again parts of this archival body and most importantly, minutes from the earlier meetings of CCT that were missing from the GAK of Kavala when Iliadis conducted his research. All the archives I accessed in Komotini belonged to the Archive of the Ministry of the Interior, a

⁴⁸ A discussion here: <http://www.iospress.gr/ios2003/ios20030706a.htm> and a recent debate here: <http://www.protagon.gr/epikairotita/ellada/erevna-stin-ellada-my-greek-drama-25014000000>. The MFA regulations for access to the archives here: http://arxeio.mfa.gr/portal/mfa_welcome.jsp (All pages accessed 20/5/16)

different body than that accessed by Iliadis in Kavala belonging to the Directory of Minority Schools. In GAK of Rodope I did not find any other trace of the Minority Schools Directory Archive. I was told that the GAK does not have access to these, whereas other researchers who worked in Thrace told me that this body of archives ‘disappear’ or to put it better never appear in the light of the day. It is important to note that I talk about historical archives, that are typically open-access.

Trying to keep my referencing system to the historical archives concise, I give in footnotes the number of the folder in GAK of Rodope, for example, AA 104, the registry number (AP/EP), date on the document and page when relevant. If it is a CCT minutes’ file, I give the name of folder, number of meeting and date.



16. Sample of an archival file

2.4 Analysis & presentation of the data

Having developed a wide-scope research question (How do otherness and education in Thrace interrelate and shape both the be(com)ing and the learning of people from the group?) rather than having sub-questions, I use the questions that emerge from the data analysis to structure the investigation in each chapter.

The wide focus of the question in combination to the narrative interviewing I used for the collection of the data made it difficult to find quickly a direction through my data and get a sense of where these multifocal stories pointed to.

In addition, I found difficult the transition from the field to my university desk. The people I had developed bonds with were now typed words in my papers. For a long time, I used to approach my analysis as if I were still in dialogue or some sort of communication with the participants through my writing. Until I reached the emotional state of detachment from my life in Komotini and the data collection, I could not see and read through the stories I collected.

As brilliantly Andrews (2014: 15) puts it: “In being critical, we release ourselves from operating within the framework of truth into which our narrator has invited us (...).” For a long time, I was misinterpreting the distance I had to build and the scholarly movement between ‘belief and disbelief’ (*ibid.*) as some sort of betrayal to the participants. It took me time until I started exploring the narratives in their second layer, ‘beyond their truth’ as a product of agency: “Human agency and imagination determine what gets included and excluded in narrativization, how events are plotted, and what they are supposed to mean” Riessman (1993:2).

2.4.1 Building an analytical framework

Although I had hundreds of pages with the interview data, I did not use any software to code them. When I first attempted to do it, I realised that by breaking the stories I compromised on their essence. Therefore, for the whole period of analysis and writing I kept on working with the stories as a whole. Alongside, I coded themes several times by taking notes in the margins and in my notebook

which I kept on revising and filtering until I could select the narrative kernels that seemed to mostly matter in the narrative universe of each story and across these. During this process the need for a spatial lens emerged when I realised the way various geographies were woven in each story pointing a roadmap for looking across them. I started thinking in spatial terms separating parts of the stories that unfolded or referred to rural and urban, minority and majority educational spaces, Thrace- non Thrace while keeping a parallel focus on the liminal spaces between these and the connective mobility across the various spaces.

The second analytical tool that emerged following my data collection process was to make a distinction between the personal, the community and the historical narratives looking into the ways they interrelate. The personal stories told by the participants, which I name in this thesis the ‘small stories’, have a broader narrative context on which they draw. The majority or minority community narratives are part of this context. Rappaport (1995: 803) defines a community narrative as ‘a story that is common among a group of people’. Andrews (2004) names the broader cultural narratives ‘master narratives’ stating that: “One of the key functions of master narratives is that they offer people a way of identifying what is assumed to be a normative experience”. A certain story-line or thread that appears many times in the literature, press and public or political discourse is what I understand as constituting part of the community or a master narrative.

During the interviews the dialectic between the personal and the community stories was evident. Often participants addressed directly the dominant majority narratives: ‘they say about us...’, ‘they are right when they say’, ‘they do not know...’. Once a participant after he reproduced a thread of the minority community narrative, commented reflectively ‘or maybe I am prejudiced?’ At other times participants were very reluctant to express opinions that deviated from the master community narrative worrying that they might get in trouble, if I did not protect their anonymity. In other times, when participants expressed views non compliant to the community narrative they would add comments like:

‘if you ask them here, they will say...’ making clear the juxtaposition. Once a participant asked me to ignore as ‘unnecessary’ an important element of her story. I knew that this was because that element had clear links to and connotations within her community master narrative. I assumed that asking me to not include this was her trying to protect her story from being interpreted in a certain way according to the collective meanings.

In my analysis, I attempt to pull out the connective threads between the personal and the collective narratives, either by emphasising these relations within the narrative materials of the personal stories or by bringing small stories next to stories publicly told in Komotini, or pieces from the historical State archives that formed the national narrative. It is therefore a patchwork of micro and macro narratives (Andrews, 2014) contemporary and historical, public and private. Taking into account the richness of my data, I have selected here those fragments that stand out the most or are most helpful in drawing a picture of these relations.

There is need to see this process as working in both directions. Andrews (2014: 86) argues that “individuals reveal how they position themselves within the communities in which they live, to whom or what they see themselves as belonging to/ alienated from, how they construct notions of power, and the processes by which such power is negotiated”. By the same token, the macro narratives: may that be the national master narrative, or the Thracian community narratives also reveal how they position their members and how they are positioned regarding the ‘Other’ community. This double bound dynamic meaning making is explored through the way data are analysed. The historical context that preceded gives also a time and collective memory dimension on the way the cultural and personal stories and what is ‘tellable’ in these has been formed across time.

Another way to think of the narratives presented in the thesis is Scott’s notion of ‘hidden transcripts’. According to Scott (1990: xii), “Every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a “hidden transcript” that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant. The powerful, for their part, also

develop a hidden transcript representing the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed.” In the context of the thesis, we can regard as ‘hidden transcripts’ the small narratives within the group, “spoken behind the back of the dominant”, which in this case might be the powerful elite of the group, the majority or the State. While, the historic archival narratives represent ‘the powerful’s’ hidden transcripts”, which accessible to us today, reveal State’s secret practices and the in the shadow fabrication of its big narrative before it took the form for public dissemination and consumption.

2.4.2 Re-writing the data

All interviews were conducted in Greek. Likewise, the publicly told stories I recorded were also in Greek. This means that the data presented here have been through two levels of transition across languages. Understanding that my minority participants had to put their thoughts and feelings in Greek, instead of their mother tongue, there was already something lost in translation. My very little knowledge of Turkish allowed me at times to understand the deeper feeling they wanted to express when I could see a Turkish expression being put in Greek words and I tried to convey this in my translation in English. During the analysis, I worked with all my data in Greek and only translated into English when I added quotes into the thesis. I tried to convey the meanings as they would be expressed in English, and I reworked my translations with time trying to make them making more sense in the target language. Because English is second language for me at times this was challenging for slang or other culturally bound expression. On some occasions, I included transliterated in English the original Greek word or expression. Translation of the archival materials was particularly hard because Greek in formal writing can be very dense with extremely long sentences and complicated syntax. Therefore, I simplified the structure a lot to make the text more comprehensible in English. I also edited to the minimum some of the quotes making them more concise in English. I indicate parts that I omitted using this symbol: (...). Pauses are indicated in the text like this: ...

I tried to present some participants more holistically prioritising the stories that were more rounded as a result of an in-depth interview or a series of interviews

I had with them. Therefore, some participants appear across different chapters revealing different dimensions of their story in each. Each chapter focuses mainly on the stories of three to five people. Voices of other participants are brought in too through fragments of their stories when they are relevant and can shed more light into the principle stories the chapters focus on. The large number of different participant voices might be slightly confusing for the reader. When I first introduce a participant I provide a mini profile of her/him.

For ensuring anonymity and confidentiality I use pseudonyms. These were chosen by me according to their meanings in Turkish and how they reminded me some personality characteristics of my participants. However, I was cautious not to choose names that could reveal someone's identity. I was extremely careful to conceal the identity of the participants, especially because I found myself understanding who the participants were in other studies. In critical points, I have changed participants' gender, place of origin, or other identifying details.

Being the author of the thesis I have had the opportunity not only to describe the major influences on my lenses but also how these evolved and what this meant each time for my interrelation with the data. This was a privilege that the participants in the research did not have. Having talked with a large number of people, and being very constrained in time and financial resources I decided to abstain from giving the chance to every single participant to approve the way I handled their stories during the analysis and writing up. I also considered how handling this on-line, since I was in England, two years after the interviews and by counter-translating from my English text to Greek would not be very helpful overall. However, in some occasions when I judged that the part of the story I was intending to make use of was sensitive or could potentially reveal participants' identity I contacted them to take a second consent and make sure that they were comfortable with these parts being in the thesis.

Andrews (2014:8) notes that “the lens from which we view our lives and the world around us is one which is not only situated, but dynamic, that is to say, in

a constant state of being created and recreated". The small stories woven in the body of the thesis were the stories people held and crafted when I interviewed them three years ago. During this time, some of these stories might have been evolved, reviewed, changed or even replaced by completely different ones. It is important to keep this in mind and treat this thesis as a window to see some narrative events at a specific time under specific circumstances. This is not to diminish the value of the stories or this work but rather to appreciate the openness and dynamic character of meaning makings and identity narratives as always in motion and renegotiation.

Conclusion

"no need to hear your voice, when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still [the]colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk"

bell hooks, *Yearning*

I already talked thoroughly in chapter two about the frustration I experienced while in the field, feeling for the longest period of my stay the need to continuously prove that I was not guilty of the likely suspicions that I were a spy, potentially willing to harm people in some way. The community stories of suspicion and espionage around me and the stories these subsequently created in my mind, located me in an imagined space where potentially I was always guilty of something. Relating to people and collecting data from this imagined space, which was not my centre and where I was not at home in my skin, influenced inevitably the data I collected.

I further explained how upon my return to England it took me a year to debunk a new guilty story I was telling myself. The story was that the more intellectually, analytically and academically I was trained to engage with the stories of those who participated in my research- and were now my friends- the more I was alienating the stories from their tellers betraying my friends and participants.

With an extreme length of time, many drafts, some arguments and lots of frustration this story in my head was replaced with a new one that allowed me to finish this thesis.

Similar to the way that towards the end of fieldwork I came home in myself as researcher and claimed the residency of my centre transforming completely the depth of my relation to the participants and the volume and depths of the stories I collected; towards the end of my writing-up I came home to myself as re-writer of the data I had, understanding that I could do this having my heart fully present and not pushed back for giving all space to the critical and analytical mind. There was no need for either-or, there was need for wholeness and claiming again my centre as the standpoint for this process.

It is important to close the chapter revisiting the last guilt I held while finishing the thesis; that of the minority Greek telling the minority Thracian story. I need to claim the ownership of my intentions and interpretations and also acknowledge what I heard in Komotini a couple of times by Muslims and Christians alike: I am from somewhere else and somewhere else my life is. What people from both communities persistently underlined to me is to take note of my very own lenses when looking at their very own stories. It is important to remember that the stories I collected and listened- in my own language- those I did not hear, those I chose and edited along with my analytical insights, I combined, compared and separated have all been through the various filters of my own identities and views.

Chapter 3

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework that was guiding my endeavour and helped me to shape my questions initially, was Bourdieu's sociological theory of 'habitus'. I arrived in Komotini equipped theoretically with Bourdieu's concepts, which inevitably influenced the way I was listening to participants' narratives. Indeed, while collecting the data Bourdieu felt extremely relevant. A large part of the participants' educational and life experiences could be related to Bourdieu's concepts such as the 'hysteresis effect', 'doxa', 'habitus' and of course 'capital'.

In the course of my fieldwork and especially later during the analysis the need for a spatial filter also emerged when I realised that geographical location of agents and their trajectories across different spaces within and out of Thrace have played an important role on the shaping of their experiences' and identities around education. Moreover, I found in participants' narrations that the various physical distances between different spaces correlate interestingly with symbolic ones. Bringing a spatial lens into my work would then enable a deeper analysis employing Bourdieu's concepts.

This chapter is divided into two sections: In the first one, the scope is on the collective, exploring ideas around collective identities, group making and some introductory notes on space production. In the second part, the scope is on the level of self-exploring those concepts that will help me understand the individuals' experiences as these are embedded in the previous broader frame. By all means, this is just a rough division as many aspects of the collective are related to the self and vice- versa. Both sections will provide a basic outline of the main theories and concepts which will inform my analysis both in the macro-level of group politics and dynamics in Thrace and in the micro-level of the experiences and decisions of individuals within this general network of politics and relations.

3.1 The Collective

3.1.1 Approaching identity. Boundaries and the politics of belonging

First of all, I need to outline the general understanding of ‘identity’ that underpins my thesis, not as a property but rather as process and narrative. According to Jenkins (1996: 4), “Identity can in fact only be understood as process, as ‘being’ or ‘becoming’”. Therefore, examining identity is about examining the constant process and outcomes of active and on-going negotiations; “the outcome of agreement or disagreement” (ibid.).

Apart from the understanding of identity as verb and transition; as ‘being’ and ‘becoming’, I also adopt a performative and discursive notion of identity. As Yuval-Davis (2006: 202) argues: “Identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not)”. The understanding of identities as narratives emphasises their fluid and situational character; in different situations and for achieving different outcomes people may employ different narratives for performing different identities.

The situational and fluid character of identities as narratives and performative actions is also emphasized in Goffman’s (1959) work about the presentation of self. For Goffman any projection of a definition over a situation that entails a projection of identity is largely a product of agents’ ‘calculation’ reflecting their interests on the desired outcome of an encounter. Goffman argues that agents might be well aware of these calculations or maybe unaware as these are often conditioned by the “tradition of group or social status” (ibid.: 3).

Yuval-Davis (ibid.: 202) acknowledges that “the identity narratives can be individual or they can be collective, the latter often a resource for the former”. Jenkins (1996) sees two different types of collective identity: the first related to the internal identification that makes a ‘group’ and the second to the external identification that makes a ‘category’: “The first exists inasmuch as it is recognised by its members, the second is constituted in its recognition by observers” (ibid.:82). In this thesis I adopt the term ‘community’ when I want to stress an internal understanding, a viewpoint from within the collective identity ‘minority’. I use of the term ‘group’, always referring to the Western Thrace

minority group, equalling Jenkins' concept of 'category' in other words when I will be locating the viewpoint of the collective 'minority' externally. Community holds an emotional charge of togetherness, whereas I view the word group unloaded by emotions as an external label.

Collective identities are necessarily associated with membership to a group, voluntarily or involuntarily and hence to the politics of belonging which come along with the processes of differentiation and othering. Talking about negotiations and struggles over representations makes it evident that "power and politics are central to questions of identity" (Jenkins, 1996: 24) especially as "social identities exist and are acquired, claimed and allocated within power relations" (ibid.). Returning to Goffman and his scheme of encounters and interactions he argues that to each projection there is a response. Therefore, definitions (of identities and relational patterns amongst others) are a matter of negotiation between the projection and the response that this has; what Goffman names a "working consensus" between the two parties. Taking this to a greater scale in Thrace we can talk about the 'working consensus' between the minority and the majority definitions of the situation, their respective collective identities and belongings. The power relations defining whose claims are more likely to be 'temporarily honoured', even if real consensus has not been achieved.

Belonging and collective identity become politicised and intermingled in power dynamics. According to Yuval-Davis (2006: 197) belonging is not only an emotional need but can be plotted out as a political project too: "the politics of belonging comprises specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectivities that are, at the same time, themselves being constructed by these projects in very particular ways". She further underlines how it is within a frame of specific power dynamics that some identities linked to the collective and framed as belongings are seen as natural: "Even in its most stable 'primordial' forms, however, belonging is always a dynamic process, not a reified fixity- the latter is only a naturalized construction of particular hegemonic form of power relations" (Yuval-Davis, 2011 :12).

There is need, into a framework of 'the politics of belonging', for a conceptual understanding of the boundaries that include and exclude. According to Yuval-

Davis (2006: 204), “The boundaries that the politics of belonging is concerned with are the boundaries of the political community of belonging, the boundaries that separate the world population into ‘us’ and ‘them’”. It is the construction of borders and boundaries that “determines and colors the meaning of the particular belonging” (Yuval-Davis, 2004: 216).

The concept of boundaries: their construction, maintenance, transcendence and challenging is particularly important in understanding the politics of difference and identity and the workings of power over the making and unmaking of groups. Guibernau (2013: 36) emphasises this significant meaning of boundaries by stating that, “The continuity of a group is contingent on its ability to maintain the boundary: that is, the distinction between those who belong and are inside the boundary and ‘outsiders’, ‘aliens’, ‘strangers’”.

Following the idea of distinction that is associated with the notion of boundaries the next section will outline an understanding of the political manipulation of difference for the making and unmaking of groups and the establishment of legitimised hierarchies between these based on the theoretical framework of Bourdieu.

3.1.2 The ‘symbolic configurations of difference’

Although before my fieldwork I was conceptually mostly focused on the level of self, while in Komotini I realised that it was important to understand the broader frame into which individual aspirations and choices are embedded. Already on my first days there, I felt the politicisation of identities and belongings and the underground clash between the ‘Greeks’ and the ‘Turks’ or the ‘Christians’ and the ‘Muslims’. Moreover, in the course of my research I became more aware of the hierarchy and the classification of the various cultures into ‘majority’ – ‘minority’ ones and the further classification within the so called ‘minority’ of sub-majorities and sub-minorities. It would not be possible to understand the upward educational mobility experiences of those classified into the ‘minority’ group without examining the power dynamics that allow or not the claiming of various belongings as well as the rights or restrictions that come along with these once they are granted.

Bourdieu argues that objective difference occurs in the social space breaking with the relativist tradition that views all differences as socially constructed: “One must therefore assert the existence of an objective space determining compatibilities and incompatibilities, proximities and distances” (Bourdieu, 1985:725). What is important however is the notion of ‘distinctions’ that Bourdieu introduces meaning “symbolic transfigurations of de facto differences, and more generally, ranks, orders, grades, and all other symbolic hierarchies” (ibid.: 731).

Symbolic power for Bourdieu (1991: 166) “is a power of constructing reality and one which tends to establish a gnoseological order”. I understand the concept of ‘gnoseological order’ as a shared code for cognition of the social world that then comprises a common ground for the production of the ‘immediate meaning of the world’. Bourdieu draws this idea from the ‘logical conformism’ of Durkheim. According to Bourdieu (ibid.): “Symbols are the instruments par excellence of ‘social integration’: as instruments of knowledge and communication (...) they make it possible for there to be a *consensus* on the meaning of the social world, a consensus which contributes fundamentally to the reproduction of the social order”. This consensus over what is common sense, the gnoseological order, produces the effect of ‘doxa’ which means perceiving the world, and hence the hierarchies and classifications, as natural, as common sense.

For Bourdieu (1989: 23) symbolic power’s “form par excellence is the power to make group” and one crucial condition for symbolic power to achieve this is the ‘symbolic capital’, which has been accumulated in the past through ‘previous struggles’, resulting now in ‘social authority’ which ensures the capability to making things and realities by the means of performative discourse. “Symbolic capital is a credit; it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition” (ibid.). How closely this theory can be related to the nationalist ideology in Thrace and the way it makes groups, classifies them and forces them to perform boldly their identity and unity becomes clearer in another part of Bourdieu’s work where he explains thoroughly his view on the making of groups and the making of the reality of group’s unity and identity:

“Struggles over ethnic or regional identity, in other words, over the properties (stigmata or emblems) linked with the origin, through the place of origin and its associated durable marks, such as accent are a particular case of the different struggles over classifications, struggles over the monopoly of the power to make people see and believe, to get them to know and recognize, to impose the legitimate definition of the divisions of the social world and thereby to make and unmake groups (...) What is at stake here is the power of imposing a vision of the social world through principles of di-vision which, when they are imposed on a whole group, establish meaning and consensus about meaning, and in particular about the identity and unity of the group, which creates the reality of the unity and identity of the group” (Bourdieu, 1991: 221)

Furthermore, under the common sense understanding (the effect of doxa), classifications, ranks and hierarchies are then being accepted as self-evident and therefore are being reproduced even from those who are disadvantaged under these schemes. This is how symbolic power exercises symbolic violence through the workings of misrecognition: “Objective power relations tend to reproduce themselves in symbolic power relation, in views of the social world that help to ensure the permanence of these power relations” (Bourdieu, 1985: 731).

According to the Greek nationalist ideology the Greek-Orthodox culture and those who ‘belong’ to it, naturally and self-evidently, should enjoy more privileges within the Greek state in comparison to any other ethnic/religious culture that is not ‘endemic’ to the nation. Understanding the underground or outspoken clash of cultures in Thrace with reference to nationalism is about understanding the workings of symbolic power that ensures the maintenance of dominant relations on the ‘common-sense’ grounds.

The way culture relates to symbolic power and domination in Bourdieu’s theory, is highlighted by Navarro (2006: 14-15): “A second foundational principle in his theory is the notion that culture is not only the very ground for human interaction, but is also an especial terrain of domination. He argues that all symbolic systems are anchored in culture and thus determine our understanding of reality. (...) Culture, in the form of dispositions, objects, institutions, language and so on, mediates social practices by connecting people and groups to

institutionalised hierarchies. Thus it necessarily embodies power relations”. ‘Reality’ for Bourdieu (1991: 222) “is social through and through and the most ‘natural’ classifications are based on characteristics which are not in the slightest respect natural and which are to a great extent the product of an arbitrary imposition, in other words, of a previous state of the relations of power in the field of struggle over legitimate delimitation”.

According to Bourdieu (1991:167) “the dominant culture (...) contributes to the legitimisation of the established order by establishing distinctions (hierarchies) and legitimating these distinctions”. The way that this is achieved is by undermining the production of vision through di-vision and emphasizing the production of communication: “the culture which unifies (the medium of communication) is also the culture that separates (the instrument of distinction) and which legitimates distinctions by forcing all other cultures (designated as sub-cultures) to define themselves by their distance from the dominant culture”.

3.1.3 Ideologies and power

For Bourdieu ideologies play an important role as symbolic instruments of domination that ensure the legitimacy of the gnoseological order. Bourdieu (1991: 165) views the “ideological power as specific contribution of symbolic violence (orthodoxy)⁴⁹ to political violence (domination)”. However, he clarifies that ideologies are always ‘doubly determined’ not only these generally serve the interests of a certain ‘class’, for example the dominant culture, but also the particular interests of the elite that produces these ideologies (ibid.:169).

Bourdieu’s work on symbolic power and the role of ideologies on creating and sustaining ‘orthodoxy’ has many common elements with Gramsci’s understanding of ‘hegemony’. Drawing on both may enhance the understanding of the Thracian context and the detrimental power that nationalism exercises in maintaining the power relations between the so-called ‘majority’ and ‘minority’.

⁴⁹ Along with the field of doxa, there exists also the field of opinion in the two poles of which are the ‘heterodoxy’ and the ‘orthodoxy’. Heterodoxy represents the challenging of doxa, the recognition of the arbitrariness of the power relations. Orthodoxy aims to bring the challengers back to the doxic field. The field of opinion is the field of dispute in contrast to the „taken for granted“ that the field of doxa represents (Bourdieu, 1977:168).

Gramsci, on his theorisation of subaltern cultures in his Prison Notebooks, places centrally the concept of ‘common sense’ (Crehan, 2002: 98) - what Bourdieu calls ‘doxa’ or ‘gnoseological order’. According to Crehan (ibid: 101), “For Gramsci power relations can be seen as occupying a continuum with direct coercion through brute force at one pole and willing consent at the other”. The notion of the continuum of power relations allows me to draw an analogy with Bourdieu’s distinction between political violence that entails force and symbolic violence which is softly based on the principle of ‘misrecognition’.

Misrecognition or the establishment of ‘common sense’ through the effects of ‘doxa’ reflects back on the creation of ‘hegemony’, Gramsci’s major contribution to the understanding of power: “The concept of hegemony is really a very simple one. It means political leadership based on the consent of the led, a consent which is secured by the diffusion and popularization of the world view of the ruling class” (Bates, 1975: 352).

The ‘intellectuals’ and the political mobilisation of ideas according to Gramsci have a major role into producing the hegemony of the ruling class and the establishment of the world view that serves its own interests as the ‘common sense’ one. In this sense, the ‘intellectuals’ of Gramsci resemble the ‘elite’ of Bourdieu. As Crehan clarifies (ibid.:131) drawing on the Prison Notebooks “intellectuals are not merely those who think, but those whose thoughts are considered to have a certain weight and authority”. Putting it on Bourdieu terms, those who have effective accumulation of symbolic capital through previous struggles, hence the power to name.

Moreover, linking to, previously mentioned, Bourdieu’s understanding of institutions and culture and their direct relation to the modes of hierarchy and symbolic power, Gramsci has also focused on the general system that produces and legitimises knowledge: “Gramsci (...) is interested in the institutions and practices that produce socially recognized knowledge and how individuals are situated within these, rather than in lone individual thinkers” (Crehan, 2002: 133).

These concepts are relevant to my study as they highlight the role that the ideology of nationalism plays in maintaining hegemonic cultural relations in

W.Thrace and the mission ascribed to ‘intellectuals’ and institutions on maintaining the nationalist world view as the common sense one creating thus, subcultures and most importantly ‘subaltern consciousness’. ‘Subaltern consciousness’ means a position from which someone views the world through the lens provided by the dominant culture legitimising and hence reproducing its domination. The theoretical discussion here also relates to the big narratives that are circulated through elite advocacy networks of both minority and majority groups and the State. It is important to bear in mind, the interests of the elite that produces and circulates certain ideologies as Bourdieu underlined. The role of the elite and the way its big stories sustain certain ideologies will be explored particularly in chapters five and six.

Young (1990) understands justice in relation not to a distributive paradigm of power but to the structural conditions that enable or disable “the development and exercise of individual capacities” as well as free expression and communication. She views oppression (institutional processes) and domination (institutional conditions) as largely overlapping, although she argues not all subject to domination are oppressed. Moving slightly away of the role of big actors such as the State or ‘the elite’ or ‘the intellectuals’, Young (ibid.: 41) stressed the significance in perpetuation of the oppression of the “well-meaning people in ordinary interactions”, the “normal processes of everyday life”. Chapter five looks more into oppression as the institutionalized conditions and processes that have prevented or limited people from the group in developing and expressing their capacities and the role of the elite in reinforcing these. Chapter fours and six will present more of this aspect of Young’s understanding of oppression; the one that arises in daily situations by well-meaning individuals.

Young (ibid.) offers an analytical scheme of exploring oppression through what she argues to be its five faces: exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. Some aspects of marginalisation are looked at in chapter four, Umut and Taşkin in chapters four and five illustrate how powerlessness has led people’s decisions and experiences in education. Finally, chapter six, which looks at the majority educational spaces, offers an opportunity to look at aspects of cultural imperialism as it emerges through participants’ small stories.

3.2 The interpersonal

3.2.1 'Habitus': a 'border' concept.

This section aspires to shed light on the level of self at the individual experience having at the background the social and the collective. I will unfold below some of Bourdieu's concepts to make a tapestry for understanding how individuals in Thrace may make sense of the world around them and make respective choices with reference to upward educational and social mobility.

The central concept in Bourdieu's theory that constitutes the main lens through which I approached my research is the concept of 'habitus':

"The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor" (Bourdieu, 1990: 53).

I see 'habitus' as a border concept. Being located in between the subjective and the objective, the self and the collective, the past and the future. A dynamic one with two forces simultaneously exercised around it: a constraining and a liberating one; both as constraining established realities and as opportunities to break from these constructing new ones. In the following I will try to break down 'habitus' into its analytical units:

In between objective and subjective, past and present

According to Bourdieu "there exist, within the social world itself and not only within symbolic systems (language, myths, etc.), objective structures independent of consciousness and will of agents, which are capable of guiding and constraining their practices and representations" (Bourdieu, 1989: 14). In this statement, the objective structures or conditionings do not define in an absolute way the agents' practices and representations. They may guide and

constrain these but there is a space left to the will and the consciousness of the agent to deviate. The effects by the force exercised by the objective structures depend also on the subjective “schemes of perception, thought and action” which are associated with and are inherent to both ‘habitus’ and to various ‘fields’ (ibid.).

The dynamic nature of habitus with forces about it going both ways like a window that allows a gaze to travel both from inside to outside and vice versa and a wheel that can roll either ways is captured in the phrase of Bourdieu about “the dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality”⁵⁰ (Bourdieu, 1977: 72) .

Habitus stands between, and relates and depends to both the class of objective conditionings that have socially constituted it as a ‘system of cognitive and motivating structures’ and to “the socially structured situation in which the agents’ interests are defined” (ibid. :76) bridging in this way the past with the present and the future. Practices as products of habitus “cannot be deduced either from the present conditions which may seem to have provoked them or from the past conditions which have produced the habitus” (Bourdieu, 1990: 56). Habitus is tightly related to the past, Bourdieu defines it amongst others as “embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history- is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product” (ibid.).

Bourdieu (1991:14) clarifies that “particular practices or perceptions should be seen, not as the product of the habitus as such, but as the product of the relation between the habitus, on the one hand and the specific social contexts or ‘fields’ within which individuals act, on the other”. The encounter at any present moment between the ‘incorporated history’ (habitus) and the ‘objectified history’ (fields) will give an outcome creating a future more likely, but not necessarily, in alignment with this history that has defined the terms of the ‘game’. He uses the terms ‘game’ and ‘field’ drawing the metaphor from the

⁵⁰ And elsewhere more explicitly: “Overriding the spurious opposition between the forces inscribed in an earlier state of the system, outside the body, and the internal forces arising instantaneously as motivations springing from free will, the internal dispositions- the internalization of externality- enable the external forces to exert themselves, but in accordance with the specific logic of the organisms in which they are incorporated” (Bourdieu, 1990:55).

sports: “A field or market may be seen as a structured space of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or ‘capital’” (Bourdieu, 1991: 14). At the same time, it is “always the site of struggles in which individuals seek to maintain or alter the distribution of capital specific to it” (ibid.).

In between the self and the collective

A crucial aspect of Bourdieu’s theory is found in what he names ‘homology’ or ‘orchestration’ of habitus. As seen in the previous section, for Bourdieu power works in producing ‘gnoseological order’; a common sense world. It is in these ‘common sense’ grounds that arbitrary hierarchies and power relations can be legitimised and taken for granted, as natural.

This is a particularly relevant part of the theory when looking into how aspirations are developed or not at the level of self for different members of a certain group. What is common sense for someone to aspire to and what is common sense for her/him to do in regards to this or that aspiration that might arise?

Bourdieu acknowledged that “it is impossible for all (or even two) members of the same class to have had the same experiences in the same order” (Bourdieu, 1990: 60). However, he suggests that it is more likely for members of the same class/ group have shared homogeneous conditions of existence. This results in homologous practices as products of a homologous habitus that has been conditioned by homogenous structures and conditions. Bourdieu, with the notion of habitus, relates the individual to the collective: “Each individual system of dispositions is a structural variant of the others, expressing the singularity of its position within the class and its trajectory” (Bourdieu, 1990: 60).

The taken for grantedness of practices aligned to the class habitus is what then casts out as ‘extravagances’ the practices that deviate from the ‘norm’ from the ‘common-sense’. And it is exactly these ‘extravagances’ that have the potential to challenge and reveal the arbitrariness of what is considered as ‘natural’. It is these ‘extravagances’ that may play the role of a counter-power in a well-established system based on a certain ‘gnoseological order’. Going back to my

research questions, I am interested in understanding how those members of a group who deviate from the class ‘normal’ practices experience this deviation.

“The habitus tends to generate all the ‘reasonable’, ‘common-sense’ behaviours (and only these) (...) which are likely to be positively sanctioned because they are objectively adjusted to the logic characteristic of a particular field (...) At the same time (...) it tends to exclude all ‘extravagances’ (‘not for the likes of us’), that is all the behaviours that would be negatively sanctioned because they are incompatible with the objective conditions” (Bourdieu, 1990: 56)

The young people in Thrace who found themselves in school classrooms in the late nineties and early millennium, have been a generation in between two different class conditionings. I use the term class here referring to the overgeneralising and homogenising category of ‘minority’ as defined by the Greek state discourse which changed during the nineties. My research thus seeks to understand this change and its effects transgenerationally and explore both the struggle of those in ‘extravagance’ and also the shift on what has been collectively considered ‘common-sense’ upon the shift of the social conditions for the population categorised by the state and the dominant discourse as ‘minority’. It also seeks to understand the clash between the past and the emergent meanings in the encounter with the changing conditions of existence.

3.2.2 Capital: various volumes and types of power

I will return to the notion of field later as it is closely related to the spatial lens that I aim to add to my analysis. I will only briefly outline here the concept of capital in Bourdieu and the way it relates to power. As specified above different forms of capital are specific to different fields. Apart from the symbolic capital which I referred to in the previous section Bourdieu suggests three main types of capital: economic, cultural and social.

Achieving an understanding of the different types of capital and the way these are specific to and operate in the various fields is crucial for exploring my research question on the upward educational mobility of ‘minority’ agents in W.Thrace. Seeing the adventurous journey to higher education as a ‘game’

played in the educational field, subfield of a broader social field with all types of capital inherent to it configurating different aspects of the game.

Cultural Capital can exist according to Bourdieu (1983: 47) in an ‘embodied’, ‘objectified’ or ‘institutionalised’ state. The first may be for example “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body”, the second various “cultural goods” and the latter could be “academic qualifications”. Social capital on the other hand is more about “membership to a group” (*ibid.*). All forms of capital; economic, cultural, social and symbolic can transform into one another. If the experience in higher education and the certificate that results from it is considered a form of cultural capital that may bring more ‘profit’ in social, economic, symbolic or further cultural capital, the pursuit of it requires the agents to take part in a specific field and struggle for its accumulation from their positions in the field and the volume and type of capital they have at hand when starting the game.

I see the various spaces within and out of Thrace through which young students need to move in order to pursue higher education as different fields where some players are better equipped than others. Therefore, some of the game participants need to undertake a heavier struggle due to their position in the field that is largely defined by their previously accumulated different volume and type of capital. Some players are equipped with the habitus that endows them with the sort of capital most needed for occupying a stronger position into the field: “the various fields provide themselves with agents equipped with the habitus needed to make them work” (Bourdieu, 1990:67). All these informed my research question about how ‘the feeling for the game’ of different agents has been shaped by the different spaces, fields, that inhabit and visit. It also led me to think about the game, amongst others, in terms of struggles for capital from different capital positionings.

3.3 The spatial turn

3.3.1 Space as a social product.

Although Bourdieu did not theorise on space and power, he employed spatial vocabulary in his theory and did use a spatial approach through his metaphors⁵¹ even if he did not do so explicitly. This makes it smoother to combine his theoretical pillars that have guided my research questions and analysis with what is called the ‘spatial turn’.

It is important to start this section with a founding assertion by Smith and Katz (1993: 72) that “spatial metaphors are problematic in so far as they presume that space is not” therefore, they denounce the notion of ‘absolute space’, which views space as ‘innocent’ associating it with a ‘sense of emptiness’. After they outline the historical roots of the absolutist understanding of space and its normalisation especially in the context of capitalism, they explain that this notion has contributed to what is perceived today in the West as the space of ‘common-sense’.

Soja (1989) at the preface of his seminal work on post-modern geographies underlined that power is hidden also in space: “We must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology” (ibid.: 6).

Having acknowledged how ‘space’ is not innocent and that power is hidden in it, while politics and ideology play an important role in its production and reproduction, there is need for a theoretical model that will assist to explore it. Lefebvre’s work on ‘the production of space’ (1991) is quite obscure and complex. However, it suggests a useful theoretical tool for looking into space and I will try to briefly outline it here drawing on other scholar’s simplified description of it.

Lefebvre summarised the theorisations of space historically first as ‘physical’, later as ‘mental’ and more recently as ‘social’. For Lefebvre (ibid.:26) space, “in

⁵¹ See for example his theory of ‘fields’

addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power”. In his model he tried to merge all the different historical phases of theorising space into one whole, unitary model. He thus produced a triadic model where what is important to bear in mind is that its three aspects are inextricably interconnected and cannot be separated as three distinct analytical categories as they all function in tight relation to one another; ‘each one ’underpins and presupposes the other’ (ibid.:14).

- **The perceived space or ‘Spatial Practice’:** “This is the production and reproduction of specific places and spatial ‘ensembles’ appropriate to the social formation. It would include building typology, urban morphology and the creation of zones and regions for specific purposes” (Shields, 1999: 162). Shields associates this aspect with the ‘common-sense’ taken for granted daily encounter with the space and its appropriation. Moreover, the conceived space is the aspect of space that ensures ‘the reproduction of the social relations of production’ (ibid.). Loxley et al. (2011: 48) understand this aspect encompassing both ‘the physical organisation and control of space’ but also ‘the norms’ of behaviour that are associated with the various physical spaces, hence through the ‘perceived space’ “certain forms of relationships are valorised and legitimised”.
- **The ‘conceived space’ or the ‘Representations of Space’:** “This is concerned with space as an abstract entity and ultimately as an object of conceptualisation and theorisation” (Loxley et al., 2011:48). It is the space of the architect, the engineer, the urban planner, the geographer etc, “all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived” (Lefebvre, 1991: 38).
- **The lived space or the ‘Representational Spaces’:** “space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols” (Lefebvre, 1991:39). This aspect constitutes for Shields (1999: 164) “the social imaginary”. And as Loxley et al. (2011: 48) better explain this aspect refers to “how space is experienced individually and collectively (inhabitants and users) through the translation and transformation of its symbols”.

It is important to keep this conceptual tool in mind when I will be later looking at the space in Rodope and the various perceived, conceived and lived geographies in the way they interrelate to the educational stories of my participants.

Another set of tools that will help me into this is what Migdal (2004) described as ‘mental maps’ and ‘virtual checkpoints’ the two main elements that he suggests that characterise boundaries:

“Checkpoints refer to the sites and practices that groups use to differentiate members from others and to enforce separation (...) At virtual checkpoints, practices go from scrutiny of modes of dress to detection of language and accent differences. Dress and language, along with other daily practices, then, not only are accepted ways of doing things among certain people; they also serve as signifiers at virtual checkpoints, as separators, marking who is included in a group and who is not” (ibid. 6).

On the other hand, “Mental maps incorporate elements of the meaning people attach to spatial configurations, the loyalties they hold, the emotions and passions that groupings evoke, and their cognitive ideas about how the world is constructed” (ibid.7). Migdal’s scheme relates both to Bourdieu’s orchestration of habitus and also to the various theories I draw on about the politicised boundaries of difference.

3.3.2 Resisting the binary ordering of difference; the spatial angle.

The choice for a triadic model was strategic for Lefebvre in his attempt to avoid the effect of dualisms that tend to form oppositional binaries: “A triad: that is, three elements and not two. Relations with two elements boil down to oppositions, contrasts and antagonisms” (Lefebvre, 1991: 39). The spatial turn when examining the politics of difference is significant in that direction: escaping from binary understanding and structuring of difference.

As stated above, one of the effects of ‘hegemony’ or ‘symbolic power’ and the ideology of nationalism in Thrace is the naturalisation of hierarchical ordering of difference in cultural binaries of opposition: ‘Greek- Turk’, ‘Christian- Muslim’, ‘majority- minority’. Adopting a spatial lens in the thesis aims, among

others, to overcome this hegemonic model of binary oppositions and its reproduction.

Anthias (2001:620) suggests that “the location of culture as the core element for defining identity and belonging” is problematic as it misses out not only other important constructions of difference such as gender or class but also the general context of power hierarchies in which cultural difference is embedded and operates. Anthias departs from this point to introduce her concept of ‘translocational positionality’ while critiquing hybridity theory for essentialising culture by the way that views, according to Anthias, cultural contact and syncretism as involving “monolithically constituted ethnic absolutisms”.

Soja and Hooper (1993:182) from a different standpoint and for different purposes,⁵² when talking about ‘the new cultural politics of difference’ also refer to the legacy of the modern identity politics which provided an ‘epistemological critique’ aimed at ““denaturalizing” the origins of binary ordering to reveal its social and spatial construction of difference as a means of producing and reproducing systematic patterns of domination, exploitation and subjection”. Any sort of binary ordering (Soja and Hooper view these in a broader frame than Anthias) is an oppressive structure in itself, they note, and one that needs to be reconsidered under different terms that brake the binary opposition and its inherent oppression. Anthias (1998: 522) notes how one pole of the binary is always considered the ‘standard’ or the normal and therefore the second pole is always charged with a negative value as in distance from the standard. As seen earlier, Bourdieu has also talked about how the culture that integrates is the one that separates making a map of proximities and distances; inclusions and exclusions; ‘di-visions’.

Talking about space and oppression it is important to introduce here the take of hooks (1990) on space and particularly her argument about margins not only as a ‘site of deprivation’ but also as a ‘site for struggle’. hooks understands margin as the home of the oppressed, yet ‘a profound edge’, a space where they can build a ‘community of resistance’ and imagine alternatives. In Bourdieu’s words it is where doxa can be questioned and in Young’s is where one can be nourished

⁵² I will return to their work in the next section.

for resisting cultural oppression. Chapter five, especially, will look into centres and margins in the perceived, conceived and lived space of Rodope and it is important to have hooks' ideas in mind when looking at the ways participants build their identities in relation to their respective positionalities regarding margin and centre.

The spatial turn in the context of my own research can contribute firstly, to the avoidance of cultural determinism and mono-analysis through nationalist discourse's own lens in the binary categories: Greek-Turk, Christian- Muslim, majority-minority. It may also help in illustrating how these categories are not unified and monostatic in terms of meaning and experience challenging their very own 'essence' and foundational myths, hence exposing their hegemonic constructing materials. It is also an attempt at academic resistance to further 'minoritising' in discourse the commonly named 'minority'. Doing so by looking at the multiplicity of experience of the agents, who are categorised as 'minority', by exploring it not only in relation to its mirroring opposite 'majority' but through a fish eye lens that offers various angles and multi-focal points.

3.4 On Becoming

At the initial stages of designing this study I had in mind to meet the first cohort of people from the minority who became students in Greek Higher Education Institutes. I was particularly interested in this since it was an unprecedented becoming for people from the group. In the pre-1990s era it was only very few men from the group who had studied in Greek universities.⁵³ The affirmative action for admissions in Higher Education allowed a big social leap to occur in the group from one generation to the other. It was about a becoming that a few years earlier was largely considered impossible.

Most of the personal narratives I collected have clearly a point when it is described as the process of thinking forward, of forming some sort of aspiration in relation to education. There were mainly three patterns in this. First, it was the

⁵³ I view EPATH as a different case.

model of aspiring a becoming and going for it. Second, the model of feeling constrained to aspire certain becomings although the desire was there and third, feeling completely at loss about aspiring for education. There were two narrative ways about it: either the teller was presenting the process from a point of view located in the past, through her/his past-self voice, or from a point of view located in the present through a reflective voice of her/his present-self.

There are three main theoretical strands on which I draw in this work for understanding the process of aspiring. I find very useful the concept of Appadurai (2004) that views aspiration as “navigational capacity”, the way Andrews (2014) places narrative at the heart of imagining futures, giving therefore a tone of narrative capacity in it, and finally the work of Bourdieu and the way it grounds aspiring on habitus.

Appadurai (2004) believes that the capacity to aspire is a cultural capacity challenging dominant notions about culture that associate it with ‘pastness’ and inhibition of development. As she argues, “Aspirations are never simply individual (as the language of wants and choices inclines us to think). They are always formed in interaction and in the thick of social life” (ibid.: 77). This aspect of interconnectedness between the personal capacity to aspire and the collective horizon of available aspirations features strongly in the personal narratives I collected and relates also to the notion of culturally available narrative stock for weaving one’s personal story as put in Andrews’ work (2014).

Returning to Bourdieu’s concepts of capital, Appadurai talks about ‘the poor’ as those who have little capital, not only financial but also social and symbolic. The scarcity on these resources means that they are more cautious on experimenting regarding what could be a possible becoming and are equipped with less experiences of exploring how stretched the horizon of possibilities may be. Therefore, another difference that Appadurai sees between the poor and those better off is that the first are more likely to aspire “in terms of specific goods and outcomes, often material and proximate” which are connected to common collective “axioms” about life (Appadurai, 2004: 68). Those with greater volume and more sophisticated composition of capital due to the richer stock of relevant

experiences in their social network can make a leap out of the immediate having a broader framework available that offers justifications while understands better the links and the complexities between “more and less immediate objects of aspiration”. The capacity to aspire, Appadurai argues, is a “navigational capacity” (ibid.: 69).

Andrews (2014) on the other hand, offers an interesting discussion associating aspiring with the capacity of narrative imagination grounded on Sartre’s idea of ‘the not-yet real’. “In order to realise the necessary steps of transformation for traveling from A (current reality) to B (a hoped for but as yet unrealised reality) one must first create some sort of narrative emplotment, which includes characters, plot (or action), and a desired endpoint. Thus, from one’s knowledge of the real, one must be able to extrapolate, to build out towards a world that is not yet real but which one day might be” (Andrews, 2014: 5). Relating this to Appadurai’s understanding of aspirations, the ability to build the narrative emplotment is related to the relevant experiences that make the person who imagines ‘the not-yet real’ confident not only to imagine that B might be possible but comfortable in designing in imagination the steps that will lead from A to B.

On the other hand, Bourdieu, describes how agents even in the case that as Andrews puts it ‘imagine’ B, due to their sense of place might never embark to reach it: “The sense of one’s place, as a sense of what one can or cannot ‘permit oneself, implies a tacit acceptance of one’s place, a sense of limits (‘that’s not for the likes of us’ etc.) or, which amounts to the same thing, a sense of distances, to be marked and kept respected or expected” (Bourdieu, 1985: 728). Borrowing the scheme about travelling from A to B, as described by Andrews, an agent might feel that A is her/his place whereas B is not, and due to this belief adjust her/his aspirations respectively. This process is also informed by a ‘practical evaluation’ of the situation, especially regarding the ‘likelihood for success’ (Bourdieu: 1977:77).

Bourdieu relates this process with the broader theory of habitus and the way agents are conditioned by what he calls ‘objective’ structures to reproduce what

is already there, instead of bringing about changes and creating alternative realities with the power of aspirations: “Because the dispositions durably inculcated by objective conditions (...) engender aspirations and practices objectively compatible with those objective requirements, the most improbable practices are excluded, either totally without examination, as unthinkable, or at the cost of the *double negation* which inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway refused and to love the inevitable” (ibid.77). Furthermore, probability or improbability is judged by a “practical evaluation” which takes into consideration “a whole body of wisdom, sayings, commonplaces, ethical percepts (“that’s not for the likes of us”) and at a deeper level, the unconscious principles of the ethos which, being the product of a learning process dominated by a determinate type of objective regularities, determines ‘reasonable’ and ‘unreasonable’ conduct of every agent subjected to those regularities” (ibid.).

In the chapters that follow certain stories feature regarding various aspiring processes with regards to upward educational mobility, especially the story of Azmi (Chapter Four), Umut (Chapter Five), Haluk (Chapter Six) and Nehir (Chapter Seven). In the discussion of these stories the theoretical concepts outlined above will be applied to these particular cases shedding light into the complex process of realising new imaginings.

Conclusion

This chapter pulled together the threads of the main theories that guide my analysis and the way I made sense of my data. At the sphere of personal and collective identities, I start from the basis that identifications are products of an ongoing process. They are situational, fluid and narrative in character. The thesis explores the ways that personal and collective identities interrelate and, as chapter one established, looks at how the narrative stock of the two communities in Rodope and the process of collective memory allow to different extents the identity narratives of individuals to develop and potentially challenge the boundaries of what is ‘tellable’ and what can be imagined.

The spatial lens has informed the way the data analysis was structured. Chapters four to seven demonstrate the way various educational spaces are filled with ideologies. This is particularly given through the big stories and the archival resources that describe the production of space as a means to exercise power. Participants' small stories then suggest how their experiences of encountering various spaces and crossing their boundaries have shaped aspects of their identities and learning experiences. Bourdieu's scheme of habitus provides the necessary tools to read through participants' small stories and analyse their movement across spaces and the making of meanings along this process. Linked to Bourdieu's and Young's understanding of constraints on people's capacities to develop and express aspirations; Andrews' and Appadurai's views on aspirations lead the discussion on how participants' experience goal setting and aspiring of formal education within the context of their conditions of being and learning in Rodope as well as the context of the master narratives.

Chapter 4

Rural Geographies: “Your geography defines your future”

This chapter aims to introduce the diversity of experiences within the minority group, which in public discourse is often constructed as homogeneous. Diversity of experiences is looked at throughout the thesis by reference to distances, physical and symbolic, between what is considered periphery and centre in the continuum of physical space. It is thus different in this sense from the way this is discussed in either the Greek national narrative or minority group's community narrative regarding the unitary (as 'Muslim'/'Turkish') or diverse character of the group (in the ethnic triple: Turkish/Pomak/ Roma) that is used for political mobilisation.

This chapter focuses on the mountainous zone, Pomak identities and briefly on female experience. These three domains of space, identities and experiences were very scarce in my research data. I have already mentioned in chapter one how hard it was to recruit participants who were not male, well-educated, identifying as Turks and living in Komotini. Judging by the abundance or scarcity of certain experiences within my data gave me an indication about whose stories were generally more or less likely to be told. Likewise, in the public discussions I attended regarding minority issues the vast majority of participants were male, self-identifying as Turks, with a good record in formal education.

Only towards the end of my fieldwork did I manage to get some insight into the experiences of people from rural areas, especially the mountainous zone, and the experiences of women, especially those who did not cover up themselves. It is not only what I was told by these participants about their experience of being from the mountain, being Pomak, or being a woman in the minority that pointed

to the rurality of these identities in terms of access and representation as it will be shown in the chapter. It was also what I was not told that made bold silent statements. For example, it was non-Pomaks who would talk about Pomaks, while those I could understand from the context of our talk that had family Pomak ties would not utter a word about it. It was the uncovered young girls that would talk about the experience of those wearing headscarf, while the veiled girls I interviewed would never mention anything about how their headscarf could influence their access or experiences in various spaces.

This chapter, therefore, aims to offer an insight into how minority identity might mean very different things to different members of the group. The main questions that the chapter addresses are: How is learning and being associated with the mountainous identity in Rodope? What role does mobility within the mountainous zone and between this and other spaces play in the shaping of learning experiences and aspirations? Finally, how might gender affect the learning narratives of participants?

The chapter is divided into three parts: The first looks the mountainous zone, it provides a contextual understanding and presents some small stories about the mountainous experience regarding education. These are seen through the voices of Argun and Lale who grew up in Organi, the centre of the mountainous area, and also Umut and Taşkin from *yakka* and Komotini respectively. The second part focuses on the story of Altan and the impact he perceives that his mountainous and Pomak identities have had on his life. Finally, the third section looks into female identity as a form of rural geography regarding schooling. Here the focus is on the stories of two young women from the mountain: Azmi and Lale. Insights from other female respondents from Rodope come in as well to explain how gender might relate to educational access and aspirations.

4.1 The design of the mountainous zone

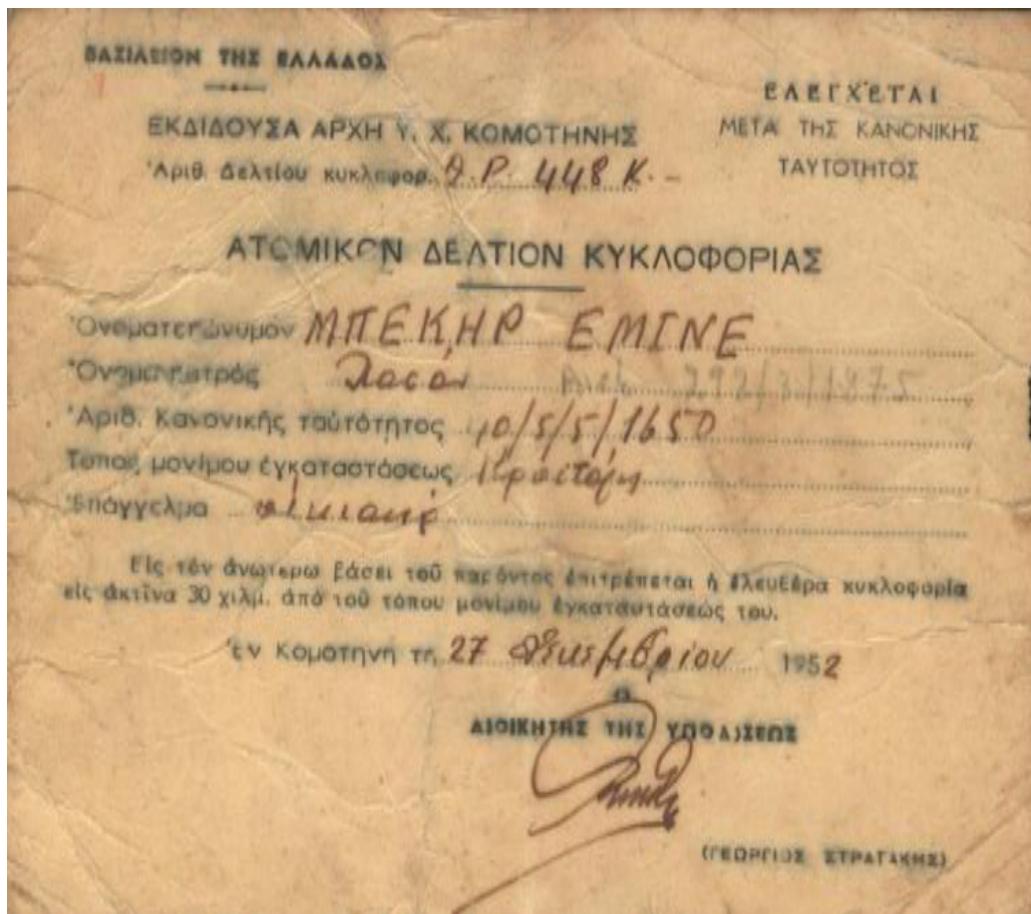
My minority contacts from Komotini and yakka would describe the mountainous area as isolated, poor and backward very far from the centre and the progress that Komotini symbolises in Rodope. On the other hand, amongst majority informants the mountain was constructed as a place where people are poor and illiterate, oppressed not only by their poverty and isolation but also the local Turks. If these are the mainstream local meanings I had access to as an outsider researcher, in Greek mass media the story of the mountainous Rodope is framed in different terms. It is the story of an exoticised, mysterious place where an interesting population; the Pomaks, live. Pomaks are represented as marginal, almost mythical⁵⁴ and most importantly naive or innocent due to their isolation and powerlessness. In public minority advocacy discourse, however, and in the minority circles I was moving very rarely I heard the word Pomak to be used. I was also advised to avoid using locally both the words Turk and Pomak as these can lead to sensitive and disputed conversations.

Looking into the State designs over the mountainous space in Rodope can help us understand better the ways that domination and control have shaped the conditions of being for the mountainous residents and the enablement or not of their access to power resources and other opportunities. By doing this we are moving away from the assumption that space is innocent, looking at how in itself is being produced as a means of domination (Lefebvre, 1991).

Apart from the Bulgarian occupation (1941-44) the other most significant element of collective memory regarding the mountainous zone is the Surveillance Zone (SZ) (*Epitiroumeni Zoni*). The SZ was designed by the state during the Cold War across the Northern borders of Greece and although it was abolished in the prefecture of Macedonia in the late seventies, in Thrace this happened only in 1996. The SZ did not aim only to cut off communications with Bulgaria but mobility to the South was also controlled and restricted. The

⁵⁴ Considered for example descendants of Alexander the Great. This view was marketed by the Greek bibliography in the 1990s that substituted by the State aimed to prove the ‘undisputed’ Greekness of the Pomaks integrating them in the national myth.

residents of the zone had to carry with them a sort of passport issued by the police. They could only enter the Surveillance Zone after being checked by the army at the internal frontier ['bara']. Migration to or within the Surveillance Zone was prohibited unless the Committee for Military Security would issue a permit. Between midnight and 5 a.m no one was allowed to get in or out of the Zone (Labrianidis, 2001).



I7. “Personal Mobility Card”: This issues “free mobility within 30 km from the permanent residence of the holder”. Source: GAK in Rodope

The delay in the abolition of zone in Thrace signals that the region was of particular concern. Kostopoulos (2009: 99) argues that “The main aim of the maintenance of the internal borders was to separate Pomakophones from Turkophones”. The Greek State has been seriously preoccupied on restricting and controlling Pomaks not only by isolating the space of their residence with the Surveillance Zone but also by discouraging migration to the Southern areas of Rodope, where they could mix with people identifying ethnically as Turks. A means to achieve this was granting them privileges: “The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has projected, already for two years, a Programme of support for the

Pomaks. The purpose of it is to boost their loyalty (nomimofrosini) and also to prevent the abandonment of the borderlands where they reside. The latter resulting from their migration to the plain and the towns, where by all means, they receive ethnically dangerous influences and their differentiation from the other minority elements weakens".⁵⁵

The imposed isolation and restricted mobility had an impact on educational opportunities for the mountainous residents. Looking at the educational landscape apart from the various multigrade minority primary schools, the whole mountainous region is served by only one Greek secondary school (Gimnasio) in Organi which was founded in 1984. Until then pupils from the mountain needed to migrate or to commute daily in harsh conditions and long distances in order to access school in Komotini. In that same period, four other secondary schools were also founded in the mountainous Xanthi. All these schools were not established as minority schools but "under the general legal framework of secondary education" (Tsitselikis, 2012: 499).

Kostopoulos (2009:115) argues that the establishment of the mountainous schools was the State's attempt to Hellenise the mountainous populations a project already planned by the authorities in the mid-sixties (ibid: 116). Kostopoulos cites a confidential document of 1979 in which the Inspector of Minority Education argues that the previous Greek state policy that aimed "to the non provision of educational opportunities for the minority" has resulted to the attachment of the people to the land and to high birth-rates. The inspector then suggested that the minority youth should be encouraged to study in Greek schools because "in this way Turkish and their religious conscience will weaken". Moreover, "the residents of the mountainous area (Pomaks) will be Hellenised".

The inspector acknowledges that the State had planned to deprive minority from formal education opportunities but he argues that this policy needs to be revised. In the light of this revision, educational opportunities, he says, will be enabled in order to weaken pupils' affiliation to Turkishness and Islam. In other words, schooling for the mountainous region had to be aligned with the way the Greek

⁵⁵ AA 50, MFA AP: 54437, 19/11/1960

Constitution defines the aims of education and not in the way that Treaty of Lausanne specifies it for the minority group. This conflict is what led to strong reactions by the mountainous residents when the ‘Greek’ and not ‘minority’ schools were established in their region. The number of the students who enrolled at the beginning was really low but started gradually rising in the ‘90s and ‘00s (Tsitselikis, 2012: 500).

This section emphasised the way that the mountainous region was designed by the Greek State as marginal and isolated mainly through the long maintenance of the Surveillance Zone. What has been at stake from the Greek policies standpoint was the restriction and control of the mobility of the mountainous Pomaks. This aimed to prevent their interaction with the minority Turks residing lower in the mountain and at the plain. Such interactions were considered dangerous. As regards education, the zone has been extremely physically remote from the secondary education opportunities provided only at the plain until 1984 when the secondary school of Organi was founded. The school through the study of respective State documents seems that came to serve the purpose of Hellenising the area and its residents by weakening their Turkish and Islamic feelings. The following section will move from the macro-narratives presented here into young people’s stories about their schooling in mountainous Rodope and their experience and meanings about the secondary school in Organi, the centre of the area.

4.2 Change as a doorstep to schooling & schooling as a doorstep to change

This section draws on the narratives of two young people who were born in the mountainous zone in the early 1990s, attended *dimotiko* and *gimnasio* in the locale and later both migrated to Komotini for *likio*. Lale is now a young woman and Argun, a young man who both entered later a Greek University. Umut, on the other hand, is a young man in his early twenties like Argun and Lale, who grew up in a *yakka* village and gave his views about the mountainous experiences in education. The small stories of Lale, Argun and Umut⁵⁶ provide

⁵⁶ Lale (pp. 232, 238) and Argun (pp. 237-8) appear again in Chapter Seven. Umut’s story will be presented in Chapter Five (pp.166-172)

a reflective experiential perspective around schooling and educational aspirations. However, their personal narratives are linked to the broader communal meanings at the region, the master narratives.

4.2.1 Breadwinning versus schooling

When I asked Argun, “Is it right that when the gimnasio was established in Organi, there was very low attendance?”, I had in mind the literature mentioning the reactions and the movement of abstaining from the school that took place against the mountainous schools’ establishment in the 1980s. The opening of the Greek schools stirred once more the clash between the group, as represented by its elite advocacy networks, and the State and meanings around education were once more inscribed into the frame of this conflict.

The Thracian Turkish elite called for the sabotage of the schools as a means of resistance to the assimilatory agenda of the State with the schools being a manifestation of it as it was argued. Instead, the Turkish elite demanded the schools to turn from Greek to minority ones. Tsitselikis (2012: 500) refers to formal complaints made in 1987 by some of the minority associations in Komotini while Aarbakke (2000: 739) cites a document which the then minority MP Sadik Ahmet presented at a conference at the Council of Europe in 1987 referring amongst others to the matter of the mountainous schools as violation of the minority right in Turkish education. According to (Michail, 2003: 131) in the mountainous Xanthi (neighbouring Rodope) the religious leaders launched a campaign against the schools, spreading the ideas of the associations about the threat that the schools imposed. She also mentioned cases of local-scale threatening, bribing and marginalisation of the families who would send their children to the ‘Greek’ schools. Moreover, she argued that the religious elite had a personal interest in such campaigns since they feared that they would lose the monopoly of power they had as the only ‘educated’ locally (*ibid*: 132).

Argun’s answer to my question acknowledged the low attendance but explained it under completely different terms without making any reference to the above

narratives. “Back then, in the 1980s, nobody had the intention to study at the university or to do something else. The children would typically work either with the animals or with the land. The school was viewed as something extra ‘eh, let’s go there too’. I believe it is still the same. Not much has changed”. Argun presents bread winning through husbandry as the primary field of activity and intentions within his community. Next to it, schooling had only secondary importance in the way people would think and plan their lives. However, it was not only education that people would not consider outside of their custom activities, but “something else” in general.

Argun associated the low ranking of education in the field of ‘intentions’ of the people in the region with the mobility barriers they experienced and the limited financial means they had: “In the 1980s, very few were going to *likio*. Back then, *likio* was like a university. It was very hard to get out of the village. There was no car, no telephone, no money”. Argun refers here to the 1980s when the surveillance zone was still in operation. Argun’s sentence “It was very hard to get out of the village” (either this was due to administrative or financial barriers) summarises his argument. He also sets the level of educational expectations locally by resembling *likio* to university. Accessing *likio* was considered the highest educational achievement someone from the locale could succeed. Considering that university usually entails migrating to a town and investing money, Argun explained that for people from the mountain, attending *likio* was already a big project equal to that of higher education and only a few had pursued it. Deciding to invest in education was not a taken-for-granted path for the people who lived remotely, facing financial and mobility barriers that were making access to higher secondary education (*likio*) very difficult.

Umut did not grow up in the mountain. He is from a rural area but not as remote. He said, “education is in this state”, meaning the little attention he thinks pupils enjoy at primary school from their teachers. Nevertheless, he added that people also have “this mentality” (*nootropia*) of not prioritising education: “In the mountainous region they send their children to become shepherds from a very early age and they do not send them to school”. He further explained why he

thinks this happens: “We have this mentality, we do not set off for studies because it's hard, people get disappointed and do not pursue it in the face of the hardships”.

The content that Umut gives to the term ‘mentality’ seems not to be associated with values or ideologies but more with a sense of limitedness (“it is difficult”, “people get disappointed”, “in face of the hardships”) that makes people give up on education since it is not a straightforward field of investment. However, Umut in his description of a mountainous village lifestyle talked about a non-straightforward way of life, full of hardships: “In that village, when children turn thirteen years old they usually come here in Komotini to work as shepherds hosted by someone until they become adults. Then they migrate to Northern Europe to work. They stay there for two-three years making savings so that they can buy a house here and get married. Very rarely people from those places go to university. It is a matter of mentality”.

Linking the words of Argun with these of Umut, mobility and migration seem to be central in mountainous people’s lives. Argun argued that it is the mobility barriers that discourage people from prioritising education. Umut agreed that education is not prioritised because ‘it’s hard’, there are ‘hardships’ and people ‘get disappointed’. However, he described multiple migratory movements in which people from a remote mountainous village are engaged. What differentiates the migration for education that people are hesitant to take as Argun argued, and the migration for work that people practice, as Umut describes, is that the first needs money while the second brings money.

Umut asked rhetorically, “since they make their living, why would they consider to take the hassle”. He meant the hassle of education bringing in a second layer of the matter. The decision seems to be between engaging in a way of life that has been observed for years and assures ‘making a living’ or investing out of very scarce resources for many years in a lifestyle that offers no clear guarantees for paying off after one gets his/her degree. Education is associated with risk taking since means shifting to a new largely unobserved locally practice.

Taşkin, in his early twenties like Umut and Argun, was born and grew up in Komotini. Taşkin in a similar line with Umut, when he talked about people from the mountain ‘getting disappointed’ because of hardships and not setting goals, also used psychological terms to describe the mountainous ‘mentality’. He raised the issue of how the experience of the Surveillance Zone has made people from the mountainous zone less confident and more reluctant in their approach to life: “In the forbidden area after eight you could not go out in the street, the army would come to check on you, these people have lived such things, they have the psychology of the defeated, they do not believe in their power, they do not know their power, they do not believe in themselves”. The effect of the Surveillance Zone is not seen merely as physically restricting people, like in the account of Argun but twenty years after its abolition Taşkin believes that it still holds a restricting effect on people in symbolic terms: the past has created a sense of powerlessness and lack of self-confidence.

4.2.2 Pursuing change through education

The accounts of the young men have described so far the marginal place that formal education traditionally has had in the lives of people from the mountainous Rodope and the reasons why they think this has been so. However, they mentioned that the situation has been changing and they referred to some people from the region who recently started prioritising schooling and investing in educational aspirations.

Umut has associated these new practices to the interactions people from the region have had with others out of their locale: “Some families that have socialised more and have been in contact with other people became better in setting goals and go after them”. Moreover, he remarked, things “slightly changed also because many of those who had migrated abroad and returned, have money. They have moved down to the plain they have seen other things and their mentality has changed”. Unlike those who have not had the chance of socialisation and interactions out of the mountainous community; it is those who “have been in contact more”, those who “have seen other things” and those who

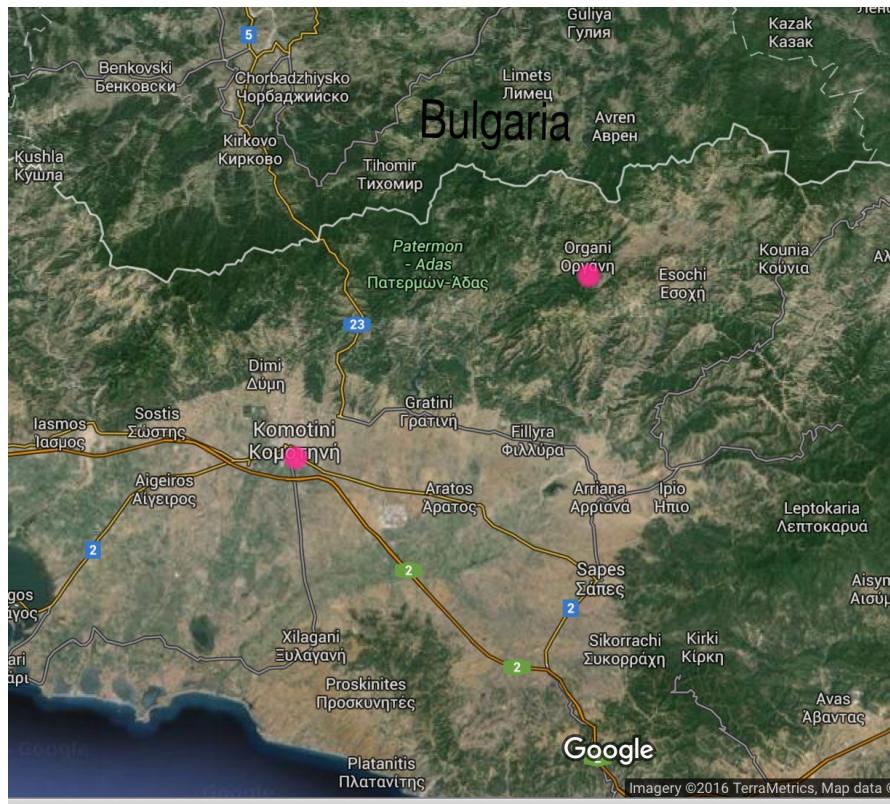
now “have money” that changed their ‘mentality’ and developed an ability to set goals and pursue them.

For Argun the change is linked to the abolition of the Surveillance Zone (1996) and the general shift of the State policies regarding the group which improved the life conditions of minority group members: “It is only after 1995 that things improved, financially also. Since 2000 people decided to study”. Not only the Surveillance Zone was abolished but in parallel the Greek State started infrastructure works like road openings that facilitated the communication between mountainous villages and between mountain and the urban centres (Troubeta, 2001: 100; Kostopoulos, 2009: 153). Moreover, the administrative harassment (*dioikitikes ohliseis*) was denounced and incentives were given for education (introduction of PEM and quota for university admission). When all these structural obstacles started shifting, people’s educational expectations and aspirations started shifting slowly too.

Argun’s elder brother was the first in the family to be sent to secondary school, in Turkey and not in the newly established school in Organi. During my fieldwork, I got used to listening to majority voices interpreting narrowly every school choice by minority members as primarily or solely an expression of national loyalty. In this context, Argun’s father choice would easily be interpreted as sabotaging the Greek school and favouring Turkish education. It would be seen as a performance of non-belonging to Greece and of affiliation to Turkey.

Argun, however, framed his father’s choice in very different terms, "Those who stayed in the Gimnasio in Organi, did nothing with their lives. My father wanted my brother to go to secondary school in Turkey so he gets to know life". Choosing school here means choosing ‘to do something with one’s life’ and ‘to get to know life’. This seems to be a new understanding about schooling different from the attitudes in the community back in the 1980s when Argun argued that schooling was of secondary significance to one’s life. It is important to note that the double purpose of education; do something in your life and get to know life

is believed that can only be achieved out of Organi, out of the mountainous zone. His father selected Turkey, as an out of Organi place, because he had family there who hosted, looked after and supported Urgun's brother throughout his secondary education.



I8. The mountainous village of Organi in the Northern Rodope close to the borders with Bulgaria. Komotini in the southwest of Organi. Source: Google maps

Lale, who like Argun, attended the *gimnasio* in Organi said: "Many children regretted going to *gimnasio* in Organi. If everyone is the same, the society is the same and you do not speak Greek there is not much that changes. Even in Komotini you do not need to speak Greek at all". Change is the buzz word for Lale, too. Formal education is presented as having significance on the condition that it may bring change. The school of the mountainous village being part of the mountainous ecology cannot bring this change alone. Moreover, Lale mentions speaking Greek as an aspect of the desired change. Although the medium of tuition in the school of Organi is Greek for all subjects apart from the Koran, Lale noted: "We speak Turkish amongst us and in the village. It is only

with the teacher that we speak Greek. In *gimnasio*, it was not hard because all the students were Muslims”.

For *likio*, both Lale and Argun came to Komotini. Argun chose the technical one and Lale the medrese. Technical *likio* is considered in Greece as a school of low demands from the students and therefore easier than the general one. Moreover, it is a form of vocational education that most often leads to the labour market rather than to higher education. Medrese, on the other hand, is considered the easiest ‘minority’ school, again due to its lower demands from the students. It is also considered in Rodope a school for pupils from the mountain. This is because apart from its capacity to provide accommodation to pupils from the rural areas during the school year, it is known for its conservative religious environment. The other minority secondary school, *Celâl Bayar*, also provides accommodation but is considered harder to succeed in and more secular in its orientation. People from the mountainous area are commonly said by people in Rodope to be more religious and conservative than the rest of minority populations in Rodope and medrese is thought to provide a more protected environment for the young girls, like Lale. However, it was only in 2001-2 that the first girls registered (Askouni, 2006: 73). Askouni further explained how most of the medrese pupils’ come from mountainous Rodope and Evros and families “that belong to the most traditional and deeply religious part of the minority with ‘Old Muslim’ roots” (ibid.:313-315).

When Argun and Lale looked back to their schooling years in Komotini they both made the same bitter comment, ‘nothing changed’, underlining in this way what their primary expectation from school was. Argun said: “In *likio* it was all the same again: Our peers were again Muslims. We were speaking in Turkish. All the same ever again. We were not making friends with the others. We did not speak the language well. We were feeling ashamed to speak in Greek”. Lale commented in similar lines: “For *likio*, it was all the same again, absolutely nothing changed.”

In their case, although they left Organi and the locality they both felt that the school years in Komotini did not bring the change that they have hoped for. Lale's school was a minority one, so she did not find any difference from her school in Organi. Argun, however, potentially had the chance to make new friends, get to know 'the others' and speak in Greek. Nevertheless, shame kept him at 'all the same ever again'. Argun, feeling at the time of our interview very confident in speaking Greek after his university experience, said about his *likio* years in Komotini: "When I was going to the doctor I was finding it difficult to describe my pain. If you ask a minority pupil in Greek where something is, s/he will blush and will be ashamed to talk to you. S/he is not used to speak in Greek and is afraid that might make a mistake". Hence, for the change to occur- the goal Argun and Lale pursued through education- not only external barriers and physical distances needed to be dealt, but also internal barriers and symbolic distances that seem to be sustained by a feeling of shame

This section outlined through the voices of Argun, Umut and Lale the way people from the mountainous region have regarded education. Argun and Umut explained the way they think that external factors have made education a less appealing field for investment for the people of the zone. The impact of the Surveillance Zone seems to have been quite significant in this respect since mobility was restricted while means for mobility (car, money, etc.) were scarce and breadwinning was the main priority.

Many children from the region used to be sent to work from early adolescence. This situation started changing very slowly in the 1990s when the life conditions for the people started changing with the abolition of Surveillance Zone and the general shift of the Greek policies towards the minority group. The meaning that is mostly ascribed in education by Argun and Lale, who come from the mountain, is change. Change for them can only be achieved through contact with others out of the boundedness of their locality and through 'seeing something different'. Therefore, the *gimnasio* established in Organi cannot fulfil this mandate. However, the change they hoped for through education did not come, as they say, during their *likio* years in Komotini. Due to their lack of confidence

in speaking Greek and the lack of previous experience in communicating with native Greeks they stuck to their ‘own’ group and ‘it was all the same again’.

4.3 Being from the mountain: the salience of spatial identity

Altan is from the broader rural area around Organi. He is in his early twenties like Argun, Lale, Umut and Taşkın. In the summertime when I was given Altan’s contact, he would start work around 03.00 a.m. in the tobacco fields with his family. They had to finish before the sun would get too hot in the daytime. Then during the day, he would rest, help his family in other tasks and spend some time in kafeneio ideally with his former school teacher, that he could talk with about things other than tobacco and football as he said. He was meant to be preparing for the university exams in autumn, wishing to graduate soon, but it was difficult as his daily schedule was planned around the tobacco work rhythms.

It was after a couple of times we had met casually that we arranged to have an interview. When we met, I felt that he was a bit tense about it so in an attempt to make him feel more comfortable I just asked him to pick one story, any that he preferred, about his schooling and recount it. He picked a story that took place at the space between school and home: “An incidence that I remember very boldly from school”, as he said. In this story Altan is fourteen and as it is a Friday he gets on the bus from Organi to his village. Since the school caters for all the surrounding villages, it is also provided with a hall of residence for these pupils and a bus service that takes them from and back to home on Mondays and Fridays.

“One such Friday in the winter, the bus came to pick us up. It was snowing heavily and the wind was blowing like crazy. The driver could hardly drive forward through the snow. In the end, we reached a small village and there the engine died, the bus could not go any further. The driver told us to get off. We, little children, got out into the snow and the wind. We headed to our village in

the snow with the rucksacks on our shoulders. We were two: my friend and I. We could hardly see a metre ahead. We walked for a while but we soon realised that we could not go any further so we decided to walk back to the village where the bus had dropped us”.

Altan and his friend knew no one in that village and so they decided to go to the *kafeneio*.⁵⁷ The owner surprised to see them said that if they had kept on walking, they would have possibly got drowned in one of the many streams of the area. “Back then, it was in the mid-nineties, there were no telephones at peoples’ houses, only the *kafeneio* of the village had one. *Kafeci* asked who my father was, he knew him and ringed at my village. We spent that night at *kafeci*’s home. The following day the weather was milder, we took the way up to our village and my dad came with the mule to pick us up”.

Altan explained why this story has been so significant for him: “This experience made the big boom in my life. I did not realise back then, but it has influenced my life tremendously. I started thinking that your future does not depend only on your identity, your faith but even on the geography of your residence. Your future depends on this”. Altan links identity, faith and geography; hence ethnic, religious and spatial identities to the future in a direct dependent relation. I understand that by future he means life chances.

The way Altan built his story was around the theme of inability to move forward. The bus was trying to move forward but it could not. He and his friend kept trying to walk forward, but they could not. They could not see ahead and Altan repeated for their fourteen years old selves ‘we were little children’ as if the adversity of the landscape on that day made them feel smaller in their bodies. Moreover, it is a story of disconnection between the school and the home space. Because Altan was at school, he found himself struggling to re-connect to his home. The space in between seems threatening, uncertain and hard to transcend. The community provides the safety net in this endeavour.

⁵⁷ A small traditional on-budget cafe where usually men gather. It constitutes an important community space for males. In small villages it can be also a place for decision making regarding the community, political discussions etc.

What this story seems to have gradually changed in his perception is the salience of spatial identity for his future. Geography got to be realised as an important element of identity similar to ethnicity and religion. During this adventurous trip Altan for the first time embodied as part of his identity the morphology of the landscape around him; the streams and the heights, the snow, the mountain and its harsh conditions in the winter. It seems that grounded the physical experience of and ties with the mountain Altan built a notion of collective identity with others who share the locality. Altan further actualises this identity through solidarity: “Since then, I have always been trying in my life to support in any way I can the students who come from the mountainous zone”.

The elements that through this story seem to form aspects of this collective identity are the shared experiences of isolation; Altan mentions the lack of telephone lines at home at a time when the internet was already invented. The isolation did not only result from the lack of planned infrastructure and other developmental works by the State, but it was also imposed by nature and the mountainous harsh weather conditions that hinder communications in the locale. His narrative also portrays the central role of *kafeneio* in the social life of the locals, being the only place with a telephone-line hence the external communications point. *Kafeneio* is also placed at the heart of social integration in the locality: *kafeci* informed the families of the children and also hosted them.

The following section will look at the way the mountain, not physically but symbolically as, amongst others, the locale of Pomak-ness shapes Altan’s understanding of self and imposes a different sort and degree of isolation in Rodope.

4.4 Don't speak! They will hear you!

“So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity - I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself”

Anzaldua, Borderlands

After some tension in our talk and ensuing silence, when I could notice Altan's chest rising and falling tensely, he turned to me and asked: “Shall I tell you what is inside me...I cannot say publicly neither that I am Pomak, nor that I speak Pomakika. It is shameful for one to admit that is Pomak or to speak the language”.

Since I entered the field, I was told several times about the pejorative use of the term ‘Pomak’: “Pomak here is a derogative term, it is like you say ‘idiot’”, or in someone else’s words: “Pomak here is an insult: ‘*Git bre Pomak*’” (Bagger off, Pomak). Tasia, a Greek teacher in multiethnic classrooms in a Rodope plain village told me: “It is an insult. Every time that the word ‘Pomakika’ is heard in the classroom everyone bursts into laughter. Even the pupils that seem to be Pomaks laugh, probably because of embarrassment”.

‘Seem to be’ is important here as in Rodope there is usually a guessing about this identity mainly because often people who identify privately as Pomaks or identify as Turks but have Pomak origins (by which I mean them or their parents have been born in a Pomak speaking family usually in the mountain), often avoid to talk about it or they actively try to conceal it. Once, I had an interview with a young man who refused to tell me the name of his grandmother’s village, when I asked about it after he said that it was ‘up at the borders’. During our interview, I could tell from many elements that his family has ties with the Pomak community but he did not use the word once. In my encounter with other participants in Rodope whose level of fluency in Turkish or place of origin made me think that their mother tongue might be Pomak, they never mentioned any

association with Pomak identity.⁵⁸ It took a very long time until close friends would start speaking Pomakika in my presence. Until then, they would switch from Greek when talking with me, to Turkish when talking among themselves. Altan was the first and only person who talked to me openly about his Pomak identity and how he experiences it in Thrace.

I need to note here that I consciously avoided throughout my research to make direct questions to people about their self-identifications and in the cases I was puzzled whether research participants' or acquaintances' mother tongue was Pomak, I never asked. This choice was for me a matter of being polite, especially as a welcomed guest, since these sort of questions I felt to be quite intruding in the Thracian context. Altan's opening was a spontaneous act.

Pomak identity apart from being considered a stigma as the insulting use of 'Pomak' in Rodope suggests, is also considered by some minority people I spoke to, as non-existent. The argument about 'Pomaks' not existing was built in most cases around people's conceptions of Pomak language. Melik⁵⁹ (a participant who through his own narrative portrayed the way he has suffered from the Greeks the negation and stigmatisation of his Turkish identity) said: "The state attempts to create a minority within the minority. Speaking Pomakika does not make you Pomak. Pomaks say that they are Turks. Speaking Pomakika is not an indicator of ethnic identity in Western Thrace".

Melik's main argument is that speaking a different language does not make you ethnically different. He also localises his argument in W.Thrace applying it to the Pomak case. Pomaks as such is, according to Melik, a construct of the Greek State; proof is that Pomaks 'say that they are Turks'. It seems that two discourses from two different contexts are woven together in Melik's words. On one hand, the Ottoman legacy in which linguistic identity was not an important factor for identification and unification with others in a group since religion had this role.

⁵⁸ It was not the same with informants from Xanthi, who were not reluctant to refer to their mother tongue, Pomakika or identify directly as 'Pomaks'

⁵⁹ Melik is a man from the minority in his mid -thirties. He has appeared previously in the context chapter. Although, his story is not discussed his views come throughout the thesis.

On the other, Melik does not refer to Muslim identity at all, but speaks about ethnic identification “they say they are Turks” a nationalist discourse of the post-Ottoman times, in which linguistic identity has been the primary element for ethnic identification. The controversy in Melik’s description where he analytically separates Pomaks and Turks to then say that Pomaks are Turks (but not vice-versa) illustrates Demetriou’s (2004) comment on Pomak-ness as a “slippery identity”. Melik uses a term, that for existing it means that “reflects a social reality” (Aarbakke, 2012: 158), to argue that the social reality does not exist.

Melik’s view is in accordance with the minority elite’s mainstream line of defence for the group’s Turkish-ness. According to this, Pomak-ness as a separate minority identity does not exist and is a Greek State’s design. The powerful elite of the group, especially the minority associations, canonised this line in the 1990s as a reaction to the codification of Pomak language and promotion of Pomak culture that was fuelled back then, directly by private initiatives but backed up discretely “behind the curtains” by the Greek State (Aarbakke, 2012:172; Troubeta, 2001:88). Kostopoulos (2009:201-205) stresses that reactions did not remain only at the level of official advocacy through the associations and press, but also took place at the grassroots level through “exercise of psychological violence by means of threats or social marginalisation of “*Pomakophrones*” (those who felt Pomaks) or even the inclusion of them at the blacklist of the Turkish Consulate” (ibid.: p. 204).

Another research participant, Selale⁶⁰, like Melik, denied legitimisation to any local claim of Pomak identity on linguistic grounds but argued for this on different terms. She believes that a language with no script is not a language, hence its speakers cannot claim a distinct identity on the grounds of their distinct mother-tongue: “I believe that Pomaks do not exist. Christians and Muslims yes, I accept it. Since there is no script, what does it mean Pomaks? Bulgarians maybe”. Unlike Melik she is not preoccupied with the unitary Turkish character

⁶⁰ She is a young woman, in her mid-twenties at the time of the interview. Part of her story will appear in chapter five.

of the group (she told me that there are not Turks either ‘since we live in Greece’), but she cannot accept a Pomak identification, if this is not affiliated with a group that at least has a script to its language: “Since Pomakika is closer to Bulgarian than Turkish, they may call themselves Bulgarians”.

Şelale points to the inferiorisation and stigmatisation of Pomaks locally on linguistic grounds. Since they supposedly speak an inferior language in contrast to Turks or Greeks whose language is considered of higher social status. The external shrinking of Pomaks’ self-expression or right to be is emphasised through Şelale’s words “they do not exist (...) since their language has no script”. Tasia, the teacher I mentioned earlier, remarked that when she teaches about languages, dialects and idioms and she refers to Pomakika, “The Pomak pupils do not say anything, but I can tell that they listen to me with four ears! They themselves do not know what they speak”

These normalised beliefs amongst the minority, the master narratives, about the inferiority of Pomak language and its speakers offer a partial only explanation of the silencing of the language in the public sphere and even in the household as in the experience of Altan: “Sometimes, I am here in Komotini and my sister rings me. I pick up the phone speaking Pomakika. She tells me: ‘Don’t speak Pomakika, they will hear you!’, even at home they say: ‘Don’t speak!’ When I was younger, I remember a day I was speaking Pomakika with friends. People turned to us and said: ‘Eh, what is this language you speak, you should speak Turkish’. The people with ties come in the village and they tell us: ‘Don’t speak Pomakika, it’s a meaningless language, it’s useless. Speak in Turkish!’”. I heard similar accounts about public shaming and muting of Pomakika by other participants too, both minority and majority, who happened to witness it. Silencing Pomakika in the inter-group interactions automatically means switching to Turkish and this is not a recent phenomenon in W.Thrace.

An article published in the minority newspaper ‘Trakya’ in 1952, as cited in (Liapis, 1995:15), strongly encouraged the Pomaks to drop their mother tongue in all public and private spaces (town, village, mosque, school, home). In the

same article, it was argued that the mountainous Rodope villages: Nimfea and Organi rejected Pomakika and were linguistically Turkified during the Balkan wars. Aarbakke (2012:166) explains that those earlier campaigns were more related to the then recent experiences of Bulgarian pressures on the local Pomak populations.⁶¹ Whereas, Kostopoulos (2009:51) argues that the practices of linguistic Turkification in Thrace have been basically imported from Turkey following the spirit of the Kemalist campaigns for linguistic Turkification that were initiated there already from the 1920s.

Dropping Pomak language and over time transmitting Turkish as a mother tongue is a process that has taken place widely within families that migrated from mountainous villages to Komotini. Grandparents of one of the participants in my research were born in a mountainous village in Rodope and their mother tongue was Pomakika. The grandson was born in Komotini, he knows only a few Pomak words, his mother tongue is Turkish and he self-identifies as Turk. However, some Pomak heritage is kept at his household through, for example, some of the dishes his mother cooks. According to Aarbakke (2012: 168), “Most of the Pomaks from families who have been living for more than a generation in Komotini have no proper knowledge of the Pomak language”. This is also confirmed by teachers I spoke to who have worked at the ‘Pomak’ school of Komotini. However, the case of Altan is different since he is not an urban but a mountainous Pomak, living in a Pomak speaking community.

It has been argued in the literature that the choice for Turkish amongst Pomaks comes as a preference in positive terms expressing a will to identify with the Turks. Papadimitriou (2003: 47-48) says that, during his fieldwork in 1995 in a Pomak village of Xanthi, he observed grandparents speaking Pomak amongst themselves but Turkish to their children and grandchildren. Papadimitriou sees this as a “conscious” choice to abandon Pomak and “adopt Turkish as the only intrafamily language, declaring like this the adoption of a Turkish ethnic identity”. Troubetta (2001: 120) sees these ‘tendencies’ as a “desire” of the

⁶¹ W. Thrace has been under Bulgarian occupation in the years 1941-1944 whereas, it also was between 1912-1919. The aggressive attempts of Bulgarians to Christianise/Bulgarise the local Pomaks and the traumatic memory of these is what explains why W.Thracian Pomaks never mention any affiliation with Bulgaria.

Pomaks to be “integrated on equal terms in their environment, to become accepted by a modern community that has access to power and in this sense consists a dynamic community”. A step to Turkishness is then a step to modernity far from the backwardness that Pomak-ness represents locally or as Demetriou (2004: 107) puts it: “Given that at least for the Rhodope region, living standards and identification with Turkishness decrease with increasing altitude, it is understandable why Pomak speakers would strive to identify themselves as Turks instead of Pomak, especially in their encounters with wealthier urbanites”.

Altan, however in his narration rather emphasised this choice in the light of pressure he feels from his own family and socially to drop Pomak language and speak Turkish, something that seems to cause him anguish. It is not just shame for being heard speaking an inferior language, as Şelale described it, or fear of being identified as Pomak, a common insult within the minority group. Altan explains that there is something more about it, something beyond the positive preference for being included and accepted: “In general, it is a shame to be a Pomak and it is considered betrayal. If you say openly that you are a Pomak, you are finished. It is over. You destroy your life. There are many Pomaks who are in the front row, they do things, but they bargained away their identity like prostitutes. If I say this word publicly I will be excluded from every opportunity.” In this narration, Altan presents the choice for Turkish as the alternative to ‘destroy his life’.

When he says ‘front-row’, Altan means people who enjoy high social status locally and presumably have a white-collar job in contrast to the vast majority of Pomaks who according to Troubeta (2001:106) traditionally belong to the lower castes of the W.Thracian working class. Altan believes that he cannot make a better life for himself than that of his parents unless he bargains his identity away. In this context, his expected university degree cannot alone ensure upward social mobility for him since he believes that his mountainous identity weighs much more in Rodope, and is its management that enables or disables social mobility.

Moreover, the ‘betrayal’ that Altan mentions, which falls in the index of hard words used commonly in Rodope (‘hero’, ‘traitor’, ‘spy’), points to the betrayed, who in this case cannot be else but ‘the Turks’; the Turkish community. The friendly informal encouragement to drop the language and switch to Turkish comes from Turkish speakers, from Turks and from the older Pomaks to the youngest, as has been shown above. The discourse about the uselessness of the language comes from the people with ties who are simultaneously advocates of the Turkishness of the group. Belonging is not just emotional, but highly politicised (Guibernau, 2013) in this context.

The official Greek pro-Pomak stand is an effort to weaken the strong Turkish identification of the group. Although Melik earlier argued that language does not signify ethnic identity in Thrace, it seems that for the Turkish elite speaking Turkish works as a signifier that realises the solid Turkish identity group political project especially in a context of the Greek state negating officially any Turkishness to the group. The more the speakers of Turkish the stronger the minority advocacy for ethnic recognition. In the context of these antagonistic interests, two parallel patronage systems have been developed assigning privileges and status in order to bring people to their camp (Aarbakke, 2012; Demetriou, 2004).

For Altan to get membership and hence privileges in the broader minority community that its elite identifies solely as Turkish, he needs to pay a price: negate his Pomak identity and stop speaking his mother tongue. The Pomak belonging although emotionally necessary as his anguish shows, cannot provide him with ‘the opportunities’ and the ‘life’ that the Turkish community does. The expressions Altan uses: ‘destruction’, ‘exclusion’ and the fear to speak Pomak even at home shows that his family believes that there are real consequences, if they do not perform loyalty. Into the local market of representations and belongings and its highly political character, as being able to mobilise groups and therefore claims, identities are transformed into currencies.

Bauman (2001) argued that the price for enjoying the privilege to be in a community may be as high as the ‘right to be yourself’. The right to be himself

is what Altan asks for: “I am not in favour of one Pomak identity and flag, and all these that the associations⁶² do. Neither I support Pomakika to be introduced at school because Pomakika is a poor language that cannot be useful in education”, he said. “What I want is to be respected, not to be spit on for who I am, to be accepted as I am. It is only this that I want: to respect me, to not tell me: ‘I do not allow you to marry my daughter because you are Pomak’. What are these? It is from many little things like this that shame is accumulated and builds up. There is a saying that: 'From a pig's skin you cannot make a pillow, likewise with a Pomak you cannot make friends'”.

A reader, familiar with the Thracian context and the minority issues could have easily been led to believe that Altan is maybe affiliated with the circles that promote the Pomak culture locally developing a particularly anti-Turkish speech reproducing the main Greek nationalist positions. I talk about the ‘Centre for Pomak Research’ (*Kentro Pomakikon Erevnon*), which was established in Komotini in 1997 and the “Cultural Association of Pomaks of Xanthi” (*Politistikos Sillogos Pomakon N. Xanthis*) set up in 2007 and the circles and press around them. Kostopoulos (2009: 223-245) demonstrates the links between these associations with the far-right in Greece and Greek government officials and hence the relation of ideological and financial patronage between them.

Altan, does not want to ‘bargain away his identity as prostitute’ as he remarkably said and he made sure to clarify that all he told me has nothing to do with the activism of the Pomak associations. With this clarification, Altan stripped his narrative from any separatist claim within the group. The only thing he asks for is to be respected. As regards the other minority associations in Komotini Altan gave me an example to understand what he meant that they only indirectly advocate for the lives of the Pomaks: “In America when there was racism against the blacks, everyone would get onto the buses but not all were equals. In the front rows were sitting the whites and at the back the blacks. The bus would

⁶² Here he means the Pomak associations that promote a distinct Pomak identity and claim that this is oppressed by the Turks within the group. These associations are said to be funded directly or indirectly by the Greek state (Kostopoulos, 2009).

arrive somewhere for all of them. However, the blacks were second class humans”. The example he used points to his understanding of the intra-group hierarchies while he relates his understanding explicitly with racism. In the way I understood it, it is his pursuit for dignity that makes Altan feel trapped amongst dead-ends regarding his ‘future’, that as mentioned earlier to preserve his dignity he cannot join any camp (the Greek or the Turkish) that would enable him to access opportunities.

The story of Altan illustrates the need for a new sort of activism movement in Thrace that would express and negotiate its claims in new terms. As I will further highlight in the following chapters the absence of minority Thracian youth from and their critical stance towards the popular discourses, while in private they are making and sharing amongst them new meanings, might indicate this intergenerational disagreement. As it will be shown persistently in the thesis, it is the crossing over the Thracian boundaries what seems to allow most the younger generations to reflect critically on the conditions of life in Thrace.

4.5 Creating change: Geographies of gender

4.5.1 One size doesn’t fit all

In one of the local conferences I attended in Komotini, two young girls wearing headscarfs were in the audience. I was sitting not far from them so I could hear a journalist, who was covering the event, asking them: “Do you want to get married and make a family?”, “Yes”, the girls replied. What a bizarre question to a stranger one would think, so unrelated to the theme of the conference which was ‘minority education’. How skilful on the other hand, on entrapping the exoticised subject (the young veiled girls) of the dominant gaze (the majority Christian journalist) into its stereotypical representation: A Muslim girl, especially if she wears a headscarf, is more interested in marriage than education.

Lale and Azmi, two other young girls, were born and grew up in the mountainous area and they are in their very early twenties. Azmi is from a small village unlike Lale, who as seen earlier, is from Organi, the centre of the mountainous Rodope.

Nurcan⁶³ is twenty years older than them, she is from Komotini and attended Celâl Bayar in the 1980s, “a big issue back then” as she noted. The issue was big because Nurcan was a girl; the first in her family to go to secondary school, something that her mother, for example, was not allowed to do. Lale and Azmi were the first females in their region to access secondary education almost two decades later than Nurcan.

Apart from noting the gap of twenty years between the mountainous and urban Rodope as regards females in secondary school, I find important to note how striking I found the similarities between the stories I heard from the group about women’s non-access to education in the past with the stories I heard during my Masters research on my island, Lefkada, from women in their 70s and 80s. The story of Dilek’s mother born in 1936 could be the story of any Christian woman on my island born at that time: Only the boys, their brothers would possibly be sent to secondary-school and like in Rodope this patriarchic practice would start cracking first in the urban centres and later in the rural.

4.5.2 Symbolic distances

Azmi went to the multigrade primary school of her village in 1993. The school back then accommodated sixteen students in total. ‘It was raining inside in the winter’ and for the first four years her class used the same primer.⁶⁴ She also remembered the breaks lasting nearly three hours: “Here in the cities it is different, this is why we, who come down to town from the villages, find it difficult”. She liked school very much, as she told me, and added “I was very curious for learning. I was watching TV and I liked very much the way they were talking; I was wondering if I would learn to speak like this when I’d grow up. I was very curious and TV helped me in this”. When Azmi finished primary school her Greek was good, she reflects, but she “was still confused and was making mistakes”. However, despite her curiosity for learning, she did not

⁶³ Nurcan comes again in chapters five, six and seven.

⁶⁴ Usually, primary school students cover a primer (of two volumes usually) at each grade, going from simple to more complex texts, covering wider vocabulary and more complex grammar and syntax. Azmi, used the first primer for four years and got the one for the second grade when she was in the fifth.

continue to secondary school: “We had a secondary school in Organi but there were not any girls from our villages and I felt ashamed to go. Therefore, the first year when I was supposed to enrol, I did not and neither I mentioned something about it”.

It seems from her narrative that she did consider continuing schooling but shame stopped her- no other girls were there- and she remained at home without her or anyone else in her family to discuss it. Next year, Lale and her friends in Organi after graduating from primary school enroled at the secondary school. Lale presented the matter for herself in Organi as straightforward: “The first time that girls from Organi went to the secondary school was in 2004, three of us started”. ‘Why not earlier?’, I asked her, considering that the secondary school in Organi was established already in 1984. – “This is how they were used to. Because they never saw it happening, they would prefer to work at the tobacco. It was my parents that mostly encouraged me, but I also wanted to go. At the last grade of primary school, we were three girls, all three of us wanted to continue. I never thought of not going.” - ‘How did the relatives and neighbours react to this decision?’ - “They did not say anything, they agreed. The girls before us had regretted not going.”

The news about Lale and her classmates’ travelled in Rodope, but what seems to have been very easy for Lale proved very difficult for Azmi: “When I heard that there are girls who are going to school I said that I also wanted to go”. My father said: ‘Now it is too late. Why should you go? You have already missed a year’. Anyway, my father was somehow slightly persuaded to let me, but my grandmothers did not want me to go. They used to say that girls do not go to school. That If I were to go, I would become a sketty girl. Facing the strong opposition of grandmothers and soon of the whole village Azmi started a hunger-strike: “I was not eating, I wanted to make them feel sorry for me and show mercy. It was not only the parents and my grannies; it was the whole village that was arguing against me. I was telling them: ‘I will go, I will go and it is over’. They were telling my dad: ‘She will be a girl amongst all the boys, do not let her, what is going to happen there?’ I could not understand why they were doing

this to me". Azmi presents her father as the decision maker. However, the word of the elder women seems to weigh significantly within the family. Eventually, the father, who was from the beginning 'slightly convinced' to send her, decided in her favour.

According to Bourdieu (1977: 80), "One of the fundamental effects of the orchestration of habitus is the production of a common-sense world endowed with the objectivity secured by consensus on the meaning (sens) of practices and the world". The orchestrated silence after Azmi's graduation from the primary school regarding secondary education reflects her community's consensus on what was common sense for young girls to do. This consensus reinforced by the identical experiences of all females of the village and the broader area had made the practice to be felt as natural by the effects of 'doxa'. When Azmi expressed her desire to continue schooling she simultaneously put the 'common sense world' under question. Bourdieu has talked elsewhere (1991:130) about "the social mechanisms that ensure the production of a compliant habitus, with the group having a central role in continuously reinforcing dispositions excluding as 'unthinkable' practices that do not comply with these".

4.5.3 Physical distances

Both Azmi and Lale graduated from the secondary school of Organi and after that continued to high-school which in Rodope, is only available on the plain. Consequently, and given the distance and the harsh winter mountainous conditions that hinder access, they both had to migrate to Komotini to continue schooling and also attend extra private lessons in support. Lale had already relatives living there so they hosted her for the three years of high-school. Azmi, on the other hand, did not, so her father decided to migrate with all his family to Komotini.

The stories of the two girls, as presented to me, illustrate the diversity of experiences within the mountainous zone: Azmi and Lale lived in the same region but their experience around their desire to go to secondary school was

very different. Lale presented the collective, the ‘society’ and her family as approving the unquestionable for her; continue schooling, while Azmi’s story is one of a clash between the self and the collective. I feel here important to stress, drawing from the context of my data, what I see as the main difference in these two stories: Lale had already formed a little group of three girls who decided all together that they would go to Gimnasio. Azmi, on the other hand, believed that she was alone and so dismissed the thought of continuing school. Her silent drop of the aspiration to continue changed into a radical vocalised demand on going to school when she knew that other girls would be there too.

Hrisavgi, a local majority woman, who used to work as a teacher in the high-school of Organi, told me during an informal chat: “Girls in Organi did not use to go to Gymnasio. The boys would stay at the hall of residence; there was no way they would let the girls sleep there”. This outsider view could partially explain why it was easier for Lale and her friends to go to school as they could still sleep in their homes and did not need to move between villages or share dormitory with males. Michail (2003: 132) mentioned the same argument was used for excluding girls from the mountainous secondary schools in Xanthi. Moving in order to access school appeared in my interviews to be a serious problem for the students from the rural Rodope. It emerges from the narratives that the decision about continuing schooling most often means a change of direction in life goal setting for the families to invest in their children’s education.

To have a lift to and from a school and ideally to and from extra supportive lessons is a practical necessity that comes along with secondary education for most of the pupils from the rural Rodope. Coming from a rural agricultural background where many mothers do not drive might make things slightly more complicated: Aliye⁶⁵ is of the same age like Lale and Azmi but she is from Komotini. She noticed: “A doctor from the neighbouring village could give lifts to his daughter to come to the supportive private lessons, to our drama group, to participate in the town life. The farmer who gets up at five in the morning to

⁶⁵ Aliye’s story comes again in chapters Six (pp. 201-204) and Seven (p.234)

water the land is not that flexible”. Derya⁶⁶, also in her early twenties living in a village of *yakka*, said “We are six km away and we do not have a bus service. Many children cannot afford frodistirio because they do not have money. Fathers work and mothers do not have driving license to give us lifts”.

4.5.4 Male and female voices in decision-making about schooling

The comment of the teacher about the girls not been allowed by their families to sleep in the male-dominated hall of residence pointed to the gender dimension of the matter. Looking back, the main argument of the opponents of Azmi against her will to continue schooling revolved about the duty of her father to protect her moral purity by keeping her far from the male dominated school space. Azmi’s father, the male figure- was already ‘slightly convinced’ and his opposition was very loose in comparison to the strong voices of Azmi’s grandmothers (Azmi does not mention her mother).

I came across the same theme in other female intergenerational narratives. Aliye said about her mother. “My mum did not go to Gymnasio because my grandmother did not let her: ‘She is a girl, she will not study’, were her words. Although my grandfather wanted to send her, my grandma insisted that she should learn embroidery to know a craft and it was her who did not allow her, despite my grandpa’s desire to send her”. This story happened in Komotini in 1977. Aliye’s mother was living very close to Celâl Bayar but the few Komotinian girls that were at the time attending the school were, according to Aliye, “from families owning shops. In those times, if you were a person of the market, a shop owner you were someone of high class. My grandpa was farmer and sailor; my grandma was working at the tobacco.” It was due to their lower social class, as Aliye understands it, and spatial identity out of the market, that her mother was not sent to school. It is important to stress here that Aliye’s grandmother did want her daughter to learn something, and this was embroidery, which she considered a valuable learning experience and a sensible investment and choice.

⁶⁶ I had an interview with both Derya and her younger sister. Fragments of their stories come again in Chapters Five, Six and especially in Chapter Seven (pp. 220-222, 241, 243).

Likewise, Nurcan's grandmother in Komotini also opposed her father's decision to send Nurcan to Celâl Bayar in the early 1980s: "She did not want me to study, she believed that this was something unnecessary for the girls, she was also telling me indirectly that I should put on the headscarf and get married". Nurcan's grandparents had applied the same policy to her mother: "They only sent their son to Celâl Bayar, not my mother; they said it was for financial reasons but I think it was for social".

Both Aliye and Nurcan referred to the bitterness with which their mothers reflect on their missed opportunity to continue schooling, and how this unfulfilled desire still casts a shadow on their life-review: 'they did not let me', 'If I had been', are continuously coming to their mothers' lips. In the in-depth talk I had with Nurcan, without me orienting the conversation to this direction, she tracked down the history of the women of her family. She talked about her grandmother who did not have any schooling but learned to read on her own from the calendar, about her mother later who was smart and brilliant but was stopped from school when she was twelve and finally for her, the first female in the family to go into secondary schooling. I realised that the feeling of being in a chain of women who were largely restricted to private space without being given formal education opportunities was what made her determined to get educated. "I grew up with my mother's photo being *simeoforos*,⁶⁷ how could I not become a good student?". To my feeling, Nurcan continued what was denied to her mother. Nurcan's personal story is collectively important as she contributed into changing the pattern in both her family and their community.

Azmi's story is an expression of such change. She studies today in a high-profile university. After many years of anger and resentment, she has now come to terms with the people of her community. They also have now changed their mind and approve of her rebellion back then. 'She did well' they say and Azmi finds it ironic. 'Now when they need help, they call me'. Azmi is the one who assists

⁶⁷ On the Greek national days, school pupils parade on the streets, the pupil with the highest grades is *simeoforos*; meaning the one that holds a flag.

other people of her community in accomplishing tasks that involve some sort of literacy. She forgave them attributing their stance to their ‘ignorance’ (*amatheia*). This ignorance is tightly related not only to the very little educational experiences people from her village and especially women had, but also to the very little, if any, interactions her grandmothers and other people from the village had with people out of their region. What Azmi’s grandmothers and people from her village could imagine was restricted by what has been known to them. Over the course of a decade and after younger generations like Azmi tested the waters of what else was possible through their imagination and passionate claim to make it reality, the communal meanings followed.

4.5.5 Distances between stories

There is a mainstream belief amongst the local majority in Rodope that Muslim Thracian men restrict their women at home: “They are authoritative in their families and especially with their wives. They exclude them from any contact with the Greeks. They don’t let them go to schools. Women live literally like slaves”. These are the words of a progressive local majority man in an interview we had. I heard this story, in many variations but with the same bottom line, from many majority men during my fieldwork. Papanikolaou (2007:187) discusses these majority views which overlook the way that majority men, especially in the past, themselves restricted veiled women’s access to public space in Komotini putting the blame on them and their husbands.

However, in the narratives above it was not men but rather older women who used pressure for keeping the younger girls at home in traditional roles far from the school. One of my informants in his seventies told me “I remember the mother saying that girls should not be going to school”. It is a female voice that he remembers saying this in the past. By contrast, fathers in most of the stories I was told had been very supportive of their daughters’ education often making personal sacrifices to support them. In the study of Zografaki (2011) the figure of ‘supportive father’ also appeared as the major element to enable young minority girls’ educational attainment.

The inter-gender reproduction of oppression in the stories of Aliye, Nurcan and Azmi, might be explained by the fact that it is men who occupy the public space, who ‘know’ and ‘have seen’, who have been themselves to the secondary school. The older women who used to stay at home as housewives could only imagine what the public space and the school space could be like. Apparently they imagined it to be not only perilous for the morals of the girls (and therefore their chances to get a good marriage) but also ‘unnecessary’ or unrelated to their lives (‘to learn embroidery, to learn something’). They had never seen a woman in a professional role. At the time of Nurcan, her mother and grandmother, very few men from the group would have professional⁶⁸ rights or jobs too.

It is not a coincidence that Aliye underlined that only people from the market (‘*tis agoras*’), who are those who interact with many people, listen and see much, and had contact with the Greeks were sending their girls to school. Those who were in the midst of interactions were more likely to adopt a practice that was not common before in their community. Here again, the mobility between various spaces: from private to public, from home to school, from the bounded tobacco field to the multi-interactional market seems to shape significantly attitudes about education.

4.5.6 Schooling and the headscarf

Hrisavgi, the teacher from Organi raised another issue: “I had a friend in the village who wanted to send her daughter to Gymnasio. For girls to go to Gymnasio, they had to remove the headscarf. They needed not to wear it to go. It was double what they had to break”. Nurcan, who was amongst the first girls to be in *Celâl Bayar*, said that when her girlfriends were asking her at the end of the primary school if she would wear the scarf: “I did not know what to answer, I was telling them ‘I will go to Gymnasio’”. Her answer when she was eleven shows how the scarf and the secondary school were somehow related back then, in Nurcan’s understanding, in an either/or axis.

⁶⁸ I mean non manual-worker, farmer, husbandry occupation

Covering the female body is not strictly a religious matter, but also a matter of social expectations and conformity to community meanings in Thrace. This does not apply only to the clothing but to the general expectations of the minority Thracian communities from the Muslim women. An informant who teaches the Koran to women in the mosques (*Quran kursu*) stressed to me that it is a very different story what the Koran says and what meanings the patriarchic organisation of the group confers projecting these as 'Islam'. In this way, she wanted to emphasise that it is the patriarchy and the community meanings that are more powerful than what she differentiated as the religious teachings. Many female students of her who feel oppressed in one way or another in their families have been led to believe, as she said, that this is in accordance with Islam. She opposes this belief and the Koran lessons seemed to me that might make a safe space for resistance and renegotiation of meanings about women's place in Thrace.

When I first met Lale, it was in a big *iftar*⁶⁹ in Organi. When I arrived, I was struck by the homogeneous crowd of women who were wearing *ferece*.⁷⁰ When the young people I was with saw Lale their jaw dropped. Lale asked: "How do I look like with the scarf?" Azmi answered: "Basically I was not expecting to see you with the scarf". "Neither did I. I put it on because every woman wears it here", Lale replied. A few days later, during a music concert in a different minority village of *yakka* Lale came to greet me, but I could not recognise her until she told me who she was. This time, she had her hair uncovered and was wearing jeans and a sleeveless top.

According to Papanikolaou (2007:182-213), who offers an interesting discussion about the complexities of the 'headscarf issue' in Rodope, girls wearing headscarf faced problems in enroling at *Celâl Bayar* at the period between 2005-2007. The previous year for the first time in the history of school seven girls showed up in the school wearing a headscarf, as she notes. Due to pressures and reactions around it, four of them moved to a different school while three

⁶⁹ Celebratory dinner to break the feast during Muslim holy days.

⁷⁰ A piece of cloth, like a long coat covering the whole body and arms combined with a scarf.

remained (p. 192). As Papanikolaou mentions in Greece, there is neither law prohibiting, nor law allowing the headscarf at educational institutes. Some of her informants, the parents of a girl from the mountainous zone who in 2005 were denied registration at school for their daughter unless she would remove the headscarf, after they missed the deadline due to negotiations they registered the girl in a public school. In this incidence, Papanikolaou reports that the parents although asked for support from minority representatives they did not find any. Whereas, she argues that in 2004 when the issue first emerged “the greatest reaction to the young girls’ initiative came from the ‘clique’ - the Minority elite (...) According to their logic, the girls had many options if they wanted to veil and go to school. They could either go to a public school or a religious school, but they ‘did not have the right’, to go to *Celâl Bayar*” (p. 193).

At the year of my fieldwork, 2012-13 it was very common in *Celâl Bayar* for girls to wear headscarves. It has been almost ten years since the initial dispute and things seem now, at least from an outsider perspective, to be smooth in that front. However, I was told by some minority informants about a Greek teacher there, who criticises covered female pupils as ‘backward’. Regardless of these changes, the scarf discussion, which I only lightly touched here points to the multiplicity of perplexities regarding girls’ access to secondary education.

Derya for example, when she described the experience of her and her sister at a public Likio in Komotini in the late 2000s made a comment on the experience of the only girl with a headscarf there. “And we are open (without headscarf) imagine the girls with headscarf how many problems they face. They ask them all the time why they wear it and these girls close down to themselves. They cannot explain themselves. The others mock them and they close down to themselves, there is racism. This girl at school she was walking at the forecourt and they were mocking her”. How did she react? I asked. “Nothing, she would not speak back. To make you understand; Imagine it is Christmas and someone is dressed-up as for the carnival, like this they were mocking her”.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on rural geographies within the group: the mountainous Rodope and the symbolically named as rural the Pomak and female experiences. In both the physical and the symbolic sense this was a discussion about ‘Spatial Practice’ (Lefebvre, 1991). In the case of the mountain and the Pomaks, this is concerned with the long maintenance of the internal borders (Surveillance Zone) for the specific purpose of separating populations in order to avoid ethnic mixing and to control them. In the case of females, it has to do with the ‘norms’, behaviours and practices that are associated with various physical spaces. The appropriation of space under these terms becomes a daily taken for granted experience for those concerned. (Shields, 1999; Loxley, et al., 2011).

What emerged from the chapter is that these categories (mountainous, female) entail a diversity of experiences within and therefore they can only serve as analytical sign-posting. The diversity of experiences that was presented here relates to the multiplicity of positionalities of the agents. These had references to: geography (e.g. being from different villages within the same zone differentiated the experiences of Azmi and Lale), linguistic identity (Altan’s experiences differ from the others’ presented in the chapter due to his mother tongue that is peripheral to Turkish) and gender (Lale and Azmi had different set of challenges specifically related to them being females). The hierarchical ordering of these differences also emerged through the small stories: Turkish linguistic identity is higher in the hierarchy than the Pomak. Likewise, for male and female and urban and rural identities.

The notion of distance has emerged strongly in this chapter. Distance, both physical and symbolic, has been a primary feature of the conditions of being and learning for people from the mountainous Rodope as well as for females. Stories suggest that breaking the distance, (physical and symbolic) is almost a prerequisite for developing and realising aspirations. Altan’s experience of geographical distance between the home and school domains was described as something that “made the big boom” in his life. For Altan, Argun, Lale and

Azmi, formal education signified a new relation to distance by breaking it; moving into a space they did not have access to before (non-Thrace, the urban space, the majority school), as well as, by departing from a place they previously felt bounded by (the mountain, the home domain).

However, this potential that ‘learning’ via formal education could bring about was described as directly dependent on the conditions of being, not only in the physical and material sense summarised in Argun’s words “it was hard to get out of the village”, but also as dispositions and habitus expressed in Umut’s words: “people have this mentality” and Lale’s “this is how they were used to”. Taşkın explained further pointing to the origins and the process that resulted in these conditions: “they have lived such things (...) they have the psychology of the defeated (...) they don’t believe in their power”.

The way distances have been described and also transcended can point to the notions of Young (1990) about marginalisation and powerlessness as expressions of oppression. Marginalisation as Argun and Umut put it with regards to the surveillance zone not only deprived people from opportunities to participate in social life, it also had consequences on material deprivation. Powerlessness, on the other hand, is what Umut tried to describe as a mentality of giving up and being fearful. What Taşkın described as the psychology of the defeated that ‘does not know or believe in own power’. It is within this context of being and limitations of becoming, that the low educational attendance and mobility for people of the mountainous Rodope but also females in the past can be explained. Askouni (2006) described in her study how these groups were the most educationally disadvantaged when PEM reform was initiated.

Argun’s father did not study, but his sons did. Mothers of Lale, Azmi and Nurcan did not go to secondary school but the three women studied at the university. Altan’s father hardly had schooling, but Altan made it to the university. What happened from one generation to the other? First of all, the shift of Greek policies created new conditions of life, making distances shorter and easier to be covered, as Argun pointed: “It is only after 1995 that things improved,

financially also”. Moreover, some people who had migrated for work, who had already covered the distance for outcrossing the Thracian borders, returned and were now different: they ‘had seen new things and had some money’. Similarly, in the town pioneers of change were families ‘of the market’, the streetwise, those in the middle of interactions and geographically near Celâl Bayar as the stories of Nurcan and Aliye demonstrated. In addition, there has been a cohort of women, ‘the mothers’ of the younger participants, who had lived a life in regret for missing out education, something that ‘the grandmothers’ had fiercely opposed. ‘The daughters’ of the regretful mothers, claimed what so far was denied.

Looking back at chapter three, Appadurai (2004) argued that the capacity to aspire is a cultural and navigational capacity. The strength that the repatriated immigrants had, as well as the market people of Komotini was that they had developed their navigational capacity through their contact with other people and the experiences they had out of the locality. They also had a very different horizon in their narrative imagination. Umut made this distinction clear when he differentiated the people in the rural mountainous Rodope who imagine pursuing education as something “difficult”, they are ready to “get disappointed” and “give up in the face of the hardships” and those others who “became better in setting goals and go after them”. Those who had, therefore, a strengthened capacity for aspiring were those “who have socialised more”, “had been in contact with others”, “had seen other things”. In a few words, all that the Greek state regulated, monitored and controlled strictly until the mid-nineties.

Although the external conditions of life have changed the internal barriers that the mountainous life conditions had created remained. Lale’s and Argun’s stories demonstrated that although the physical distance between their locality and the educational opportunities offered in the town was covered, there was a symbolic distance between them and the new environment that they found hard to transcend. Consequently, they kept on being amongst “their own” and as they noted “absolutely nothing changed”, “it was all the same over again”. The symbolic distance was demarcated by fear and shame and was mainly grounded

in their feeling of lacking linguistic capital. In the manner of ‘hysteresis effect’ in Bourdiean terms, having had very little opportunities before for speaking Greek in natural communicative interactions, and feeling very little prepared from their mountainous minority and lower secondary school to do so, they were not confident enough to approach the Greeks in the new space, as Argun argued.

Here we have an expression of Lefebvre’s (1991) ‘representational spaces’ or the space as “lived through its associated images and symbols” (*ibid.* :39). Being physically present in the Greek/majority educational space or the urban/Komotinian space by contrast to minority/mountainous point of departure does not mean the ‘fit in’ experience which becomes now a new struggle for another distance to be covered. Argun and Lale’s mental maps (Migdal, 2004) play out in the way they flock together with their own in the majority spaces where especially their accent and broadly linguistic capital operate as an instant signifier of their separation from the Greeks, who are symbolically considered the legitimate users of the space occupying the centre with the minority/mountainous pupils being at the margin.

At the beginning of this chapter it was hinted how the big stories charge schooling with all sort of meanings around nationalism and patriotism in contrast to how the participants talked about the way they formed their personal meanings around education. The next chapter will develop the discussion regarding this narrative gap and will explore distances using more filters with reference to minority educational spaces.

Chapter 5

Minority schooling: “You grow up knowing what you are...”

“Minority school is a weight that pulls you down” (Cenk)

“Minority school is a privilege that we need to maintain” (Nehir)

As the above quotations show minority schooling holds strong and often contradictory meanings for members of the group. This chapter explores how learning, being and becoming interplay with reference to minority schooling. It also examines the ways that the personal and the collective interrelate, and the small and big stories differ with reference to minority schooling. The chapter draws on all three narrative domains: historical archives, small stories told in private and big stories told in public.

Chapter one outlined how minority education in W.Thrace has been shaped and the most important elements about it. The first part of this chapter will build further on this context by bringing together historical archival sources and contemporary stories told publicly and privately in Komotini about the teaching personnel in minority education. The discourse about teachers allows to construct a frame for understanding the way that different meanings around minority education have emerged. It also demonstrates the huge symbolic meaning of minority education as a field where minority group and State negotiate their relations and group’s identity. The small story of Tevfik is looked at here in parallel to the confidential voice of the historical archives revealing the distance between the stories told from the top and those constructed from

below. Nurcan, Haluk and Nehir also give with their stories their own perspective on the teachers' debates.

Following this, the chapter looks at the minority school-scape in Rodope. Agah, Selale, Haluk, Derya and others describe through their stories of minority schooling the ways that learning relates to the intra-group hierarchies and diversity as well as intergenerational shifts regarding minority education's meanings. Moreover, majority and minority voices in public dialogue reveal how belongingness of minority members is constructed and contested suggesting the way that minority education relates to the power hierarchy between minority and majority. The chapter closes with the small story of Umut, which counteracts the big stories seen earlier through the archives and the public discourse and challenges directly the stories told by the elite of the group.

5.1 Discourses about teachers: Minority Education as a battlefield for nationalism

During my fieldwork, I realised that a helpful way to get to grips with the issue of minority education in Thrace is through the discourses, which are formed in all three areas of my inquiry: private, public and archival stories, about teachers. What the conflation of the discourses around teachers in these three areas underlines is first, the paramount role of nationalism in the production of minority school spaces and second, the very different meanings and feelings the minority community in Rodope holds in comparison to the meanings of the State as regards the teaching personnel. As seen in Chapter one, a series of Greek laws and bilateral agreements between Greece and Turkey have regulated the appointment of teaching staff at minority schools. The main categories of teachers for the Turkish curriculum have been '*prosontouhoi*', '*metaklitoi*' and '*Epathites*', along with the Greek/ Christian teachers for the Greek curriculum.

5.1.1 Metaklitoi and national consciousness building

Metaklitoi are called in Greek the teachers who started coming to W.Thrace from Turkey in 1952 following a bilateral agreement that aimed to promote positive

diplomatic relations between the two countries and the betterment of the conditions for their respective Greek and Turkish minorities. A few years later, however, in 1958 the Inspector of Minority Schools in Western Thrace, Minas Minaidis, was alarmed by their presence: “Propaganda from the Turkish teachers acts in a subversive, insidious and secret manner. (...) Indeed, the Consulate uses the teachers coming from Turkey as instruments of the policy of its Government aiming to keep in constant unrest the Muslim population here; on one hand for reasons of general politics and on the other for promoting the Kemalist reforms to the whole minority population”⁷¹. For this reason, Minaidis, amongst other measures, proposed the shortening of their stay to two years: “Although we consider this wrong from a pedagogic point of view it will, however, benefit the national aims. The teachers will not be able to get to know people and matters and their influence will not be that detrimental” (ibid.). Minaidis as Inspector of the Schools clearly demonstrates that he understood his duties being less about education and more about national security.

Metaklitoi, were believed by the authorities to be Kemalist preachers and therefore were undesired in Thrace. However, ten years after Minaidis' warning about the threat that metaklitoi posed the Prefect of Rodope argued that the battle had been lost: “Our effort on maintaining the division between traditionalists and modernists does not have any positive outcome taking into account the strong propaganda that takes place. In due time, the conservatives will end at the camp of the sovinst Young Turks”⁷².

The propaganda, the Prefect refers to, was believed that was carried out mainly by Kemalist teachers in collaboration with the Turkish Consulate in Komotini. The report⁷³ of the CCT meeting, in January 1959, included a reference to the action of metaklitoi at some primary schools reinforcing the worries of the authorities. “It was found in some schools of W.Thrace that those teachers from Turkey replaced the morning prayer with the nationalist oath canonised in

⁷¹ AA 43 Inspection of Muslim Schools, EP 184, 1-5-58, Confidential

⁷² AA 104, CCT 56th meeting 17/2/1968 p.16

⁷³ AA 84 MFA, AP 3127, 5/2/1959 p.14

schools of Turkey. Through this oath are underlined the Turkish ethnicity and the virtues of the Muslim child which promises faith in his (Turkish) homeland.”

To better understand the designs and decisions about the education of the minority, it is worth looking at the broader belief system that Greek authorities had. For example, the prefect of Rodope cited above believed that “A broader plan on behalf of Ankara is in progress aiming to raise an issue over Thrace. This could have consequences which may lead to a war between Greece and Turkey in the next five years” (ibid.). The belief that through minority education a threat was posed to the nation the respective educational policies were designed not only with the input of the local Prefects but also the Minister of the Exterior, the Army and the Intelligence Service. For example in 1956 colonel Panagopoulos, General Inspector of Constabulary sent to the government a report with the title: “Regarding minority education and the national perils stemming from it”⁷⁴

Counter to the state’s phobic discourse about *metaklitoi*, comes the enthused narrative of Nehir,⁷⁵ a well-educated man from Rodope who in his sixties when we met, attended *İdadîye* and later *Celâl Bayar* between 1955 and 1965. For Nehir *metaklitoi* contributed to the rising of educational aspirations amongst minority pupils: “Maybe for some period, in older times, families were not interested in education. From the 1950s onwards there is a shift and an intense interest, a movement was developed in the community around the idea that ‘the children should be educated’. ‘We must study at the university, we must get educated’, and this idea was spreading. The Turkish *metaklitoi* teachers contributed to this”.

This movement that Nehir talks about could be associated with the Kemalist propaganda that authorities saw the *metaklitoi* importing. The Kemalist ideas were not restricted only to ‘selling identity’⁷⁶, but were also propagating modernisation in the form of westernisation and leap out of the Islamic tradition. This was a worldview very different from the one that the religious schools, where teachers were trained previously, adhered to. Indeed, a value system that

⁷⁴ AA 73, Prefecture of Rodope, EP 311, 21/8/1956

⁷⁵ Nehir’s story is presented in Chapter Seven (p. 242) and he appears also in Chapter Six (p.184).

⁷⁶ Expression used by an informant in Komotini on the contemporary issues of identity politics

could mobilise the minority on a different understanding of ‘self’ and life. Persecuting Kemalism in the form of persecuting teachers could be then seen by modernists in Thrace, as if the state was persecuting the right of the group to a more progressive and liberal model of education, confine them in this way in a backwards (as defined by Kemalism) lifestyle.

On the other hand, Tunay, who studied at *Celâl Bayar* during the same years as Nehir in the late fifties- early sixties, acknowledged the nationalist propaganda that was going on in his school at both sides of the curriculum: “The teachers in the Turkish part were all Turks, we did not have local ones. Of course, half of them were spies working for the Turkish Intelligence Service. The Greek teachers we had were spies for KYP:⁷⁷ Fanatic Turks and fanatic Greeks; spies. What sort of education were they able to provide? There was an electric atmosphere at the school”. Tunay also gave aspects of what retrospectively perceives as expressions of Turkish indoctrination: “We were taught poems of Kazim Akif Esroy.⁷⁸ Even today, when Erdoğan⁷⁹ wants to influence the Turks he reads poems of Akif. The Turkish teachers were saying: ‘our ancestors; the Ottomans...’”. Here it seems that the nationalist meanings that permeated the minority education policies were echoing in the school experiences of pupils, like Tunay.

5.1.2 Prosontouhoi and the threat to nation’s security

Prosontouhoi were local Thracians who were trained in Turkey as teachers and therefore they were considered ‘qualified’ as the word translates in English. According to Abdurrahman (2012: 148), the first exam for the selection of the first twenty minority Thracians to be sent to Turkey was held in 1955 under the supervision of the Turkish Consulate and the last exams were in 1966.

The minutes of the 57th meeting of CCT⁸⁰ provide a detailed insight on authorities’ reactions when the first waves of prosontouhoi started coming to Thrace. “Our utmost important aim is the selection of the prospective

⁷⁷ Greek State’s Intelligence Service

⁷⁸ The poet of the Turkish National Anthem

⁷⁹ The Prime Minister of Turkey at the time of my fieldwork

⁸⁰ AA 104, CCT 57th meeting, 27/3/1968

prosontouhoi teachers and their additional training into a more Greek-appropriate way to weaken their fanatic dispositions" otherwise he added "you understand what kind of insidious anti-Greek propaganda those new *yenitsaroi* will make".

Prosontouhoi are often called *yenitsaroi* in the CCT meetings. *Yeniçeri* (in Turkish) was a special military body of the Ottoman Empire formed by Islamised, previously Christian, young boys. I understand that this term is used in the CCT implying that prosontouhoi Thracian teachers were Turkified in analogy to how *yenitsaroi* are remembered in Greece as some of 'us' who have been recruited and trained against us after being Turkified. A sense of betrayal and also brainwashing is attached to the term whereas the teachers are paralleled to military forces.

At the same CCT meeting, the inspector of minority education, Mantzouranis, outlined the way he associated schooling with national security: "(School) stands between family, Community and Religion and it relates to the State. (...) With this work the nation and the State are secured, during peace and the fatherland (*to patrio edafos*) is protected, during wartime. Any other penetration alien to the State which protects the nation is a threat (...). The expansion of the educational system of a neighbouring country into a part of the national territory inhabited by one-third by people from the same or similar ethnic origin, entirely of the same religion, deeply demarcated from the majority on language grounds consists indeed a direct national peril"⁸¹

According to Mantzouranis, primary schools have a fundamental role in securing the nation and the State both during peace and war. Moreover, he sees prosontouhoi as a direct threat to national security since he thinks that their appointment links inextricably the minority group with Turkey facilitating the latter's expansion in the national territory of Greece. He continues explaining in detail how if the already working at schools prosontouhoi will not be retrained (into Greekness) and if one more of them gets appointed there will be "the immediate danger of linguistic homogenisation of the Muslim population of W.

⁸¹ AA 104 CCT 57th meeting, 27/3/1968, p.3 Capital letters as on the document.

Thrace (...) according to the spirit of the Kemalist reforms in Turkey". He elaborates saying explicitly why this should be avoided: "The linguistic unification, added to the at large racial unification and the complete religious one will form the unbreakable foundation of the national consciousness of the Muslim population of W.Thrace, which will later be impossible to silence".

Moreover, he shares the view of the Prefect of Rodope about Turkey's expansionist plans in Thrace that aims to achieve first via minority schools: "Turkey wants to reach with ease the Greek-Bulgarian borders and Nestos and to resume the Treaty of Athens⁸² and pursues this through education (...). With the appointment of 200 Muslims (Turks at consciousness) teachers trained in Turkey, Turkey takes control over all Muslim schools, the curriculum, the teaching materials, the teaching methods, influences the public opinion, introduces the canonised language in Turkey after 1924⁸³ and aligns the Muslim population of W.Thrace to its own population. This means that it creates national consciousness national emotion and national character."

Considering that CCT viewed prosontouhoi as soldiers (*yenitsaroi*) of the Turkey's expansionist vision in Thrace the minority education policy they had to design had to be a policy for national defence countering Turkey's assumed plans. It is not surprising, therefore, the way the Council tried to decommission the teachers. Prosontouhoi already in service would be fired when showing signs of not been loyalists (*nomimofrōnes*). Moreover, medrese graduates (teachers of lower status) would be appointed to schools even in cases that communities had collected signatures declaring their preference for a prosontouho.⁸⁴ Introducing exams in Greek competency for prosontouhoi was another measure to filter the prosontouhoi to be appointed at schools in the 1960s (Marvrommatis, 2008: 373).

⁸² According to the Greek-Turkish Treaty of Athens signed in 1913 the Greek borders stopped at the Nestos river.

⁸³ Modern Turkish language using latin script as it was envisioned by Mustafa Kemal replacing the Ottoman script. Traditionalists' schools in Thrace were in favour of the pre-Kemal script of Turkish.

⁸⁴ For example, in 1960 the cases in the village Elmali (Melivoia) and Likeio (AA50 Translation from AKIN newspaper F139/11-3-60 & AA50 Inspector of Minority Schools EP 66, 22/10/60)

The order at the first meeting of CCT in 1959 was clear “If an undesirable is appointed to a school s/he should be kept under surveillance and fired. He should be judged as a non-loyalist even without justification”.⁸⁵ Documents discussing the social loyalty of prosontouhoi who had been shortlisted for appointment were circulated between the Ministries in Athens, the National Security services and the local authorities in Thrace.⁸⁶ In 1962, a list of names of the teachers who “have been judged by the Committee of Loyalty for the local Muslim teachers’ as non-loyalists” was sent to the General Inspector of foreign and minority schools with the suggestion that they should not be appointed.⁸⁷ Loyalism, in this case, would be defined by whether the teachers had Greek or Turkish consciousness, as the wording appears elsewhere in the archives.

Tevfik is from Komotini. He was in his sixties when I met him and has been one of the ‘decommissioned’ prosontouhoi teachers. His story offers a counter insight into the mono-labelling of people at the pole of spies, heroes, traitors, propagandists and the nationalist understandings of the state authorities as seen above. When he graduated from the primary school of his neighbourhood in the late fifties, he did not know any Greek. The Greeks living in his neighbourhood were refugees and were speaking Turkish. At school he only learnt how to read; all grades had their lessons simultaneously in the same room with only one teacher; “what could we have learnt?”. His family was very poor, so once he finished *dimotiko* his father took him to the ‘*tenekedzidika*’ (copper shops and crafts) to become an apprentice.

After a visit there with his father he got terrified at the prospect and told him that he would rather remain at school. However, the medrese that his father suggested was not appealing to him either. Tevfik collected money from the lemonades he sold at the kafeneio while his parents were working at the tobacco fields and in secret prepared his papers for the Turkish academies in Turkey. He managed to be amongst the ninety selected Thracians that year. When his father found out by the newspapers, a big battle started at home about it. Tevfik won again and at the age of twelve, he got on the train in a group of eight other children heading

⁸⁵ AA 84 28/10/59

⁸⁶ In AA65 Directorate of National Security AP 25/704 28/1/1960

⁸⁷ AA 71 Inspector of Minority Schools EP 35, 8/2/1962

to a Turkish Teacher training school (*Köy Enstitüleri*)⁸⁸ without anyone to accompany them.

He came back to Thrace at age eighteen in 1965 and was appointed to a minority primary school in a mixed populated village in Rodope where he was immediately met with the suspicion of the majority villagers and he never got appointed again. “I had visited villages and had talked with the School Committees and the villagers, they all agreed to have me at their school as a teacher but the Inspector was not giving the permission for me to work.” Most probably Tevfik was judged as non-loyalist by the respective committees and was banned from schools.

From our long discussions, I understood that for him the Village Institute is an important part of his life and identity partially because he was still a child when he lived far from his family for six years. He often talked to me with nostalgia and showed me photos from the times. He described the Institute’s role in these terms: “Turkey after the Independence had a great need in making teachers to send them to the villages where people were illiterate to teach them not only letters but also agriculture and medical issues”.

During my discussions with Tevfik I understood that he feels that he had been part of an educational and secular movement aiming to empower people through education. Aarbakke (2000:145) cites an excerpt from an article in a Thracian minority newspaper (*Ileri* 851/24.06.1996) describing the atmosphere within the minority group about the arrival of prosontouhoi, which I find similar to the way Tevfik talked about the teaching academies: “The first and second group of graduates from the Turkish teacher colleges started to come. An excitement-love for education started to spread throughout the minority. Every village wanted a graduate from Turkish teacher colleges...On the other side... i.e. on the side of the friends who had graduated...: Except for one or two, they were all idealists. Some of them brought with them the famous village institutes spirit. The writer of these lines too brought with him some of this spirit, and feels proud of it.”

⁸⁸ The Turkish name meaning Village Institute.

Karaömerlioğlu (1998), on the other hand, emphasised the village institutes' major role in Turkifying regions of Turkey inhabited, for example by Kurds, Arabs, Laz, etc. and bring the Kemalist revolution to the countryside: "Alongside the attempt to create a different lifestyle within the peasant population, the Village Institutes aimed to spread the nationalist ideology in the villages. In the first decades after the War of Independence, Kemalism failed to gain the hearts and minds of the peasants on a mass scale" (ibid: 63). The teachers trained in the Institutes would then be the missionaries.

Like in the case of metaklitoi, although the State considered prosontouhoi as a direct threat, many people from the group would view prosontouhoi, as their very name connotes as an upscaling of their teachers and thus a betterment of their education. Whereas, Tevfik's story illustrates how his small story is sustained by materials completely different by those that the big stories are made in relation to prosontouhoi.

How do these stories and narrative gaps inform the dialectics between the group and the State? In 2013, in a conference about the education of the minority organised by the local branch of the political party SYRIZA in Komotini, a man in the audience from the minority group, in his sixties said quite upset: "Here we have a retired teacher. In 1965, they took him to Turkey. Greece and Turkey agreed and decided that he would become a teacher; when he returned, he was met with a rebuff (*ton petaxan sto dromo*). Nobody asked him 'what are you doing?', 'how do you work', 'how do you make your living?' They do not ask him 'what kind of pension do you receive and where from' they just say 'he is of the Consulate. And if someone considering the matter is from the majority? S/he knows that does not even get votes from this man. What shall this person do?"

Prosontouhoi belong to the 'Union of Turkish teachers' and receive their pension from Turkey through the Turkish consulate⁸⁹ since, as the story underlines, 'Greece' turned its back to them. When a majority Greek or state representative uses the expression 's/he is of the consulate', it is highly likely to mean that the

⁸⁹ For the pension of teachers as an aspect of nationalism business see Mavrommatis, 2008: 320

people of reference are ‘fanatic Turks’ and instruments of the Consulate serving Turkish interests, in a few words some sort of traitors to Greece.

What is particularly of interest here is the way that prosontouhoi are portrayed not as subjects of history or even their own stories but as objects of the politics between Greece and Turkey: ‘They took him’, he did not go, it was Greece and Turkey the ones that ‘agreed and decided he would become a teacher’. And after the broken promise nobody, and here it was meant nobody from the Greek state, asked him about how he makes his living. ‘They only say that he is from the Consulate’. Dependency on either the state or the Consulate is portrayed as a mainstream mode of living as no alternatives for living were acknowledged. This story can be linked with the discussion in chapter one about the way the Lausanne mythology and the experiences of the group during the stone years have left this heavy legacy of a sense of dependency that is quite strong in minority master narrative.

5.1.3 Epathites and the blacklist

The most radical way Greek authorities found to eliminate the influence of metaklitoi and prosontouhoi teachers preventing the expansionist plans of Turkey as they thought was the establishment of EPATH in 1968. The ‘Special’ Academy would train teachers exclusively for the Turkish curriculum of the minority schools and since 1977 EPATH graduates’ appointment in schools was by law prioritised against any other teacher trained elsewhere. But how is EPATH perceived by people in the group? Nehir’s view is widely shared by many minority people I spoke with: “EPATH was a Stalinist institute. It was made for the minority education and has been used for its abolition. The graduates of EPATH are very poorly trained, especially in the Turkish language.⁹⁰ At this academy, they used to brainwash the students and had more discipline than the army. Those who resisted either got fired or they resigned,

⁹⁰ Tuition of Greek was 7-5-8 hours a week each year respectively whereas the tuition of Turkish was 4-4-4 hours. Information from <http://epath.edu.gr/programma-spoudwn/index-programma-spoudon.htm> (Accessed 11.6.2014)

the rest remained. EPATH was producing teachers who would teach illiteracy. Some of them who have some morals made their own efforts to get educated”.

The stories about EPATH that circulate in Komotini within the group resemble urban myths. The sense of mystery and conspiracy that characterised the talks I had with people about EPATH is reinforced by the fact that former students of EPATH, who either got expelled or withdrew from it ‘keep silent’ as I was told and experienced. I also felt a bold contrast between the continuous telling of stories about ‘the evil’ EPATH and the complete silence on the matter⁹¹ from EPATH graduates I met.

Taşkin said: “None of the graduates talks about their training. Likewise, none from those who withdrew has opened his mouth to say what was going on in there. According to rumour, after the first year, students were asked to sign a paper... that they controlled them and they were teaching them also other things apart from...and that many of those who left are those who denied to sign this paper. There is this rumour that goes round; I cannot tell if it is truth or not’. Later, I met a woman whose father “resigned from EPATH, and one of his friends resigned too. He told me that he would never allow me to study there”.

If EPATH is understood by members of the community as described above, what meanings do they make about the Epathites teachers at schools? The first time I heard about the ‘black lists’ in Thrace was when Nurcan mentioned EPATH in our talk: “When the Academy opened there was a line coming from the Turkish consulate that minority people should not study there. For the Pomaks it was easier to disobey; they were already at the margins”. As Nehir mentioned in our talk: “At the beginning, they would only accept minority people of Pomak origin, graduates of medrese”. EPATH graduates were the first civil servants of the minority and the students were offered accommodation and a stipend; excellent motives for someone to choose medrese and follow the EPATH direction. Moreover, the authorities had interest in specifically targeting Pomaks

⁹¹ It is important to note here that I never initiated discussions about EPATH myself with either of the two groups I mention here.

who presumably had weaker Turkish consciousness and therefore would be easier to be brought to the Greek anti-Kemalist/Turkish camp.

Nurcan said: “EPATH was a dreadful school. Those entering EPATH were immediately stigmatised, got included in the blacklists of the Consulate and were considered traitors. People who were graduating from EPATH and were coming to teach were already stigmatised; they were coming at schools stigmatised. Moreover, the teachers were not fluent nor had a Turkish accent since it was not their mother tongue. Of course, some of them were good teachers. But with what sort of psychology could these people come into the class and to the society? This was the reason why I decided not to send my son to the minority school.” Lack of respect for them as professionals is what characterised participants’ descriptions of their Epathites teachers. Taşkın’s comment about them is one that I have heard many times: “First of all, they don’t know the language themselves, my mother speaks better Turkish than them. Most of them are from the mountainous area and do not speak Turkish at home. They had two choices either to become shepherds in their village or to become teachers and they chose the second”.

Epathites were presented in my interviews as the main reason for parents to choose a Greek school for their children. Those who remained at the minority schools most commonly complained about these teachers and their inefficiency especially in teaching Turkish. These narratives seem to be consistent with what Nehir and Taşkın argued earlier that through EPATH the Greek State aimed to abolish minority education in an insidious way.

As Nurcan underlined, Epathites had disobeyed the consulate line to sabotage the Academy, got on the black lists and, therefore, were constructed in the public opinion of the community as traitors. In the stories I heard, however, nobody accused them as traitors or used such terms, the focus was in their poor fluency in Turkish and they were not described as traitors but rather as pawns of the State. How did the people who viewed EPATH as a weapon of the state against them reacted to it? And how did the families and small communities express their dissatisfaction about the teacher in their school? Cenk replied: “Protests? Reaction? The reaction was to send their children to Turkey. It was difficult for

them to go to school and complain because they did not speak good Greek. They were afraid. People could not even get a building permission during those years. With what psychology (to protest)? Whatever happens in Thrace remains in Thrace”. According to Nehir, however, this was the result of a compromise after the failure of community’s first resistance mobilisations: “They protested and very intensively. The first graduates could not get into the schools. The various societies did not want them. But the central authorities were proved superior from the local communities. At some point, the resistance backed down. A compromise happened.”

Kazim is an EPATH graduate, younger than Nehir. He told me proudly that he has been a teacher since 1993. He said “When I got the position. It was very difficult for me. That year they fired seven teachers. According to the plan, they would have fired thirty-five. They said that these teachers were probably feeling more Turkish. This is why they fired them. For me it was a massive psychological pressure to take one of their positions, the psychological pressure was tremendous”.

A critical dimension that these stories about Epathites bring about in relation to the sensitised belongings and the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, rewards and penalties that nationalism has developed locally is the association with the ‘black list’. Nurcan explained: “The practice was flourishing especially during Junta⁹² but also in the 1980s. There were two ‘Juntas’ one from this side and one from the other. Those years many people wanted to cross the borders to Turkey to either buy a house or because they had one there and they could not. It was not only Epathites that were restricted, but also some journalists and business owners. For example, if a businessman wanted to make an opening and collaborate with the majority would have to face the consequences”.

Getting into the blacklist meant to be stigmatised and excluded from the community, even by one’s closest relations as gossip would spread the news of someone being stopped at the borders very quickly. Taşkin explained the spectrum of consequences that this had for those affected: “Even the closest

⁹² The regime lasted from 1967 to 1974

friends of someone that would get on the black list would stop saying hello to him. Because when the consulate shows you the red card, then the Turkish state excludes you, you are not accepted anymore in the society as well”. He further identified the fear and uncertainty that the nationalist poles capitalise through such practices: “First of all, people here have a special respect for the consulate, they consider it as a guarantor for the minority and they are afraid that in case the consulate leaves from here they will treat us in the way they treated Muslims in Bosnia. There is this fear and this mentality established in the minority world”.

According to Taşkin’s understanding, it is the fear of Greece that leads people closer to the Turkish consulate and its influence. Someone who was himself affected by the blacklist system and could not visit Turkey for ten years explained: “To be betrayed by the one on whom you had projected all your hopes to save you from Greece that is after you, is the worst betrayal. None from the black list ever forgave. To do this to a minority person is the worst offence”.

5.1.4 Greek teachers and monitoring

In analogy to the efforts of the state to appoint for the Turkish curriculum those teachers who were less Turkish; for the Greek curriculum the teachers had to be those who were very Greek. “They should have at least graduated from a secondary school, be between 25 to 55 years old, and preferably be from Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. The best is to choose for the purpose, reserve officers, children of *Makedonomahoi*⁹³, those who have solid National beliefs and those who know at least the very basics of the Turkish language”.⁹⁴ The preferred teachers should be from Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, probably because like this it would be easier for them to settle in their positions. Local teachers then would probably take more seriously the ‘National’⁹⁵ mission they had within the schools.⁹⁶ Moreover, those from Eastern Macedonia and Thrace would most probably have a refugee background from Turkey. Therefore, they would be doubly concerned with national security and would also speak Turkish.

⁹³ *Makedonomahoi* fought between 1904 and 1908 for the annexation of the Ottoman region of Macedonia to Greece. Bulgarians and Young Turks were over the same battle.

⁹⁴ AA43 General Inspector of Education, EP 24, 14/06/1958

⁹⁵ In the state document national is always written with a capital N.

⁹⁶ See also Askouni (2006:99).

Suggesting at the best the appointment of army officers and even descendants of *Makedonomahoi* is along the same lines.

It is also suggested by the Inspector of Elementary Schools, that the Greek teachers should receive a special training before their appointment: “Apart from all other subjects, they should be taught systematically Turkish language, a concise history of Islam, the folk traditions and culture of the minority group and elements of espionage and counter-espionage by a special person. It is necessary to define precisely what the goal of the service of the Greek teachers at the minority schools is, this way the teachers can steadily orient themselves to its achievement. The goals should be the following two: The first of these will be outspoken, defined by Law as the Treaty of Lausanne specifies it: This goal will identify with the demand for the Greek teachers- to the extent that it depends on them- to raise the cultural life standard of the Muslim population residing in the area of the school where they serve. However, the main goal should be the careful spying on the work of the Muslim teachers in the respective schools and additionally the spying of any possible Turkish propaganda exercised over the Muslim populations.”

Teachers and police were the eyes and the ears of the State in the villages all across Thrace. In the same period, as the state archives suggest, the authorities made a great effort to form a body of spies dispersed across Thrace. The teachers as spies could be very helpful on providing information about their Turkish colleagues’ work and ideas helping in the better monitoring of Turkish propaganda at schools. A retired Greek teacher I met was from a refugee background as is common in Thrace, spoke Turkish and believed that Thrace is under threat. He carried a special pride on having worked at minority schools feeling that he has served Greece and a national aim in doing so.

As regards minority members’ perceptions of the Greek teachers; the common thread in my participants’ narratives was the teachers’ indifference. An example of such representation of the Greek teachers by participants is that of Durul⁹⁷, a man from Komotini in his late thirties: “I was at the primary school from 1984

⁹⁷ Durul appears again in Chapter Seven (p. 240)

to 1990. In all lessons the teacher was coming in the class and was opening his newspaper to read (...) Sometimes when we were disturbing him and he could not read the newspaper, he was yelling at us to stop making noise”.

The indifference and lack of engagement of the Greek teachers frequent in the small stories as often as the ‘unskilled Epathites’, with some exceptions of course. What is more important is that participants would continuously link these experiences to the state’s undercover policies: Melik, for example, said: “Teachers were used as the first line of defence for the castle of Hellenism. But teachers are not the military they should have taught us Greek” or in the words of another participant: “The Greek teacher who was coming to the village usually was a spy as well. In general, there were rumours and my parents would hear such things in Komotini that there was a political line not to teach us neither Greek or Turkish”.

Haluk⁹⁸, another minority member from Komotini in his forties, was at school when the authorities changed the school names sing replacing ‘Turkish’ with ‘minority’. After he told me that his teachers did not teach either language he added that by contrast, they were very keen to teach pupils their identities: “The Greek teachers were doing indoctrination; you are Greeks. The Turkish teachers on the other side were telling us: no guys you are Turks”. Haluk mentioned a Greek teacher he had who was not from Thrace: “She was completely out of the Thracian issues and therefore she was doing her job. She was very different from all the other teachers, apparently because she was interested in us and not in opening this kind of conversations”

This section looked at different discourses about teachers and the contradicting meanings that these would evoke for the State on one hand and the community on the other. Through the State Archives of the past decades, it becomes clear that the policy designers produced minority schooling as a space critical for gaining or losing the battle that Greek nationalism was fighting in the area; this was the Hellenisation of the region and the national security. Teachers at minority schools have been highly politicised actors: metaklitoi were considered

⁹⁸ Haluk appears again in Chapters Six (pp.187, 190-195) and Seven (p. 229)

by the state as the hand of Turkey in Thrace, prosontouhoi resembled with military forces and traitors, Epathites were constructed as the pawns of the State in the school whereas Greek teachers were sent to schools in order to spy on their Turkish colleagues. The operation of the Turkish Consulate's black lists and the Greek State's Loyalty Committees have set the tone of the politicisation of self-expression and identifications locally. Expression of Turkish or Greek 'consciousness' became either rewarded or persecuted. In either case, minority school space is realised by the community as a highly sensitised space where learning is compromised in favour of being or becoming 'Greek' or 'Turk'.

5.2 Mapping the diversity of Minority Schools

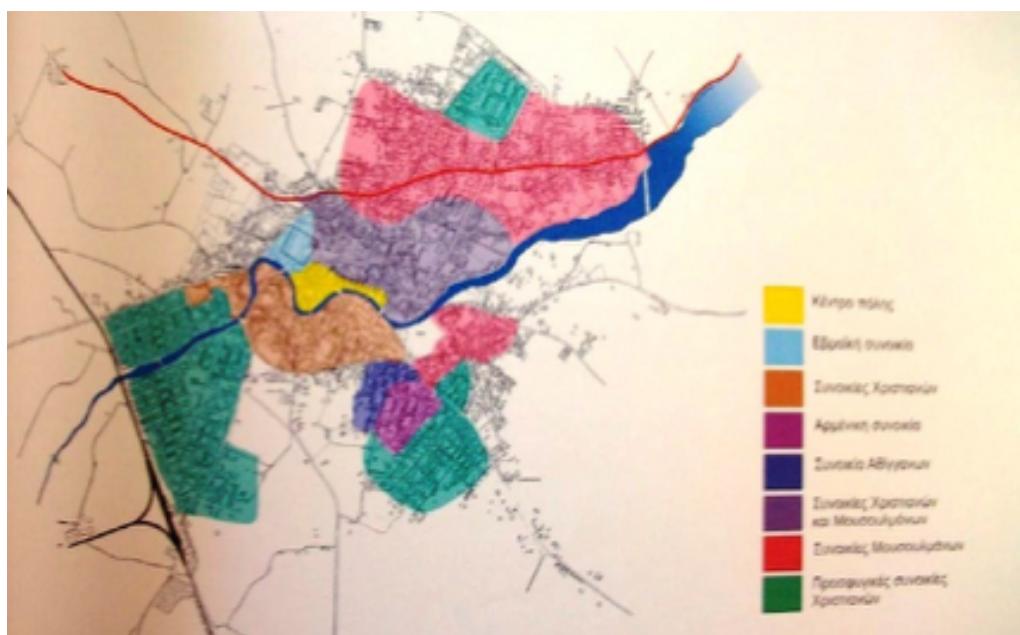
This section will present an overview of minority schools looking mostly at their material aspect as infrastructures, the way they are linked to various spaces and the general way that are evaluated by participants as 'good' or 'bad'. The aim of the section is to outline the diversity of the school-scape in Rodope as a reflection of the intra-group diversity and allow to explore through this lens how schooling may inform pupil's understanding of self. It is important to remember here what I already mentioned in chapter two; that I did not visit under my researcher role any school neither I conducted any inschool observations myself. The following discussion is based on my interviews.

5.2.1 Internal hierarchies: What does my minority-school tell about me?

Kyriakos is a local majority teacher who has served for many years in minority schools in the area and due to his involvement in a project has visited most of them. This is the brief overview he gave me of the minority school-scape in Rodope: "There are four, five categories of schools. There is a large number of schools which were established in the 1950s with Turkish funding; these have two classrooms and the teachers' office. You find them in villages and they are made with stones and bricks. Then there are some remote schools consisting of only one room. There are some which are basically a basement; these were used in the past as wood storage. There are schools which are a room attached to a mosque and finally, there is the '*Idadiye*' in Komotini, which is a school -

school". Many of the Thracian minority schools used to be Muslim Community schools during the Ottoman times. Moreover, given that there is a large number of elementary schools to cover the needs of most villages, quite often their infrastructure is very poor. In the words of Zoe, a local majority teacher: "The conditions in minority schools, except Idadiye, are wretched. You cannot transform a house of 1900 to a school of the 21st century".

There are four minority primary schools functioning today in Komotini: *Idadiye* is the big central school, a beautiful architectural Ottoman heritage, with the most prestigious status in the community. The second minority school is commonly named *Mastanli*, the name of the neighbourhood where it is located. It is considered a Pomak school since it is located in the space where many people from the mountainous region have settled after they moved in Komotini. The third is located in a mixed neighbourhood at the north of the town and the fourth also known as *Ifestos* school, again by the name of its neighbourhood, is considered a school for the gypsies.



I9: Map of Komotini representing ethnic and religious spatial segregation. Light Blue: Jewish, Brown: Christian, Purple: Armenians, Dark Blue: Roma, Indigo: Mixed Christian & Muslim, Red/Pink: Muslim, Green: Refugee Christian neighborhoods

Source: In Mehmet (2010: 131)

The way schools in the town are known reflects the diversity of the minority population, which is also expressed in spatial segregation. The hierarchical character of the diversity within the group is not reflected only at the different residential zones, but also at the schools serving each segment. *Idadiye* is always spoken about as exceptional. Kazim, a minority teacher, said that unlike other schools in the town where the students sit squeezed in very small classrooms, “*Idadiye* has ten classrooms; they are big, some are not even used. It has a huge yard where the children can play. It is a school”. Haluk thinks that *Idadiye*, traditionally the school of the elite has changed: “In the neighbourhood of *Idadiye* used to live the bourgeois of the minority group and this was at that time the most important primary school. Today is not as much; it is only its reputation that is left that it mainly has to do with the teachers”. As seen before metaklitoi teachers were considered by minority people much better than the locally trained ones at the medrese. Metaklitoi are primarily appointed at *Idadiye* and *Celâl Bayar*; the Turkish schools of the town. Kyriakos believes that the state also intervened in weakening the school’s prestige: “The authorities reformed the administrative spatial segments to put gypsies in their (the Turks’) school and devalue it”.

By contrast to *Idadiye*, *Mastanli* is considered a school of very poor infrastructure. Kyriakos said: “*Mastanli* is a school where they used to go, and go Pomaks who live in Komotini. When I was teaching there, there were only two Turks: one was the child of the *aga*⁹⁹ of the area who had five acres and used to rent pieces of it to Pomaks. The other was a girl whose dad and granddad were mountainous Turks and her mother was Pomak. All the rest were Pomaks”. His description points, amongst others, to the economic subordinate position of the internal migrants, the Pomaks, who usually rent and work on land owned by Turks. During my stay in Komotini, I met some people who had migrated to town from Pomak villages and had this relation to Turkish land owners for already twenty years trying to make ends meet often along with other labour work. Kyriakos explained that his pupils at *Mastanli* used to “speak Turkish, they do not speak Pomakika anymore. The are conscious of their Pomak origin

⁹⁹ A big land owner in Turkish

and might know a couple of words but they are also conscious that Pomak-ness is part of a stigma and is forbidden”.

Very often, participants from rural Rodope would argue that their schools are not as good as the schools in town and that pupils at the urban schools are better looked after by their teachers and learn more. However, participants who grew up in Komotini argue that this ideal that people from the rural areas imagine applies only to *Idadiye*. Kyriakos resembled the *Mastanli* neighbourhood and school with any other village: “Have you visited *Mastanli* and *Kir-mahalle*?¹⁰⁰ There is no comparison! *Mastanli* is like a village”. Indeed, Zoe’s description of *Mastanli* school was very similar to descriptions of village schools I heard: “A school low as the ground, you raise your hands and you touch the ceiling. When I was first appointed there in the 1990s I did not even have a desk for my books, it did not even have a window to have fresh air, nothing. Now the building is the same, a room of the mosque and only a few improvements have been made”.

Derya¹⁰¹, a female who attended minority dimotiko in a village of yakka in the mid-nineties and mainstream secondary schooling in Komotini, said: “In Komotini minority schools are very different. These children speak better Greek than us. Maybe because they are in the city, they enjoy more attention. When I was at gimnasio, I used to sit next to a girl who was better in Greek because she had graduated from *Idadiye* in Komotini. They also had a shop and she was spending time there”. Derya’s friend attended *Idadiye* not only because she is from Komotini, but because she was living in the respective neighbourhood. Living at the centre, there were more chances for her parents to be owning a shop at the market. Derya’s classmate did not speak better Greek only because she attended *Idadiye* but because her family owned a space where many Greeks would frequent so she was exposed to the language in communicative situations from her early years.

¹⁰⁰ Mastanli, the Pomak neighbourhood in Komotini and Kir Mahalle a Turkish neighbourhood in Komotini

¹⁰¹ Seen already in the previous chapter

Umut¹⁰², who is also from *yakka* like Derya and in the same age group in his early twenties, believes that schools are organised in hierarchical terms depending on their distance from Komotini. The further away the schools are the lower the standard of the education provided: “Education, depends on the distance a place has from Komotini. This plays a significant role. Usually, they would send us second-class teachers. The good teachers would be appointed in Komotini; in *Idadiye* or the small towns of the plain like Iasmos and Sapes. The others, like *Epathites*, would be sent to the mountainous and rural villages”. Umut sees first and second-class schools following the community’s respective classification of the teachers working there. He thinks that the central decision for appointing second-class teachers, as he believes, in the rural area reflects the differentiation of educational aspirations across different spaces in Rodope: “Anyway, no one from these villages would plan to go to university, so the teacher would not get in any trouble. Most of the parents were expecting their children to start working after finishing school”.

He explained better what getting in trouble for the teachers might mean and why rural Rodope was a better destination for them: “They send the worst teachers to the villages because there they do not need to take any responsibility. If a teacher who cannot teach gets appointed in the city, s/he will be sent away with a phone-call. Because there, parents can complain and protest. In the villages nothing is going to happen”. Apart from educational aspirations believed to be higher amongst the people in Komotini, it is also that parents in Komotini are presented to have the capacity to complain and cause trouble if they want. As seen earlier parents who send their children to *Idadiye* are more likely to have formal education and be part of the social elite of the community. On the other hand, parents at villages are most likely to be peasants having had fewer educational opportunities and therefore probably less confident to extend formal complaints to authorities in Greek.

Taşkın in chapter four argued that people from the mountainous region due to the Surveillance Zone experience “do not want to have any troubles again and

¹⁰² Umut appeared already in the previous chapter

they remain silent”. Taylan, who is from the *yakka* region, attributed the reluctance for complaining to the atmosphere of fear and the tradition of espionage locally. “My father along with other parents, being upset about the situation with the Greek teacher who would not teach us anything, did complain to the Inspector of Minority Schools in Komotini, but nothing changed. Those times, people would not talk much, they were afraid. Espionage those years¹⁰³ was more intense. They were afraid”.

5.2.2 External hierarchies: What do our schools tell about us?

Remaining for a while at the physical aspect of the minority school experience, this section will move from the internal comparisons between the various minority schools to an external comparison between minority and majority schools. A theme recurrent in many narratives, was that of the books for the Turkish part of the curriculum. Talking about the books was a means for the participants to talk about one of the ways they felt that were left behind as second-class pupils at minority schools.

Haluk said, “I remember there was a constant discussion about the books every September. Our teacher was saying ‘I hope the books will come’. Some pages in our books were black, either with a black marker or a sticker. Apparently these were pages referring to *Kemal Ataturk*. Children already realise that there is a problem, for me to remember this so intensely I had also understood it. The Turkish teachers were giving us very old and worn out books. The teacher would number them and make a draw so that we would not complain about who got the worst or the best one”. Participants also described the rituals for best preserving the books and passing them from one to another: “It was forbidden to write anything on them”, “once we would get them we would immediately tape them to not be torn apart”, “I had the same book my parents had, we had them with countless tapes on them”.

¹⁰³ He refers to the 1980s

Şelale¹⁰⁴, a female in her mid-twenties, remembers that in the minority school they did not have any books at all for the Turkish programme, just some photocopied pages. Umut when he wanted to explain the unequal point from which he would compete with the Greeks for the national entry exams to the university said: “For Biology there were eight chapters for the exams, we had only been taught two. The whole year we had to handwrite the content of the book as we did not have any. At the end of each semester every teacher would tell us, ‘My consciousness is clean, I have done my duty, I cannot change the situation’. Everyone was saying they cannot change the situation then you go to the exams and you see the other children writing normally, whereas us...”.

Teachers, books and other elements of the ‘situation’ had convinced the participants in the study that minority schools were far behind the majority ones. Cenk, a man in his mid-thirties referred once to an incident that happened in his workplace where he is the only minority employee: “The other day at work, a discussion sprung about minority education and whether there are equal opportunities for all. I said ‘how do you expect a child that goes to minority school, which is ten scales lower from the worst Greek school to have equal opportunities with a Greek’. A colleague said ‘oh come on now, we know what minority schools are dens of the Turkish consulate’. After that we all remained silent. Who was left in there to do Turkish propaganda? They filled them up with Epathites. Whatever I learned was outside primary school. Can you imagine a teacher to come in order to not teach me?” Although Cenk attempted to express to a majority audience his concern about the unequal learning opportunities between minority and majority the response he received reduced his arguments to a blame of the Turkish consulate.

Haluk also stressed that *İdadîye* is considered first in the second-class standards of minority education: “Do not think that is so good, the top, but it is all right, for being a minority school is a good one”. Umut has attended only minority schooling. While he was narrating how he managed to cope in *Celâl Bayar* after his village school, I was nodding with admiration. This made him reframe his

¹⁰⁴ Seen in previous chapter

achievements: “Don’t think that in the minority school we really learn something, I might get ‘excellent’ in a test, but this excellent corresponds only to the standard of minority school and it would probably equal a plain ‘good’ in a public school”.

However, it is mainly the students who moved from a minority to a majority school the ones who formed the understanding about the big gap between minority and majority schools. The research participants who had this experience all remembered their first year at the mainstream school as a shock for the huge distance they suddenly had to cover in terms of subject knowledge.

For example, Fuat, an informant from Komotini, sent his daughter to a Greek pre-school and then to *Idadiye*. Because of the Greek pre-school: “at Idadiye it was as if they were just playing. I realised it when I took her to the public school and suddenly it felt like the child was going to school”. Taner’s parents also took him from the minority and enrolled him at a Greek primary school when he was at the fourth grade, “to give me better education. The first year at the Greek school I could not understand anything! I felt as if I had just landed from another galaxy. It took me almost two years to get into the rhythm of the school, at the last grade I had improved a lot but the year before I still would not understand anything. At minority school we had learned other things and at the Greek school the demands were different. I was attending the fifth grade at the Greek school but my level was corresponding to the third grade”.

The degree of the difficulty participants faced due to Greek school’s higher demands along with the language barriers would depend on their previous exposure to Greek(ness). For example, Fuat’s daughter found the transition easier than Taner because of her Greek pre-schooling. “The only problem was that she was thinking in Turkish so she would be slower than her Greek classmates. It would take her ten minutes to complete a test that the others would have finished in five”, Fuat said. The comparison between the two schools not only informs understanding about the rigorous education they feel that is provided in the Greek ones in contrast to the loose and problematic conditions

of minority schools they describe, but also influences the way that ‘minority’ identity is understood and the kind of inequalities people from the group need to transcend in order to advance educationally.

5.3 Ambivalence of meanings and intergenerational shifts

For the minority group, minority education is loaded with a strong symbolic character, by default protected as their right by International Law, it represents for the group a reassurance for its cultural continuity.

The mission of minority schools to reproduce minority language¹⁰⁵ and culture is advocated strongly by the group’s elite and as I understood in my fieldwork is broadly acknowledged within the group. Taşkin said: “Minority school is very important for me. First of all, for the children to learn their mother tongue and their culture. I believe it is important for the people if they want to remain here keeping their difference without getting assimilated by the state as the latter wants”. Metin, who is twice the age of Taşkin told me as well: “Our schools are important for the cultural progress of the minority, because we have our own culture that we must transmit from one to the other. In your schools, it is not like this. They wanted to take out our own culture”. However, theoretical propositions like the above do not really correspond to the experience of narratives about language learning in minority schools.

The contradiction between the symbolic meaning of the school as safeguard of children’s mother tongue and, at the same time, its commonly agreed deficiency in doing so is summarised in Ferah’s words. Ferah in her early thirties when we met, grew up in Komotini and attended Osmaniye, a small minority primary school that has now closed down. At the time of our interview her little son was at dimotiko and she was expecting a baby girl: “I will definitely send my daughter to minority primary school as I did with my son. I believe that a child

¹⁰⁵ Which has been defined in Lausanne to be Turkish. As I understood during my fieldwork there is a wide consensus amongst group members about this choice that overlooks Pomak and Romani languages; mother tongue for a significant part of the group.

cannot learn any language well before it masters its mother tongue first. Because, as you see, here in Thrace people do not speak very well neither Greek nor Turkish. We are in the middle". The next minute, when our talk shifted to the minority schools in Thrace, she said: "My son is in the minority primary school. We have a teacher for Turkish, who does not know how to speak Turkish himself, what can our son learn?" There is a friction here between what is believed by people like Ferah that minority school ought to do and what it really does. The right in minority education which is theoretically enjoyed in W. Thrace, as participants have widely argued, in reality, is cancelled by the effect of State's interventions, especially through EPATH.

Ferah had minority schooling in Thrace and later studied in Turkey. Participants ten years younger with experience of majority secondary school and Greek university spoke in very different terms from her. They appeared more conscious of the contradiction between the advocated symbolic benefit and the experienced learning outcome and were less interested in making choices oriented to the symbolic purpose that seems to them pointless in practical terms. Aliye¹⁰⁶ from Komotini in her early twenties is such an example. Her mother sent Aliye and her sister to minority primary school "because she wanted us to get educated in Turkish, to learn the Turkish grammar, to read, to learn our mother tongue and our religion". However, Aliye has a different perspective: "Personally, if I had a child, I would not send it to the minority primary school. Because like this, you learn well neither Greek nor Turkish".

Agah¹⁰⁷ and Şelale are in their mid-twenties like Aliye. They are from the plain and had minority primary education and mainstream secondary. Agah studied later in Turkey and Şelale in Greece. Regarding their primary education Agah emphasised the deficit in Greek language and Şelale in Turkish. Agah did not hesitate to sum up minority primary school as "six wasted years": "Language is the biggest problem for minority children. Imagine to have been born in Greece in a Turkish speaking family, until you are seven years you learn your mother

¹⁰⁶ Seen in previous chapter

¹⁰⁷ Agah's story unfolds further in chapters six and seven.

tongue. A Greek during these years learns her/his mother tongue, Greek, and continues without problems her/his education. This means that a child from the minority, in comparison to the other children is seven years behind regarding language”.

It is striking the way Agah seems to undermine his fluency in Turkish considering Greek a more important language. He sums up the years dedicated to his mother tongue as ‘thirteen years in the bin’, whereas he uses ‘language’ interchangeably with ‘Greek’. Attending minority dimotiko for him means facing problems in secondary education and be always left behind in comparison to the Greeks. “The problem in the minority schools is very big. First of all, the teachers are not that good (). In six years, minority children simply read and copy Greek and do not find someone to speak with. As a result, the child does not learn the language, thirteen years gone in the waste bin”. If a child continues to a Greek middle-secondary school like Agah did, then the experience is described as such: “Afterwards they start secondary school with almost zero Greek. At the beginning, they struggle a lot. In a few years, they learn much more than what they did in the minority schools. But whatever they learn from there onwards it is impossible these wasted thirteen years to come back”. Agah by stressing the Greek language learning in association to dimotiko illustrates that what mostly matters for him is being competent in the official language. It is in this respect that he views minority schooling as ‘wasted years’.

Şelale is also resentful of her parents’ decision to send her to minority primary school: “I went to minority primary school. I have regretted that I went there because I learned well neither Greek nor Turkish.” “So, do you feel that you do not know Turkish well?”, I asked. “It is not that I do not feel, I do not know! In our neighbourhood, we speak Turkish in our own way. We speak different Turkish in my village, different Turkish in another village further away, different Turkish in Xanthi. We have this idiomorphy”. Aliye also noted: “Here in Thrace people do not speak the Turkish from Istanbul, we speak in our own way. For example, we cut many words, we do not say yapıyorum we say yapı. I was

lucky¹⁰⁸ because I had a teacher who was from Turkey”. Another informant, who did secondary schooling and university in Turkey said: “There they speak beautifully, here we cut many words”.

“I do not know Turkish well. When I read a book, I have a notebook to write down words I will need to look up later. It is the same with the soap operas; I do not understand all the words. In primary school, at the Turkish curriculum, we did not even have books; they were giving us notes. The neighbours speak better Turkish than me, like the way that Turks speak in Turkey”. Şelale, similar to the way Agah compared his Greek with the Greek of native speakers, compares her Turkish with the standard of Turkish spoken in Turkey. The comparison to ‘the standard’ of the languages makes both of them to feel left behind. Taylan once told me a story that illustrates the feeling of inadequacy minority Thracians might have when it comes to Turkish: “Once, I visited Istanbul with a friend from here, he would consistently refuse to ask for help and directions when we were lost because he was feeling really embarrassed about his Turkish.”

Feelings of shame and limitedness in interactions with speakers who are fluent in standard Turkish, like in Taylan’s case above, make minority people feel greater the need to learn both languages ‘properly’ at school. Taşkın, on the other hand, gave additional reasons for this by emphasising that “the vocabulary spoken at home is very limited”. Argun made a similar remark: “In Komotini we use on average 250 words in Turkish. They speak it different in the villages and in town. Our vocabulary in Turkish is all in all 500 words and at school is not expanded”.

This section outlined the distance between on one hand, the symbolic meanings around minority schooling, which are popular within the minority group, and on the other hand, the way that especially younger participants have interpreted their experiences there. On the symbolic realm, minority schools are meant to be empowering for people in the group since they are meant to teach the group’s

¹⁰⁸ Part of her luck was living at the centre of Komotini and therefore attending Idadiye where metaklitoi are appointed.

official language: Turkish and to provide an environment that reproduces the group's culture. The culture here is not exactly defined but I understand that what is meant is a mixture of mainly Islam and Turkishness especially as opposed to ChristianGreek culture that permeates the mainstream schools. However, on the realm of experience, minority schools are experienced as disempowering since the common learning outcome is to lack competence not only in Greek but also in Turkish.

It was shown that meanings grounded on experience seem to gain ground amongst younger generations that do not appear ready to accept for themselves the 'being in the middle' feeling linguistically and the 'left behind' feeling in comparison to their Christian counterparts. Moreover, linguistic identities were clearly associated with power in participants' narratives. A different sort of distance was described here as being peripheral in linguistic competence from what is considered the core as fluency in standard varieties of language. In this respect, younger participants feel peripheral both to Greek and their mother tongue, Turkish. This on one hand may lead to silence and shame and on the other intensify the need to depart from this identity and become competent in at least one language, escaping the middle.

5.4 Pressure for the collective interest: Fulfilling the duty to the community

- “I do not care if the school will be a minority or a Greek one. I want a school that is good; I want everyone to have the right to access education” (Cenk)

- “I disagree with this, the school needs to be minority” (Melik)

In a conference that took place in Komotini in 2013¹⁰⁹, Cemil Kabza, a person belonging to the elite of the group having an active role as an advocate for the minority rights presented a talk with the title ‘Minority or public education’. He referred to the Treaty of Lausanne to escalate his polemic speech on the Greek state’s violations of it regarding education. He touched on the issue of the ineffective teaching of Turkish language and framed his arguments about it around the State’s decisions to establish EPATH and reduce *metaklitoi*. He suggested that more Turkish teachers need to be appointed and that EPATH teachers should be retrained. Moreover, he mentioned that in Rodope the majority that constitutes 45% of the population is served by 24 public middle and upper secondary schools whereas the minority that constitutes 55% of the population have only one minority Gimnasio, one Likio and one medrese.

After these arguments, Kabza concluded: “This imbalance which does not give the possibility of a choice, in reality, compels thousands of minority people to send their children to majority schools”. He also described the restricted capacity of *Celâl Bayar* and the denial of the State to allow the establishment of more minority secondary schools: “Therefore the students from the minority do not choose; they are obliged to register in the public schools”, while he remarked that “the aim of the minority schools is to produce second-class citizens”.

¹⁰⁹ The title of the conference was ‘The Treaty of Lausanne: 90 years later – framing migration issues’ and was co-organised by the Programme for the Education of Muslim Minority Children in Thrace (PEM) and the Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP).

This is a typical discourse on minority advocacy's behalf. It always starts from, and evolves around Lausanne and is framed in the antagonism between the group and the State with the latter being the prosecutor of the first. This way of advocacy closes the dialogue down diminishing it to a clash between minority group and Greek state. Here Kabza provided a narrow interpretation of minority people's choice for public school attributing it solely to the inadequate places in minority schools overlooking the agency of the people and all the complexities around their choosing entirely. In all interviews I conducted, no one ever explained the decision for Greek school in the way a group's advocate publicly explained it in this case.

İbram Onsunoğlu also spoke at the same conference and panel. He is one of the intellectuals of the minority and active on advocating on minority issues through his talks and writings, having in the past been involved in politics without being linked to the minority associations. Onsunoğlu gave an alarming tone to his talk: "Minority education is collapsing (...) It will only be preserved as a museum artefact", he said and attributed the situation to the state's interventions. He stressed that due to the state's policies, from 1965 until 1998 the dilemma for the group was 'bad minority school or good Turkish school'¹¹⁰, but over the last fifteen years the dilemma changed to 'bad minority school or good public school'. Here Onsunoğlu frames the choice of people to opt out of minority schools as a dilemmatic decision stemming less from "free-will" and more from "direct or indirect coercion" as he said. He also emphasised how hard the decision making between the two kinds of schools is "because there come into play problems of consciousness, identity, minority patriotism, fears realistic or imaginary for assimilation and abolition of social cohesion".

As seen in the previous section, in contrast to Kabza and Onsunoğlu, in the private narratives of young research participants like Agah, Şelale and Aliye very little concern was shown about "minority patriotism". Their concern after their minority school experience, was the feeling of "being left behind" ('these

¹¹⁰ Referring to the migration waves to Turkey for schooling before the introduction of affirmative law in Greece for higher education

years do not come back’ in the words of Agah) and the need for fluency in both Turkish and Greek in order to avoid the feeling of being always at half distance (“we are always in the middle” in Ferah’s words).

The complexity around the school choice and especially the way that personal choices are embedded in collective interests is illustrated in the following example. One of the two minority primary schools in Komotini that due to the low number of registrations was closed down by the State is *Osmaniye*. *Osmaniye* is in *Yeni mahalle*, a mixed neighbourhood with Muslims outnumbering the mostly of refugee origin Christians. The school is a small building of two classrooms without playground. One of the neighbourhood residents in her sixties told me: “My children had schooling here. It was a fine school but then it closed down because it did not have enough students. This happened because all parents wanted to register their children to *Idadiye*. Our neighbourhood has many children but they all wanted to go there and now we lost the school”. Here the choice out of *Osmaniye* was for *Idadiye* and not a Greek one. Her comment points to the dual meaning that a school choice might have, even when it is not directly inscribed in the majority/minority school dilemma. At a personal level, one chooses *Idadiye* to provide “a better school for her/his child”. However, the personal choice is problematised because of the impact it has on the collective: “we are losing our schools”. ‘I’ and ‘we’ are here in conflict.

Prominent members of the group attempt to patronise members’ choices through public advocacy. *Birlik*, a local Turkish newspaper, in April 2011 published an unsigned article about *Osmaniye*, the ‘lost’ school: “We became protagonists in the plan of school’s abolition. I do not know if the history will forgive us. Only one thing is certain; *Yeni mahalle* remains without school. Today is *Yeni mahalle*, tomorrow it will be another neighbourhood, the day after tomorrow another village will remain without school. As a result, in the next thirty years,

families will be obliged to send their children to Greek primary schools. This seems to be the general plan and we need to be very careful!”¹¹¹

The article casts responsibility on group members to protect the communal interest, makes an appeal to their conscience regarding the collective and triggers feelings of fear with respect to the future. Newspapers, like *Birlik*, play a role in reminding the members of the group their responsibilities towards the collective while pointing out the right behaviours in this respect. *Birlik* also reproduces a conspiracy approach; the school closed according to a ‘plan’. The State is implied to be the designer of the plan while minority people became ‘protagonists’ to it. In other words, minority people should ‘be very careful’ not to enable the State’s ‘general plan’, which is the gradual abolition of minority education. The same appeal to minority people’s conscience and sense of duty to the community was expressed in the campaign that the Minority Primary school in Xanthi started in April 2013 with the name: “Let’s fill up the classrooms; don’t let our classrooms lie empty”¹¹² (“*Sınıfları Dolduralım, Sınıflarımız Boş Kalmasın*”). The spectrum of all this calling for the collective cultural good puts pressure on individuals who are keen to promote what they see as their offsprings’ own good.

Taşkın said “People here do everything they can to preserve our schools, this is why they send their children there. If I were a father now, I would consider very seriously if it is worth it to sacrifice the life of my child to keep the minority school open. On the other hand, I would wonder if I should be thinking my child’s future, pleasing this way the Greek state that wants to close our schools. I would fall in this dilemma and I do not know what I would have done”. His words depict how sensitised and dramatic these choices may feel. Minority school for Taşkın means sacrificing a child’s life, understanding very close to what Agah described earlier when he talked about the “wasted years”. Moreover, Taşkın feels uncomfortable by in effect pleasing the Greek state if he thinks on

¹¹¹<http://www.birlikgazetesi.info/haberler/3118-yen-mahalle-okulsuz-kaliyor.html> (Accessed 10-02-13)

¹¹² In the newspaper *Trakya'nın Sesi*, 22 April 2013

his child's future. Self-interest, community interest and state's interest are all perplexed together in a web of power relations.

This section has described the dilemmatic nature of the decision around schooling, on one axis with regards to the collective interest and another with regards to personal interest. Official advocacy networks and part of minority press seems to call members of the group to opt for minority schooling; a choice not only about education but highly charged with a sense of duty for preserving the own culture and group's rights. However, because of the situation at the minority schools that advocates acknowledge themselves, individuals are called to make difficult decisions as it seems here that serving the collective interest compromises the personal and vice versa. People appear to strive to give the best possible opportunities and learning conditions for their children driven by educational and social mobility aspirations that not always are aligned with what is presented to be group's best interest.

5.5 Pressure for the citizenship interest: Meeting the obligation to Greece

There is a popular belief amongst the Greek majority in Rodope that children from the minority group suffer the 'minority ghetto' which is understood to be solely designed and preserved by the minority group. In a conference organised by PEM in Komotini¹¹³ in October 2012, for example, it was said that "the programme made cracks on the ghetto". On another event¹¹⁴ in Komotini, organised by conservative majority circles, when a presenter wondered rhetorically why minority pupils choose the Greek schools, I heard an older Christian woman from the audience saying in low voice to her friend "to save themselves". Moreover, it is hard to forget the discomfort I felt when a local Christian told me that the minority young people, I was looking for, are "sheep" ordered by the minority associations to stay in their "heft" ('*mantri*): "It does not make a difference that they go to university. They control them there too;

¹¹³ With the title: "Innovative Practices in the Education of Minority Children in Thrace."

¹¹⁴ "Education and Muslim minority in Thrace" organised by the 'Association of Culture and Social Development of Macedonia and Thrace', December 2012

they keep them in the heft”. The heft metaphor stands for the ghetto understanding and the way people’s agency is reduced portraying them as pawns of the Consulate and elite’s patronage.

Framed by these understandings the minority school choice is interpreted by majority people as a ‘ghetto’ choice. A Christian teacher who works for years at a minority school told me: “Those who have dependencies on the Consulate and the associations, do not go to the Greek school. I have a problem when minority people do not include the fatherland in their speech”. Here it is assumed that the choice for minority school is an expression of dependency to the Turkish Consulate and this equals for the majority man a choice out of the common fatherland (*patrida*). The choice is in any case suspected to be the product of Turkish patronising and therefore somehow anti-Greek.

As it was shown earlier, young people acknowledge that they cannot learn good Greek at the minority school (which they consider a problem). Majority members focus on this inadequacy to build their suspicion towards minority people who choose minority education: If they choose minority school, then they do not know Greek well. Therefore, they do not honour their Greek citizenship and they are rendered accountable for it. An example of a public expression of this understanding was given during an open discussion about minority education that the local branch of the political party *SYRIZA* organised in Komotini in 2013.

After the panel’s presentations, the floor opened to the audience for questions and comments. A local majority teacher who works in public schools said: “For some years now in the school where I work I come in contact with young people from the minority who come to take the *panellinies*¹¹⁵ exam. I face this problem: I can’t communicate with them in Greek. How is it possible for a young person who lives in Greece for seventeen years to not even know how to spell his/her name in Greek? Knowing the language of the country where s/he lives is for me

¹¹⁵ National exams to get to university.

his/her obligation and it is for his/her interest as well. How it is possible not even to want to learn to spell his/her name?”.

This is a common statement, question, complaint, accusation in Komotini directed from ‘majority’ to ‘minority’. I have witnessed it either in private talks or casually in public spaces like banks, public services, etc. in Komotini. In this occasion, the teacher blamed ‘minority’ first for not fulfilling their obligation, as Greek citizens, to know the official language. Secondly, he indirectly blamed them for not ‘even’ wanting to do the slightest effort. As Bourdieu (1991: 37) emphasised, “relations of communication par excellence- linguistic exchanges- are also relations of symbolic power in which the power relations between speakers or their respective groups are actualised”. In this incident, in discursive terms minority is positioned at the weak end of the power continuum being accountable to the majority voice owing at least an explanation, if not an apology. They are asked to explain: ‘how it is possible’, if ‘they are or not good Greek citizens’, and if ‘they want to learn Greek’ while the tone of the dominant voice of the legitimate Greek citizen posing the questions is already condemning.

The atmosphere became tense: a few ‘minority’ teachers apparently upset and slightly offended addressed this comment. In their response, they shifted the blame from minority students to minority school as a State’s design product. The first respondent said: “I often find my consciousness aching to notice that in the private sector, where political criteria don’t apply, our children learn a foreign language in two-three years taking a class few times a week. In minority schools during a whole week, half subjects are taught in Turkish and half in Greek yet the students are not able to speak or write correctly in either language”. The other one agreed and became more explicit: “I agree that political interests should not affect the minority education because then that is the consequence: a child in the third or fourth grade of primary school is not able to write his/her name in Greek. (...) Who is to be blamed in this situation? It is the system! Nowadays, neither Turkish is taught well nor Greek, but this devaluation of the schools was intentionally planned by the Greek government and all the policies that have been designed for this”.

While the majority teacher blamed from a position of domination the minority people for not knowing Greek, the last two ‘minority’ voices blamed clearly the Greek state and its political interests that have been historically exercised on minority education. The group appears here as the victim of a well-orchestrated political project that leaves the children uneducated and unable to speak or write well neither of the languages taught at the minority school. On this occasion the dialogue was limited into mutual blaming and clash and is more preoccupied about imbalanced power relations: The Christian gaze blames minority people while the latter blame the State similar to the incident from his work that Cenk described earlier. Far from all these understandings that usually move back and forth at the same binary of clash between Greek State/ Greekness- Consulate/ minority group, people in Thrace experience their educational choices in a much more complex and diverse way as the later section will show.

5.6 At the personal realm: The story of Umut

This section by focusing on the story of Umut demonstrates the distance between the narrow interpretation of educational choices by loud voices in the public stories in comparison to the rich complexities of the small stories, narrated in private.

Umut did not refer almost at all to the clash between group and State to build his narrative which also does not have references to any sort of patriotism while discussing the decision-making process around schooling. Umut is from a minority village so he was sent to the primary school there. He intertwined his narrative about schooling to a parallel narrative of his learning experiences at the mosque. It was in the mosque that he developed his educational aspirations and it is through his experiences there that he classified his school experiences of the time.

“Our teacher was beating us up all the time. I started going to the mosque very young when I was seven. The imam there helped me to learn the Koran. If it

were not for him, I would not have made it to the university. After school, I was throwing my rucksack away and I was going to the goats. I have left three times from the school beaten up. In the mosque, I was going to learn the Koran. There the imam somehow helped me to love the science, to do something with the readings, to learn literacy. I was going to the mosque usually in the afternoons for half an hour. I was sitting there and I was reading three pages from the Koran in Arabic. The imam made me love the science. He did not make me think like at school, ‘ah I will never do anything’. He was encouraging me. Because I was good at reading he was asking me sometimes to call the *Ezan*¹¹⁶ myself and this gave me self-confidence. In the mosque, I was taking initiatives and I was motivated. In the primary school, I did not learn anything.”

For his primary school years, the mosque seems to have offered Umut a learning space of personal empowerment in absolute contrast to the primary school space where he felt disempowered. The fondness with which he talked about the imam and his influence on him redefines what counts as learning for him and the significance of building his self-confidence in a safe environment. Regarding secondary school, Umut said about pupils from his *yakka* village: “Most of us go to the secondary school. Only girls, if they don't fancy schooling, are trained as tailors instead.” Umut's gender made secondary school automatically a more or less unquestioned decision since boys from his village would usually continue. As seen in previous chapters being male is the first asset when it comes to secondary schooling especially, in rural areas like his.

From all secondary schools available in Komotini (the religious medrese, the minority *Celâl Bayar*, the majority schools) Umut decided to go to the medrese: “I knew that there it would be easier and as I told you, I had not learned much in the primary school. But my father later, after he discussed the issue with someone else, changed his mind. This friend advised him: ‘Send him to *Celâl Bayar*; do not let him be wasted at the medrese because there they do not do any good work. At *Celâl Bayar* your son with lots of effort will manage to survive’. He said this because it was known in the village that I read the Koran and I am

¹¹⁶ Call for prayer

not lazy”. The expressions ‘manage to survive’ and ‘could cope’ demonstrate the positioning in the field for Umut who desires to continue to secondary education but is unsure if he is capable of it, if he can ‘manage’. The word “wasted” points that apart from ‘managing’, there is also a positive concern about getting a good and meaningful educational experience. This friend challenged the family’s reluctant approach on the matter pointing out another asset of Umut: his devotion and performance in the Koran reading. So the mosque has played a major role in Umut’s educational path in more than one way. The decision was altered and Umut would make the effort to ‘fit’ in Celâl Bayar.

Later and while he was already enroled at Celâl Bayar, Umut felt that he would prefer to go to a ‘normal’ school: “In Celâl Bayar we had many problems. For example, we did not even have some books that are printed in Turkey or some teachers from Turkey would be appointed only months after the start of the academic year. Because of all these, I wanted to go to normal high-school”. These problems are related to the difficulties and constraints that any ‘import’ of Turkish-ness in education entails as was shown at the beginning of the chapter. Moreover, Umut by naming the majority school “normal” demonstrates how, in his perception, minority school was not ‘normal’ school.

Despite, Umut’s expressed desire to change school, “My father did not let me. He feared a lot. This fear is common amongst most of us. He feared that if I changed school, I would not manage to continue in the new one; that the gap would have been very big”. Fear is a catalyst in the way many participants in this research described their decisions. Bourdieu (1985: 728) explains that “The sense of one’s place, as a sense of what one can or cannot ‘permit oneself’, implies a tacit acceptance of one’s place, a sense of limits (‘that’s not for the likes of us,’ etc.), or, which amounts to the same thing, a sense of distances, to be marked and kept, respected or expected”. Umut did not resist his father’s hesitation; he rather seemed to have internalised it, reinforcing ‘the sense of his place’ mainly as the outcome of his spatial identity; as someone from the village: “It is not only this, there is also another issue; how... how you will adjust to

these conditions somehow. Because it is... it is different; things are somehow different. I mean that someone who goes to a normal school coming from a village maybe s/he cannot make friends in that school. Whereas, in the minority school, I had already my friends, my peer group; I was calm, I had found my routine and changes scare people.”

Umut struggled to find the right words to explain to me the ‘other issue’. Although his father feared the gap regarding subject knowledge and possibly language competence, Umut feared the contact with ‘majority’ pupils. Things at the other school ‘are different’. As he has never been to the majority school, he seemed uncertain on how to describe this difference. He understood however that due to the difference he would need to “adjust to those conditions”. According to Bourdieu (1977: 78), the logic of habitus entails the “hysteresis effect” which means that “practices are always liable to incur negative sanctions when the environment with which they are actually confronted is too distant from that to which they are objectively fitted”.

Apart from the psychological fear, Umut referred also to a practical obstacle that influenced him and his father to believe that the majority school ‘was not for the like of them’. This is the lack of economic capital that could have made the transition to the ‘different’ easier, if they could afford to pay extra private lessons: “Maybe if I had been sent to a normal high-school, then I would have needed more support. They would have to send me to frodistirio, but my parents did not have the money for this. The students whose parents can afford to pay frodistiria, go to normal secondary and high schools”. Here Umut expresses a strong understanding of the role of economic inequalities amongst ‘minority’ pupils regarding their access to educational opportunities. Those with economic capital are better equipped for the big leap.

Nevertheless, Umut believes that the lack of money could be compensated if one has previous experience of mixing with the majority, hence linguistic and symbolic capital. Symbolic (in Umut’s words: ‘a matter of psychology) in the sense that one has less fear to meet ‘the majority students’: “I have seen only

very few students who followed this path without frodistirio although, of course there must be some. I have a friend from another village who did this, but still this one, somehow, had some communication before. He used to go often to Komotini. It is also a matter of psychology you can not suddenly go one day to mix with the majority students”.¹¹⁷

Umut describes the symbolic distance between minority and majority school and his sense of limits that prevented him from attempting to cover it. “And what can I do from my village? Shall I say ‘ah tomorrow I will go to Komotini in the square to speak Greek?’ With whomever, I find there just to start chatting in Greek to learn? All villages around mine are Turkish apart from one that is Greek, but there they are rich; we do not have anything in common to talk about, let alone that they can all speak Turkish. At least in the mixed villages they can communicate with each other and exchange ideas. I mean you know how to talk with them and you have some common things to talk about. The only one I had to talk with, in Greek was my teachers”. The symbolic distance mirrors the physical distance between a mono-minority populated village like his and a mixed populated space like Komotini or other villages. Spatial identity is presented here as an important element that defines not only chances but also confidence in mixing with the ‘majority’.

Regarding this confidence to communicate, Umut emphasises not the technical aspect of knowing Greek but the communicative element. He does not feel lacking only the linguistic capacity to speak with the ‘majority’ but mostly the ‘social capacity’. According to Bourdieu the ‘socially constructed dispositions of the linguistic habitus’ entail not only the interest to speak and say something particular but also “a certain capacity to speak, which involves both the linguistic capacity to generate an infinite number of grammatically correct discourses and the social capacity to use this competence adequately in a determinate situation” (Bourdieu, 1991:37). Umut decided to stay at the minority school, regardless of not being happy there because of ‘the problems’ and ‘the situation’. He ‘excluded’ the other choice: the normal school as an ‘extravagance’ (‘not for the

¹¹⁷ Of majority schooling

like of us') (Bourdieu, 1990: 56) and despite the problems at *Celâl Bayar* remained where he could be 'calm', amongst his peers.

5.7 Challenging the big stories: The lawyer parable.

Umut concluded his story attempting to explain why the issue of minority education goes on and on without resolution. "Go one day to the office of X,¹¹⁸ especially in periods like this¹¹⁹ and you will understand why they do not find a solution to the problem of education for the minority. Every year, let's say that there are 500 pupils in every Gimnasio. From those if 50%, 25% go to the MP then this means 25% of votes. This is the reason why they do not want to improve the situation".

He believes that the elite of the minority, more particularly the clique as has been described by Papanikolaou (2007) and Aarbakke (2000) has an interest in keeping educational problems unresolved and this is what he tried to demonstrate with the example of the MP. I have heard from other informants that pupils and parents make queues in his office to seek advice and suggestions. Especially at the time of *panelladikes*, when students need to fill in a lengthy application listing in a strategic way the universities they wish to enter, they visit the MP office to ask for help. Umut gave me a parable to explain how the unresolved minority education issue works as a profitable business for some:

"Or how else to explain to you... Do you know the parable of the lawyer? One day the son of a lawyer wins his first trial. He goes to his dad and says: 'Daddy, today I did a great thing! I concluded this trial that for twenty years now you had not resolved!' – 'Ah my son, how silly you are! With this trial I have covered all your expenses; your Gimnasio, Likio and University and now you finished it over'. Because often someone thinks that if they go to an MP... What is easier to make someone educated or someone uneducated to follow you?"

¹¹⁸ He named a popular local 'minority' Member of the Parliament (MP)

¹¹⁹ It was the time of panellinies.

Ercan, is ten years older than Umut, in his mid-thirties. He studied in minority schools and later graduated from a Greek University. Like Umut, he believes that keeping people uneducated has largely been purposeful by the group's elite as it is in their interest. He underlines however that intergenerational differences challenge the old 'games': "Those who are older, who are now fifty, sixty years old, had experienced different life conditions. Their eyes have seen much and they are afraid. They are uneducated. They think if I say something now to X¹²⁰ it might turn into my own harm. They do favours for tasks that people do not have the power to do on their own. Now you know what happens? Someone has a task¹²¹ that needs to be done. S/he goes to the mayor. The mayor does the task for you and later, before the elections he comes to your home and says: I did that task for you, now you owe me a favour. Some years ago this is what they used to make people accustomed to and this is what people know. Things are like this for them, this is how they tie the people. Now, what can they say to me? Am I to ask them to make an application on my behalf?"

Ercan is one of the pioneers in his village who got fluent in Greek and now feels quite independent and empowered to face 'the people with ties' who visit his village to preach ideas. He describes previous generations as sharing a habitus different from his- they experienced different life conditions, they have seen things that have now made them afraid, they are uneducated, they have been used to clientism. He, for having felt empowered through becoming confident in using Greek, tries to advise people in his village to not follow blindly what the elite dictates to them. Moreover, as he said along with some others also educated to university level (in Turkish too) challenge the people with the ties when they visit their village to preach.

Umut and Ercan are not the only people I met in Rodope who directly challenged the motives and the interests of the group's advocating elite. I was told by one

¹²⁰ The same MP that Umut mentioned. Just before Ercan was talking about the MPs like him who visit the villages to preach the people into adopting certain attitudes and make respective choices.

¹²¹ The official documents that regulate citizens' -state's relations commonly use a very formal register of Greek that sometimes is hard even for native speakers to understand.

informant that the minority associations “are something like an unemployment office, those who do not have skills go there. They protest not because they genuinely care for the benefit of the community, but for their salary”. Whereas someone else commented like this: “These associations receive funds. The people who take posts in the associations enjoy an incredible social prestige in our small society. This gives social status and money”.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on minority schooling and allowed us to explore how this space has been produced by the Greek State on the basis of Greek authorities’ beliefs and ideologies. Beginning from this, it then looked at how this space has informed back minority members’ identity narratives and understandings about the ‘I’ (their sense of self), the ‘We’ (their sense of the collective), and the interrelation between them. All three aspects of space in Lefebvrian terms are here in dialogue: the perceived, conceived and lived space.

Minority schooling seems to foster among members of the group an understanding of the collective identity ‘minority’ as being punished and under surveillance. This understanding impacts on the way members of the group form their sense of belonging to Greece and the way group’s advocates have built their relation to the state. Participants if they did not claim to have “learned nothing” at minority school “wasting many years” claimed that they learned very little. This is, according to what they say, either because the teachers for Turkish were not capable or because the Greek teachers did not intend to teach them according to the State designs. If there is one thing they all learned this is that Turkishness is taboo, punished and persecuted and that there are first-class and second-class schools, teachers and pupils. The polarisation of Greek and Turkish identities and the pressure to identify as one or the other came across very strongly in the narratives of the participants who had their minority schooling in Komotini; the principle space of Greek/Turkish conflict in Rodope. This polarisation is itself oppressive in relation to the learning opportunities minority people have historically had in minority shooling.

At a different level, through the State's handling of the teachers' appointment at the minority schools the pupils and mostly their families and minority community came to understand the State as directly opposing the group's interests and the Lausanne's mandate for its protection. That the State aimed to disempower people from the minority group by its nationalist driven interventions in the minority educational system holds a very popular appeal to most people in the group informing their sense of collective identity as victimised. The most popular expression of this understanding is the belief minority members hold about EPATH; "an Institute made for the abolition of minority education", as Nehir said (p.139). Whereas cohorts of generations speak very low about their Epathites teachers resembling them with 'shepherds' who were given a chance to enter schools as professional teachers. By the same token, Greek teachers were overwhelmingly presented as indifferent to pupils' learning specifically sent to schools with the mission to leave the children uneducated.

Participants' minority schooling experiences apart from positioning them collectively as the vulnerable victims of the state deprived of equal learning opportunities in formal education, on a second individual level it also informs their 'sense of place' within the group. This symbolic sense is linked to one's place in the physical space too. Minority schooling experiences vary for people from the group depending on the school they have access to depending on their spatial identity. A pupil in Mastanli or a village feels already deprived in comparison to a pupil that attends Idadiye, as the narratives showed. Therefore, not only 'minority' but 'class' consciousness and internal hierarchies and power imbalances are both learned through minority schooling. The diversity of the minority school-scape directs the discussion beyond the normalised minority interests' discourse to explore the different interests within the group as well as whose interests are being served by the group's official advocacy networks.

The elite's role has been especially problematised in narratives coming from rural areas where people seem to feel deprived at very different levels from opportunities and power sources that urban dwellers have. It was especially

stressed, also in the previous chapter, the patronising role of the people with the ties, a symbol of socioeconomic success and higher status, who are presented to indoctrinate people in the villages. Participants from rural areas feel that “the people with ties” have their own interests secured while asking people from the villages to be left behind from opportunities to serve the collective interests. It is important to understand these internal hierarchies and distances to treat the experience of minority schooling as highly diverse according to ethnic, social, economic, spatial (all inter-related) positions of its members along the ‘minority’ axis that often summarises and conceals these differences. These hierarchical positions are reproduced and consolidated in the minority school-scape.

The framing of the public discourse around minority education regarding minority or Greek patriotism downplays the internal heterogeneity and other issues that in the small stories appeared to be much more significant when it comes to educational choices for people from the group as Umut’s story suggested. Umut chose to remain at *Celâl Bayar* not as an expression of minority patriotism neither as an expression of sabotaging Greek-ness. In fact, he felt constrained at his minority school because of a series of problems related to ‘the situation’, but at the same time he was enabled to feel calm and safe in his comfort zone of minority group-ness. His decision to not move to a Greek school, although he considered it, resulted from a sense of where his place is, an effect of ‘hysteresis’ according to the Bourdieu typology. Fear of meeting the Greeks, lack of economic capital, lack of previous experience with inter-community interactions, hysteresis in the linguistic habitus needed, lack of knowledge foundations in order to meet the demands of the schools all these mostly summarised under his village identity defined how far Umut’s aspirations would reach.

Moreover, the experience of minority school as a primary space of nationalist conflict at the expense of learning appears in my study to have been processed differently by people of older and younger age. Older participants seem to be more allied to the way minority associations and other members of the elite make sense of the situation. This is interpreting it primarily as an uneven clash between

the State and the group and orienting further choices and understandings in a way to address this clash, or conflict of interests and reverse it in more favourable terms for the group.

In the light of this understanding, minority schooling is projected as a ‘privilege that needs to be maintained’ (Nehir) and a means of resistance to the state’s assimilatory plan ‘in your schools they want to take out our culture’ (Metin). Starting from the understanding that the Greek State has violated the spirit of the Treaty of Lausanne in the way it produced the minority educational spaces with the ultimate purpose to ‘abolish minority education’, then the appropriate response and resistance to this is to maintain minority schooling as a means to empower the group against the State that has consistently tried to disempower it through this channel. Choosing to be educated at minority schools is then considered an action of cultural resistance and integration for the group.

The formal networks of minority advocacy, namely the Turkish associations based in Komotini, some minority MPs and other figures of higher social status in the group advocate for this need. On the other hand, when addressing the Greek authorities, they structure their advocacy restrictedly around the Lausanne Treaty, emphasising the State’s violations with regards to education and claiming justice to minority rights’ protection from the Lausanne standpoint. This type of discourse has been normalised fostering further the understanding that negotiations between group and State regarding rights for the group need always be framed in Lausanne and the light of antagonism.

While the Lausanne discourse that is reproduced through the big stories perpetuates a sense of powerlessness especially as it is limited to and emphasising the victimisation of the group, younger people’s discourse seems to claim a new standpoint. They seek equal opportunities with the majority through self-assertiveness and a journey of dynamic decision making and self-empowerment. This moves away from the dependency on the State understandings that the Lausanne discourse implies even if it claims to be in direct clash with it. Younger people are ready to move away from this setting of

the game and find solutions for themselves and meanings of empowerment that they find relevant.

Younger people built their narratives and understandings in a very different manner from their parents and grandparents, as they noted, and from the big stories that are circulated from formal minority advocacy networks. They have experienced in some way the conflict in the minority school space and they are also aware of the communal meanings and the memories of the older people in the group around this conflict. However, because they experience the outcomes of the conflict in education, they seem much more ready to break with the antagonistic polarisation of State and group. In their stories, they see empowerment for them and their children to be in the abandonment of minority schools. They build this argument not in symbolic terms, like the big stories and the elderly do but in very practical terms. While older people emphasise the paramount importance of learning one's mother tongue, younger people understand that although this holds true for them too and it is something they believe in, however, they know that this does not happen at the minority schools so they are more flexible in securing the best outcome for their children under the circumstances. The choice for minority school is not only presented as pointless regarding learning the mother tongue unless one is lucky, but it additionally restricts the likelihood to learn well Greek too.

This feeling of being left halfway regarding language, both Turkish and Greek, seems to generate a strong sense of limitedness which young participants explicitly linked to minority schooling and expressed their desire for them and their children to overcome. Associating their power with the degree of confidence in speaking Turkish and even more importantly Greek empowerment for them was not expressed regarding winning back the antagonism with the State on the grounds of Lausanne by claiming the rights that have been violated for a collective victimised 'minority'. On the contrary, it is the label of 'minority' that they want to escape and to feel self- empowered to face the majority on equal terms. The following chapter will build exactly on this need and expression of resistance through the transition to majority schools.

Chapter 6

Majority schooling: “...and what you should not be”

“You grow up knowing what you are, and what you should not be” (Cenk)

This chapter will explore the experiences of members of the group into majority schooling. The transition from minority schools, the group’s ‘privilege’ and ‘right’, to the Greek majority school until the recent past was a stigmatised choice which has become mainstream over the last years, especially in the ‘00s. The purpose of the chapter is twofold: On one hand, it aims to understand the dynamics, meanings and internal politics behind the choice for majority schooling, concerning the collective. On the other, it will look at how individuals have experienced this transition and how these experiences have informed understandings about their identities and the development or hindering of their aspirations. Most of the participants, whose stories are seen here have appeared already in previous chapters (Aliye, Lokman, Nehir, Selale, Umut, Cenk, Melik).

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first looks at the genesis of the choice for the Greek school and how it gradually evolved into a ‘fashion’. The second looks at how belonging to the minority group became contested for agents who chose majority school, especially when the trend firstly emerged and also explores the role of language as regards belonging. Finally, the third part of the chapter explores belongingness to the new school environment.

In the previous chapter, it was shown how big narratives unquestionably consider that empowerment and progress for the group can come through the vehicle of minority patriotism, which is framed explicitly by its clash to the Greek State's nationalism. Small stories in this chapter suggest alternative understandings of empowerment and progress which are grounded on the experience of crossing boundaries between 'minority' and 'majority' worlds in Rodope.

It is important to return here to some methodological issues. Since my research looked at the 'minority' experience of education almost exclusively through minority participants' narratives, there is a danger in this chapter for the 'majority' pupils or teachers at school to be seen as polarised and homogeneous, since they are only represented by minority voices. Moreover, the narrative form of my interviewing meant that I avoided prompting discussion into certain directions and was only following their own narrative as they built it. This implies that what is presented here, like in any other chapter, is what largely participants chose to emphasise in their narratives.

6.1 Political change translating into a new sense of belonging

This section focuses on the 'fashion' for Greek school and aims to highlight how members of the group experience their personal educational choices as embedded in collective educational choice patterns. Taner was the first participant who used the term 'fashion' to describe such patterns. Later I did a search in my data with the word 'fashion' and found that other participants used it too to contextualise their choice. When I asked Tunay why he went to *Celâl Bayar* and not to a Greek school back in the 1970s, he said: "At that time, it was not in fashion. We used to speak Turkish at home; my parents had Turkish mentality and the school was near my home". Aliye, who was born in the late 1980s said: "I remember a friend who, in the 1980s, was alone in a Greek Gimnasio with only two others from us. Back then they were only a few, whereas

for my generation,¹²² it was even in fashion to go to the Greek school”. The gradual development of a personal choice into a collective fashion was also illustrated by Nazif when he referred to the late ‘00s: “My family did not want me to go because now there are half and half pupils at the public schools, but in my days there were only two or three of us. Our neighbours would ask why the child goes to the Greek school? They were thinking that they would teach you there another religion”.

The above lines sketch the gradual development of an individual choice into a ‘fashion’ across three decades. Aliye built on that: “It was the parents who made this fashion, and I think the women; our mothers. Everyone wanted their child to be a good pupil, to learn Greek well, to go to *frodistiria*, to learn guitar, piano, like all families. I think that this is how the minority started progressing. Moreover, the policies had changed and the affirmative law had been introduced”. Aliye grew up in Komotini; her father owned a shop at the centre. Her perspective reflects the perspective of her spatial and class identity of her times. Mothers started desiring to treat their children “like all families”, which means like all ‘majority’ families in Komotini of similar socioeconomic background. This new fashion is felt by Aliye as “progress” for the minority.

The second element Aliye brought up; ‘the change of policies’ is what would enable minority families to be like ‘all’ families. Through my data, it seems that the genesis of the new educational fashion was closely related to the abolition of the ‘administrative harassment’ against the group and the gradual building of a new profile in the state’s minority policy from 1991 onwards. Burak, who was avoiding for some time to have an interview with me, made sure to pass me a message through our common friend: “Tell her if she wants to understand education here, she needs to understand the change before and after 1991.”

Cenk used psychological terms to describe the change: “Until 1991 we were foreigners in our country but it was also us who did this to ourselves. ‘Our’ school and ‘their’ school- it was something psychological. This changed within

¹²² Aliye attended secondary school in the 2000s

two-three years after 1991, and people started going to the public primary school. They realised that it was not possible to be in Greece and not know Greek although up to that time going to the public school was considered silly. It was a lid that was removed within few years". According to Cenk, the political change brought about a psychological change regarding minority people's sense of belonging to Greece. He stresses that the feeling of alienation ('feeling foreigner') was not only imposed but also co-constructed by the people themselves, who had built a psychological wall between 'ours' and 'theirs'. Moreover, Cenk pointed to the way the learning of Greek changed in people's perception. What was considered before as 'silly' it was later realised as essential for making possible one's life in Greece.

To understand this change it is important to contextualise what Cenk meant by 'silly'. Before 1991, life in Greece was very uncertain for people from the group: "Twenty years ago there was a great fear; things could change from one moment to another. My father remembers what happened in 1974"¹²³ an informant said. Aliye further explained: "In the 1970s and 1980s many families sold what they had and left Greece. Here, near the post-office the neighbourhood was full of Muslims; they were compelled to sell their houses and leave; they were afraid, scared. Those families who were well off left. Those who could not, because they did not have the means, remained". Bilgin¹²⁴, a Komotinian in his sixties explained how he thinks that the group from being unwanted by the State is now 'tolerated': "Now... now it is good. In the past, there was a policy of persecution: 'Get up, take your stuff and go'. At least nowadays there is a political tolerance; they tolerate us". He gave the colour of the era through the image of his parents in his eyes: "My parents did not know what rights are; they were like animals; whatever would be offered to them, they would not ask for more, always bending in obedience.¹²⁵ Always second, third, fourth-class citizens, non-existent, alien

¹²³ Referring to the Turkish invasion in Cyprus

¹²⁴ Bilgin's story will be presented in chapter seven (p.222-225)

¹²⁵ The bending bodies of some older people from the minority during interactions with the majority only occurred to me after a visit I paid to a home of an elderly couple with another Greek. During this visit, I found the lady very hospitable. Later in the day the person who was with me recounted our visit to a friend was acting out in exaggeration the woman's subordinate body language of bending while repeating the word 'efendim' which is a typical polite way of addressing someone in Turkish that translates literally as 'my master'.

bodies. Like they did not belong in this society". This narrative of experience falls in the pre-1991 era. The State's new minority policy after this opened up new possibilities for belonging. However, the past narratives of fear inform the post-memory in the community and influence contemporary understandings.

6.2 Language and belonging.

The fashion of Greek school served, primarily, the purpose of learning Greek; an expression of a newly aspired belonging when this was thought 'possible'. The previous chapter illustrated how for people minority schooling symbolises the means to learn Turkish and be in a culturally familiar environment. By contrast, majority school, as it will be shown in this chapter, represents the need to learn well the Greek language and claim with this new power social mobility and equal citizenship status in practical terms.

The change in trends regarding schooling reflects the change in attitudes about Greek-ness. Before the 1990s, the Greek language was associated psychologically with fear; it was not merely a second language but the language of the oppressor. Zoe¹²⁶, a Komotinian from the majority, linked Greek with psychological and physical violence: "Minority was and is afraid of Greekness. They are afraid of anyone who speaks Greek because the largest part of the group lives in rural areas where all the contact they have had with Greeks was the policeman who would give them fines, the rural constable who would spy on them and the teacher, who was beating the children up". Fuat, a minority informant, illustrated the scale of the fear that Greeks would evoke in the past: "The other day I was in a public service office and an employee was yelling at a veiled woman. In the past this was happening all the time, now it still happens but not that much. This fear from the past is somehow inherited nowadays. I mean in the past people were so scared that if they saw a policeman on the street, they would cross to the other pavement."

¹²⁶ Zoe was presented in previous chapter where she described the infrastructure of the *Mastanli* primary school where she worked as a teacher.

For Bilgin, learning Greek is an emotionally charged choice: “I undoubtedly believe that to say that you own a language, you need to embrace it first; to say ‘this language is mine’. You need to have ‘meraki’¹²⁷ (...) And since you say: ‘I live in this territory’, either you want it, or not, you need to embrace it, but not because they impose it on you; you need to love it. In the way, you love your country. Likewise, you love your country’s language”. Bilgin by learning Greek claimed ownership of both language and citizenship, breaking with the fear and alienation from Greece that his parents embodied.

Nehir by learning Greek also claimed ownership but he experienced this more as a political choice and a means of resistance. “I said to myself, ‘I will learn this fucking language’. Minority leaders back then used to send their children to majority schools. Galip Sebahatin and Hasan Hatipoglu both went to a Greek primary and secondary school, and then they became MPs. Haki, who was the editor of *Illeri*¹²⁸ sent both his children to the majority primary school. He used to say that we need to know well the language”. Having some idea of the polemic between the State and *Illeri* as shown in the State Archives I asked: ‘The language of the enemy?’ – ‘No, the language of the opponent’, Nehir replied.

In similar terms, Taylan, twenty-five years younger than Nehir considers Greek a necessary step for breaking with oppression: “My child will go to a Greek school. It is my wife’s decision because after she came back from her studies in Turkey, she found it very difficult to learn Greek”. He continued explaining what it means regarding empowerment to learn Greek: “The other day my father took my grandmother to a private clinic for a medical exam. The doctors were shouting at my grandma: ‘you are in Greece and you do not speak Greek’. Here in the public hospital patients go and they are being told: “You live in Greece, go first to learn Greek and then you come again”. This is a common story I often heard in Komotini while in November of 2013 the Head of the local hospital distributed an official instruction to all the medical stuff to not speaking to

¹²⁷ *Merak* in Turkish, *meraki* in Greek means to put your soul in something you are doing, to enjoy it and love it.

¹²⁸ Minority newspaper

patients in ‘incomprehensible’ languages other than Greek because this might put patients’ life in danger due to miscommunication.¹²⁹

Although, the administrative harassment was officially denounced in the 1990s, daily micro-aggressions like this on linguistic grounds have not stopped in Komotini¹³⁰ especially in spaces where people from the group, who do not speak Greek, cannot choose to not go; public services, banks, hospitals, etc. Either the new sense of belongingness after the change in State policies, as Bilgin and Cenk described it or the need to escape the second-class citizenship, which Nehir and Taylan emphasised, has led more and more people from the group to follow mainstream schooling. As seen in the previous chapter, the experience of not learning well either Greek or Turkish at minority school was presented also as a strong reason for opting for the Greek schools, but this motive is inscribed in a broader context of decision-making for self-empowerment and claiming of equal citizenship.

6.3 Negotiation of belonging and meanings over the collective

This section will explore how loyalty and belongingness to the minority community were questioned for the first individuals who chose Greek schooling. It will also elucidate how the pioneer choice that was first resisted by the community gradually became normalised as ‘fashion’.

The first people who started opting for the Greek school were faced with reactions from their immediate environment including their family. Melik explained what the situation looked like in his village: “In the 1980s, it was taboo

¹²⁹ General Hospital of Komotini, AP 8973, 11/11/13

¹³⁰ A pronounced example has been the incident on 2013 at the conference for the 90 years’ anniversary since the signing of the Lausanne treaty. All was going more or less well when a minority journalist who enjoys high social status within the group was not allowed to present his talk since he was aiming to do so in Turkish. An academic from Turkey, however, was allowed to speak in Turkish. The matter brought much controversy which I will not discuss here but it is important to bear in mind events like this in order to better understand the frame of ownership as regards language and deriving by language in Thrace and the complex emotional and ideological connotations that language speaking may take locally.

for parents to send their children to public school. Those who did took themselves out of the group and got stigmatised". Whereas his friend Erem added: "Those families that started sending their children to public school were separated; Turkish families were divided into two camps".

Lokman experienced a similar stigma and was cast away by his family when in 1977 he sent his daughter to a Greek primary school in Komotini. Lokman, when young, had registered at *Celâl Bayar* but because he could not cope with the Greek part of the curriculum, he gave up and migrated to Turkey to continue schooling there: "I was not able... I could not understand... I did not know Greek and from this, I had a worry inside me. I had this complex and for this reason, I sent my daughter to the Greek school, even from the nursery school". Lokman's experience of inadequacy at school in Rodope, was what motivated him to make his daughter familiar with Greek early on so she would not feel similarly.

Everyone in his family became angry about this decision because they feared that the girl would be Christianised or 'lose her culture'. It all started when they saw her making the sign of the cross when passing past churches: "The child took this culture from school, and then my wife started... my father in law started... and eventually the whole world: they were saying 'the communist sent his daughter to school'. Everyone, my wife especially, were fiercely asking to take her from there. But I did not care; I was thinking these people can only think that much."

Fifteen years later, in the early nineties, a similar fear of 'losing culture' and religion in the Greek school was expressed in Şelale's neighbourhood, when a family sent their son to the Greek school: "There was a child in the neighbourhood that was sent to the public school. Everyone used to say that he would become a Greek, he became a doctor. What about us? They were looking at him as if he were an alien as if he was living in another world! In the minority school, we have the Quran lesson. They used to say that he will not learn anything, not even how to pray". The fear 'to become a Greek' echoed in other interviews too. These concerns that are articulated and shared within the group

are not uttered in public since Christians would interpret them as a threatening denial of the common fatherland and belonging to Greece.

An aspect that seems to define significantly the comfort by which one would choose majority schooling is spatial identity. Haluk was born in Komotini. When he was a toddler his family lived in a mixed neighbourhood and his mother had a shop. Although he remembers that minority and majority families would not mix, his mother was 'streetwise' due to her involvement in the store and 'had a Greek friend'. Haluk back then was sent to the Greek nursery school of his neighbourhood. He and another child were the only ones from the minority group there. However, he did not continue to the public primary school as one would expect with that beginning: "Later we moved to a Turkish neighbourhood. Only two-three Greek families were there. The neighbourhood was much more conservative; people were more traditional. So the lifestyle of my family changed too; otherwise, they would be like a fly in milk. This played a role and I went to *Idadiye*. Neighbourhood creates customs".

Moving to a different neighbourhood meant a different school choice led by the need to conform to the customs of the others and not stand out as different, as 'alien' in the words of Şelale. Haluk presented this as his parents' active choice and not as imposed by direct societal pressure. However, a few years later the decision was revised: "In the last grade, because apparently I was learning nothing and my parents saw that the school was not good -and in order to not send me alone- they agreed with Irfan's parents and they sent us together to the public school. His family was also conservative. However, they sent us. I consider very progressive what my parents did back then considering both our neighbourhood and our family morals. Probably they were determined to educate me" (*na me mathoun grammata*).

Here the conservative neighbourhood and family morals (Haluk used conservative in the religious sense) are presented in direct opposition to getting educated, with the latter viewed possible only at the Greek school. Haluk considers very progressive what his parents 'dared' to do back then. However,

his parents made sure, before they sent him to the Greek school, to form a small alliance in doing this ‘extravagance’ with another family. Moreover, the motive for withdrawing from the minority school, that was well explained in the previous chapter emerges here too: it was believed that Haluk “was learning nothing” at the minority school so, despite the potential frictions with others opposing their decision, Haluk’s parents opted for what they thought a better school for him. Their streetwise-ness due to being market people was what possibly made them so ‘brave’ as Haluk argued.

Similarly, ten years after Haluk’s story, Taner¹³¹’s parents also decided to take their son from the minority primary school to the mainstream one. The motive and the conditions that influenced the decision were described in similar lines like in the case of Haluk: “It was my parents’ decision, to have a better education. My dad is not educated but because he is professional he has come out in the society. He interacts with many people, he hears many things and being in the shop he learned many things. For example, amongst his customers, there were doctors, lawyers, shepherds, everything. He ‘uneducated educated’, had an opinion. His friends also advised him, he had a friend who was a teacher from the majority and he advised him to do so”. - ‘What about his minority friends?’, I asked, ‘What did they say?’. “Because we live in a town there is some tolerance”.

The stories of Haluk and Taner demonstrate the salience of spatial identity both in the ‘capacity to aspire’ and the way group members are enabled or constrained to become transgressors and make choices out of the community norms. Appadurai (2004) describes the capacity to aspire as “a navigational capacity. The more privileged in any society simply have used the map of its norms to explore the future more frequently and more realistically and to share this knowledge with one another more routinely than their weaker and poorer neighbours”. When Appadurai talks about ‘the poor’ she includes by extension also ‘the excluded, the disadvantaged, the marginal groups’ (*ibid.*:66). Haluk and Taner’s parents are from a disadvantaged and marginal group and do not have

¹³¹ Taner is a young man in his early twenties when we met. He appeared briefly in Chapter five.

an advanced navigational capacity themselves. However, being at the market has given them the opportunity to interact with all sort of people and borrow insights from others' navigational maps. Moreover, due to the urban, therefore, more tolerant community they were enabled to experiment in non-conventional practices.

‘Community’ here may be seen as both resource and constraint; as a resource it functions like a safety-net for its members, but it can also constrain individuals’ decisions. Şelale’s parents and neighbours had not seen anyone from their community in the Greek school before; they could only make hypotheses about what would happen to the boy and they agreed that he would become a Greek. The collective as remedy to fear, doubt and anxiety, as Guibernau (2013) argues, as well as the low navigational capacity has been described by a young informant who explained that ‘fashions’ reassure people for their choices due to the collective consensus: “Choosing school here I think it is something like a fashion. It is heard that they began sending children there, they send you there. They hear that they started sending here, they send you here. They don’t know; they look what the others do. They do not know what is right. Since most of us do this, then this should be right, they think”.

The previous chapter illustrated, through the story of Umut, the uncertainty with which people may need to make decisions about schooling. In Umut’s case his family in order to make a decision drew on an imagined chart of schools in Komotini, which was composed by the popular community meanings about them: medrese was known as the easiest, *Celâl Bayar* as harder but possibly manageable, Greek school as almost impossible for a child with Umut’s socio-economic background. In this case, community with the meanings it had produced, was a resource for them in order to decide.

On the other hand, the community as a project that needs to protect itself to keep on functioning as resource places also constraints on its members. Bourdieu (1977: 163) explained how the collective demands realise the group’s continuity: “The reason why submission to the collective rhythms is so rigorously demanded

is that the temporal forms or the spatial structures structure not only the group's representation of the world but the group itself, which orders itself in accordance with this representation".

Hence, the consensus on viewing Greek school as a cultural threat, and of minority school as reproducing the own- and most importantly under threat-'identity' does not function only as a representation of the world (a 'structuring structure') but also as glue for the group's integration. The rigorous obedience to this representation provides people with a sense of what is right to do and also what to do to 'belong' and hence to reap the emotional safety that this provides. Furthermore, this consensus contributes to the sense of collective identity that might be used as a source of solidarity for members of the group. As Guibernau (2013:34) notes: "Life outside the group is 'hostile', full of dangers and potential enemies. To belong shield us from what we fear and doubt; it also protects us from anxiety by giving us a place in the world".

Haluk on a different part of our talk explained this fear of remaining place-less: "No one dares to say something different. It is the fear of becoming the black sheep because later you will have nowhere to lean on". This is an important perspective to bear in mind when talking about a 'minority' group. It is much easier for a Muslim/Turk, for example, to find belonging amongst the Muslim/Turks rather than amongst the Christian/Greeks in Thrace. Exclusion from the group will be additional to the one experienced regarding the majority: "For all the minority people, Greece at any given moment tries to cannily harm you. No matter if this impression is right or wrong, they have it. If you cannot rely on your power, you rely on the mob and you cannot stay on your own outside. Small societies are very heartless towards the lone people. Everyone is in their barns", Haluk added.

Nevertheless, the community did change. Şelale, today knows that her neighbour became a doctor and not 'Greek' or 'Christian' as it was first feared. Her knowledge results from experience that her predecessors did not have. Hence, she has the tools to revise the older attitude and regret that she was sent, as a

normal and not alien child, to the minority school. She has decided that she will undoubtedly send her children to the Greek school, in hope they will also ‘become something’ like that neighbour. Similarly, Azmi in the previous chapter had described how the outrageous war against her when she demanded secondary schooling has now shifted completely and she is called upon for help and is congratulated for what she did by the same people who once opposed her decision to continue schooling. Haluk also noted: “Society creates its rules. The one who might have judged me five years ago now s/he might also send her/his child to the Greek primary school”. Progress is a word that has been used by the younger participants themselves, like Aliye above, when they described the change after 1991. Guibernau (*ibid.*: 61) underlines the power transgressors have to bring progress: “Frequently, acts of disobedience and transgression open up avenues for social transformation () The unthinkable and outrageous at one particular point in time might become common practice and even be strongly praised in the future”.

The scale of change in communal meanings can also be seen in that although, in the 1980s, it was the community itself that would stigmatise and challenge someone’s option for the Greek school; nowadays it is the elite that is loaded with the role to control and guide the behaviour of the members regarding this matter. The following section will look at the experience in the Greek school for the ‘transgressors’ that left their barns. It will also look at the experience of much younger people who went to the Greek schools in the context of an already established fashion.

6.4 Negotiating belonging at the new space

“Before school we would not understand our difference, until you are seven you are exactly the same, after that you are an enemy”. (Cenk)

This section will focus on participants’ experiences at the majority school space. It is divided into several subsections following the themes that emerged from my data as significant in participants’ building of their stories. The first sub-section is about certain identities (Turk, non-Christian) and how these got re-negotiated internally (at the level of self) and externally (in the interaction with the other). The second part looks through different lenses at the distance that participants felt amongst them and the majority pupils at the Greek schools.

6.4.1 Being ‘the Turk’

Lokman was questioned by his community for sending his daughter to a Greek school but the girl was challenged too at her school as initially she was not accepted by her peers: “One day I go home and I find my daughter crying at a time she should have been at school. – ‘My girl, why are you crying?’, she said: “I left school and now mum found the chance”. Girls did not use to go to school and now imagine a Muslim girl being at the secondary school. I demonstrated composure. She was in the second grade. She said ‘Do I have any germ? Nobody sits next to me; I am alone every single day’. Lokman’s wife ‘found the chance’ to start pressuring him again to remove their daughter from the public school. He decided instead to speak to the Head of School and the teachers, an approach that bore fruits: “I see her coming back home all happy. She said today I sat with Maria, the other day she came and said she sat with Anna. Afterwards, they were inviting her in birthdays. The water came into the stream”.

Before the interventions of Lokman and the teachers, the classmates of the girl would clearly demarcate a physical and therefore a symbolic distance between them and her, Lokman commented on that: “It is not children’s fault. They listen at home to their mum and dad, ‘They are Turks’. They turn on the radio the same, the TV the same, the newspaper the same, they open the books, the same. Then, they do not sit next to the child... it is psychological... You are now getting to know us; you see that we do not hold a sword”. Lokman’s words offer an excellent introduction to the way ‘Turks’ are represented and imagined in Greece: at home, on the radio and TV, on newspapers and books. Being myself born and bred in Greece, I know that a Turk in popular imagination holds a sword and is more or less ready to take off a Greek head. All this explains for Lokman why the Greek children at school are psychologically constrained to approach the Turks.

Cenk had himself a very traumatic experience of his ‘Turkishness’ at the Greek school. Twenty years later, he tried hard to hold his tears while recounting it: “I remember at the secondary school, there were some children around fifteen-years-old who were playing basketball. They missed the ball, I grabbed it and went with my heart to give it to them. Then I hear: ‘Don’t go there, he is bad. Our teacher said he is a Turk; he is bad’. This was an unbelievable shock in my life; I could not utter a word. I wanted to be buried. How can I take out of their mind the idea that I am bad?” Cenk’s words, ‘I went with my heart’, show that at the time of the interview he still talked from a position of defence, needing to prove or reaffirm his innocence. Haluk had also mentioned in a discussion that “for the average Greek Komotinian, a Turk is by default a criminal”. Cenk, probably deeply affected by this incident, mentioned in some other part of our interview: “I personally have set this goal; to convince people that I am not a threat or danger to them”.

Different from the microaggressions described above, Haluk and Nurcan, who studied at a Greek school in the 1980s, felt very intensely excluded. Their Turkishness at days would even affect their very access to school. Nurcan remembered the laughs and all the mocking that followed every time the teacher

would call her name: “It sounded very strange to them.¹³² I was treated a bit like an alien”. However, things would worsen significantly: “In the days of crisis¹³³ the other students were casting us away and were threatening us. We did not know if we could enter the school and we were standing outside all stressed waiting without knowing what to do. I remember when was the case of *Sismik*¹³⁴, there was a great fear that a war would break out, the situation was very tense. I remember the others at school saying that they will send the Turks in the army, only with one bullet to kill themselves. Later with the Imia¹³⁵ case the students faced similar problems”.

By all means, the stigma that students like Nurcan experienced in the Greek school would remain for longer than the days of crisis and would be re-activated in every other occurrence of diplomatic tension between Greece and Turkey, such as in the Imia case. The feeling and belief that a war could erupt at any time have played an important role in forming the atmosphere in Thrace and the relations between the two groups. A majority local informant explained: “There always had been tensions, with some calm intervals. You never know when and how the ill might happen, at any moment even when we think that everything is fine. This is why we need to be always alert”.

Haluk found himself along with his friend Mesut at the Greek school in 1989: “At the beginning, it was just the two of us. Mesut was making better friends because he was playing good football. I was hanging out with Yannis, the son of a military officer. They did not like him; he was tall, with braces and crutches.

¹³² Nazif who went to Greek high-school twenty years later than Nurcan described a similar experience: “The first day when the teacher was reading our names from the catalogue, when she said Nazif, all eyes turned on me. I felt awful”.

¹³³ In the Greco-Turkish diplomat relations

¹³⁴ Nurcan refers here to March, 1987 when Greece’s National Defence forces were lined up to face Turkey in a war that could start at any minute when the Turkish vessel *Sismik I* started its sail from Turkey with the aim to conduct research for oil in the undersea around Greek islands in the North Eastern Aegean. The dispute between the two countries over the Aegean shelf had already started in 1973 with many peaks of tension, 1987 being one of these. In face of the events the then Greek Prime Minister A. Papandreu was outspoken about Greece entering a war if *Sismik I* would move further into ‘the Greek’ waters violating the International Treaties. Army forces were sent to the borders, Greek newspapers had war titles and Greeks were buying excessive quantities of food.

¹³⁵ The Imia crisis in 1996 has been the most recent time when the break out of a war between Greece and Turkey felt very close.

"We were always together". In Greece it is not unusual for people who hold permanent positions in the army to have quite strong nationalist beliefs. The son of a Turk and the son of a military officer is not considered a very likely friendship. Nevertheless, the two boys shared the identity of 'outsider' and bonded together.

A little later when "all hell broke loose" in Komotini in 1989 a military jeep would stop outside of Haluk's house offering to take his family at Yannis' place. Haluk's parents refused and then Yannis' mother spent all days at theirs: "Out there, there was mayhem, rallies were taking place. They were smashing stores and beating up people. I remember the title on newspapers: 'The country has sunk'. I remember my grandmother reading the Koran continuously. We had the shutters all closed. You would go out and they would throw yoghurts on you. It was said that women had been beaten. We were talking about what has happened where and what are we going to do now. They broke all the shops twice; the first time they broke all of them the second was in smaller scale".

Haluk refers to the black page in the recent history of Komotini regarding the coexistence between majority and minority groups. A series of events, around the rise of minority politician Sadik Ahmet and his trial, had brought uproar in the area. A large part of the minority population was mobilised supporting the Turkish nationalist rhetoric of Sadik Ahmet as a form of minority rights advocacy- the first dynamic mass protest from the group- whereas the Metropolitan Damaskinos was counter-mobilising the Christians of the area. On 29 January 1990, a 'mini-pogrom' took place at the centre of Komotini. Muslim shops were broken and minority people were injured.

Those days Haluk remembers the children at school mocking him. "I remember one who told me 'Haluk, did they break your shop too?' I said 'yes'. 'Nice, nice' they were replying. They were mocking. And these children knew very well what was going on. They were mocking. Some of them did not want us to be around with them. I never felt the need to withdraw and isolate myself because of this atmosphere". Haluk remembers his majority classmates performing a

superiority attitude and laughing over the fear he and his family suffered. Children at school were aligning themselves with their parents and the ‘majority’ adults in Komotini reproducing the societal power relations into the school yard. Haluk was not discouraged by these but a couple of years later he withdrew from the Greek high-school as he could not cope with the loneliness and isolation anymore: “I left because I did not have good relations with my classmates, I was feeling lonely, I was not feeling well. In that school there was isolation, I experienced it in an awful way in the first grade. I was feeling incredibly lonely, my friend remained in that school because of football, he was a cool bloke unlike me that I was the good guy”.

“I also had the subject of History where I was feeling very intensely that all eyes were on us, I was feeling uncomfortable”. The subject of History seems to have been a thorn in some pupils’ lives at the Greek school. Melik mentioned once the story of a friend of his who abandoned school altogether after the frustration he had with the teacher of History; “he did not want to go back to school ever again”. What I briefly examine here is not the institutional aspect of the issue; the representation of Turks in Greek school History books but the social dimension of this. The eyes that were spotting Haluk, the teacher of History that, as I was told, led someone to give up school.

Taner explained the impact that the History books had on how possible he found it to express his Turkish identity at school: “History? This was the worst of all! The books talk about the Turkish occupation (*Tourkokratia*) and a whole lot of things that are not like this and we know it but we cannot talk”. Earlier during a conversation we had about Thrace, Taner said: “when the conquerors came, the Greeks” referring to the annexation of Thrace to Greece.¹³⁶ The phrase of Taner represents another angle of viewing history different from the mainstream Greek historiography according to which the Greeks regained what was theirs from the barbarian conquerors; the Turks who had enslaved the Greek lands.

¹³⁶ The 14th of May is public holiday in Western Thrace to celebrate the ‘liberation’. That day during my fieldwork I walked past the banned Turkish Youth Association where people from the minority were entertained by a Turkish folk music group and dancers who came from Turkey to head to the town’s square where the majority had another concert of Greek music for the special day.

Taner continued: “Once you open the book it talks about how evil the Turks are, that the Turks slaughtered and all these stuff.” Here he refers to all the ‘stuff’ that Lokman also mentioned in our talk (‘you see we do not hold a sword’). After all, that being said in the classroom about the Turks, Taner could not ‘dare’ to say he is a Turk. “We feel weird during the lessons, how can we dare later say that we are Turks? Once in the lesson of Physics we had this conversation about Greeks and Turks and the teacher asked me ‘how do you feel; Greek or Turk?’ What could I have answered then?” Leaving uncommented how such a question came out in the Physics’ hour, I said well what you feel. Taner replied: “I believe that for someone here to say that s/he is Turk needs to be extremely brave”.

I asked Taner how he and the other minority students were positioned at school during the national day of celebrating the ‘revolution against the Turks’: “The teacher says you are a Greek Muslim - end of story. Therefore, very nicely I was part of the celebration, singing the songs, reading the poems.” I asked if they were taught in the primary school anything about Turkish history from the Turkish teacher: ’No, this is forbidden! Not only Thrace but the whole Greece would uproar. We did not have Hara Nikopoulou¹³⁷ we were 0.01% of all pupils so nobody would bother you. Books say about the Turks who used to slaughter and kill; the teacher would say these things, but they did not consider you Turk’. Here, Taner describes a simultaneous negation and affirmation of his Turkish identity: The teacher did not consider him Turk but a Greek Muslim. He felt invisible in that sense but he felt on the spot as a Turk under his classmates’ intense gaze.

This section showed that although, the fear expressed on behalf of the community traditionally has been that pupils at Greek school ‘would become Greeks’; it seems that it is also likely for these pupils to ‘become Turks’ in the sense that their Turkish-ness is activated by both its negation and emphasis under the Other’s gaze. Turkishness at the majority school space has a different content

¹³⁷ A Greek teacher from the Greek nationalist circles. Her practices at the minority primary school where she worked have been heavily questioned however for these, she was awarded a prize from the Academy of Athens in 2010.

and quality of the one minority pupils might have embraced within minority spaces. Being Turk now means being evil. Both the negation and the derogation on their identity, although might lead pupils to conceal it (as Taner said) on the other hand it activates and realises it in a mode of resistance. Melik remarked that people with negative dispositions against him because of his identity, have a Turkification effect on him, they make him ‘more Turk’.

6.4.2 Meeting Christianity

Taner and Agah are good friends and when at school they were classmates. When I asked them, ‘So how was the school like’?¹³⁸ The first thing Agah mentioned was the separation between Christians and Muslims: “This comes first, always and everywhere”. I asked how did he feel this, where could he see it: “Generally everywhere; in the classroom, during the breaks, out in the forecourt. Christians and Muslims we were sitting separately on right and left rows, we did this for reasons of language, because we could communicate better amongst us”. He added that every morning, before the lessons, there was the Christian prayer:¹³⁹ “The prayer takes place every morning and we just stand there. If we are at school, it is compulsory for us to be present”. Taner said: “I had got already used to it because I had been earlier in the majority primary school. At the beginning it is weird but then you get used to it”. They both laughed saying that after a while they know these prayers by heart.

Later Taner told me that it was at primary school that he had felt this much stronger as he was the only Muslim and when all the school was at church he was waiting alone in the classroom. “Especially in the morning (at the prayer time) you think why they are like this and I am not. All right after two months you say ‘that’s how it is’, you do not think about it anymore. Likewise, now when I am concerned about something or something worries me I let go ... I do not think of it anymore or I forget it. This must be something that I got from that

¹³⁸ Greek Gimnasio/Likio

¹³⁹ This is a common practice in every Greek school, along with a picture of ‘God’ above every blackboard in each classroom. Not rarely, Greek children that have not been baptised by their parents are asked to stand separately and this acts as a form of pressure for their parents to Christianise their kids.

period”. Here Taner got a sense of who he is by realising who he is not. What was unproblematic before he joined Greek school; his Muslim identity, at school when he met the ‘different’ started becoming a question (‘you think why they are like this and I am not’). Associating that experience with behaviours he adopts now in his life demonstrates how intense those questions had been for him.

Besides their own existential questions when they encountered and had to be present at the Christian rituals, the behaviour of some Christians towards them constituted a second degree of challenge: Taner said: “In my opinion, many of the professors who are appointed at the minority schools are more religious than normal¹⁴⁰ and this is why they choose to work at minority schools; they want to Christianise the students. Of course not all of them but half at least.” This belief was created by many little incidents but mainly around an event that none of them has forgotten: “One day it was the third hour at school, that teacher asked us all to stand up in the classroom and pray; she said either you stand up or you get out with absence note”. ‘And what did you do? Did you stand up? Did you comment on it at all?’, I asked. “Of course not! She is the professor what could I have said. I was going along with her, I did not want to compromise my marks. If you feel an imminent danger that the course of your life is threatened...” How do you mean this, I asked? “If she drops my mark this affects my future”.¹⁴¹ Taner’s words show the dramatic way in which he perceived his interactions with his teachers at school (‘the course of your life is threatened’) and the high load he attributed to his own responses.

The event at Taner’s school with the spontaneous prayer in the classroom is not unusual in Rodope as I came to understand from other participants too. Although prayer is the standard at the Greek school in the morning before the start of the lessons in a gathering of all pupils and staff, it is not supposed to take place again in the classrooms at the time allocated for the lessons.

¹⁴⁰ In the same way there is also a sense that many of the Greeks locally are more Greeks than the normal

¹⁴¹ Apart from panelladikes the average school grade counts also in a students’ access to university.

On the other hand, Agah still remembered the incidence when a Christian classmate approached him and said: “you will become a Christian”. This made him feel really bad, as he said and added “What could I have said to this person? The only thing that I could have done was to go and tell it to the Head of School. But then what would happen? At school teachers cannot be bothered to deal with racism”. Taner nodded in agreement. Then Taner said “Since Christianity will remain at schools they should talk a little bit about Islam too so that they will get to know us, as well. The issue of religion at school is sided they never talk at school about Islam to get to know something about it”.

In Agah and Taner’s descriptions, the school is presented as a space colonised by the Orthodox faith leaving them feeling more like guests rather than equal members of it. The school is not a space for all but space mainly addressing the Orthodox students. Apart from the aspect of banal¹⁴² Orthodoxy they emphasised, Taner and Agah believe that at least half of the professors meant to Christianise the students; they were ‘more Christians than normal’ and this is why they chose the school to make their indoctrination. This phenomenon seems to have broader aspects in Thrace. In my informal discussions with many people in Komotini, I heard about the cases of people in extreme poverty (usually from the Roma communities) who went to the Church to ask for financial help or food. Provision of help was denied unless these people would convert to Orthodoxy.¹⁴³

Returning to the school stories, Taner commented on the imbalance on representation of the minority students’ religion. Both Taner and Agah felt an absolute neglect of their religious identity; they were invisible in school in these terms; their faith was muted and nobody was even curious to learn or hear about

¹⁴² Following Billig’s (1995) concept of ‘banal nationalism’ as permeating casually and silently every-day life.

¹⁴³ A friend who works in a bank told me about this ‘bargaining of identity’ amongst the Roma of Rodope. “There are people who come to withdraw money and I see their ID cards; their name and surname is Greek but the father’s name is Turkish. They pay them to become Christians and proper Greeks with Greek surnames and Christian forenames. When people are in need or maybe threatened they shell their identity, it is of high value. Do you know what is the worst for their donors? That no matter how wretched is their situation, no matter what sort of name they have been given or to what tricks they have resorted to secure their living, they do not abrogate their Ottoman identity”

it. This used to make them feel even more problematic their presence and witnessing of the Orthodox customs at schools.

6.5 Degrees of distance and approach at the forecourt

Although in past decades the alienation at mainstream school that ‘minority’ pupils experienced was more overt and vocal, as the stories of Nurcan and Haluk demonstrated. In recent years, the alienation between ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ students seem to continue but in a more covert and silent way as the participants’ voices will illustrate in this section. Nurcan’s son has been sent to the Greek school, after Nurcan ‘fought with society’ to do so but decades after his mother’s school experiences, he is also only amongst ‘minority’ friends at school. Meltem summed the matter up in a sentence: “In *pentaimeri*,¹⁴⁴ during the whole journey we kept being two separate groups”. This is quite striking as pentaimeri comes after many years of common schooling (at least three, if not six) and for schools from rural areas like Rodope usually the number of students graduating is low, therefore is unlikely to have distinct camps for the whole duration of the trip. As Nurcan commented similar to Cenk “the child goes to school and suddenly it becomes a forcibly worn cloth (*ginetai rouho foreneno*) that is minority, that is at a disadvantage. It takes a huge personal struggle to overcome this and how the others see her/him”

6.5.1 Romance

Exploring the relations and the physical and symbolic distance between ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ students at school cannot be separated from the broader social sphere and the respective distance amongst these groups, locally. Love as a dangerous potential seemed in my fieldwork to be part of the ‘minority’- ‘majority’ relations.

¹⁴⁴ Pentaimeri is called the week-long excursion that last grade students do with some of their teachers to celebrate the end of their school-lives.

Aliye, mentioned the scandal that would happen if a Christian and a Muslim would get into a romantic relationship “In Likio we were not socialising with the Greeks. Someone to have a romance with a Christian? You cannot imagine what would happen!” The fear of inter-marriage seems to be a seriously important factor in both the Christian and Muslim communities to canonise their members into avoiding close relationships. Taylan has been working for many years for a Greek small private business in Komotini and he is the right hand of his boss. However, he said: “If Christians let their children make friends with us we would have been friends. My boss does not let his children make friends with us. His sister was saying the other day that the only thing she is afraid of is her daughter to fall for a Turk. This is the only thing she is afraid of! His son told us that his father does not let him make friends with our guys. What he is afraid of is that if they hang out a lot together he might find one of our girls. ‘If he finds one and brings her to me what shall I do?’ Do you understand, Eleni?”

There are very few mixed couples and history has it that they do not last long due to the intense social pressure: “If you marry a Christian, they will cast you away, they will isolate you” an informant said. Whereas, I was told about a case of a young man whose family stopped talking to him after he made a relationship with a non-local Greek. Another young participant told me that his ‘kind of girlfriend’ that met at Greek school was hesitating to be with him ‘for what her family and neighbours would say’. Aliye explained that during her time at the Greek school, she was more interested to socialise with the people from the minority, as it was in that group that she could find a romantic relationship: “I was going to ‘Theatro’¹⁴⁵, for coffee with classmates but I was also going to the Turkish Youth¹⁴⁶ so I could meet someone. Because I could not, this is the wrong verb, I did not want to have a relationship with a Christian because I had not grown up like this from my family. To make a relationship, flirt you know I was looking for a Muslim, someone in the same level like me, the same mentality let me say and so I was going to the Turkish Youth”.

¹⁴⁵ A hip majority owned café in the centre of Komotini.

¹⁴⁶ It is the community’s landmark cafe. The “Turkish Youth Union” (*Türk Gençlik Birliği*) was founded in 1928. In 1983 following a decision of the court of Rodope the association was not allowed to function having the word Turk in its title.

6.5.2 “You don’t have any reason to talk with”

“At school we were amongst us. In Gimnasio Likio we were together in the same class for four years, in the same classroom and you do not have any reason to talk with only ‘good morning’, ‘how are you’” said Derya. Finding a reason to talk with seems an issue that concerned some participants. Argun explained that the distance at school could be explained: “First because of the language and second because of religion. For example, you have other things and we have others. You have Easter and we have Bayram.¹⁴⁷ It somehow could not glue together”. Here different faiths and their traditions are understood as barriers to connection, and is the first element that is pointed out as explanation or excuse for the distance between Christian and Muslim pupils.

Umut explained other aspects of distance: “First of all, you need to have some common things to talk about. OK so now what about to talk? Sometimes they look at things in a different way or we look at things in some different way, so it can’t work”. İhsan, who is in his early twenties, like Umut, talked about different rhythms between the two groups, different topics of discussion and different sort of humour to conclude that: “It is not easy for the children to socialise. They will not catch the rhythm of the group; they have learned different things. The majority is more open. A child from us will find it difficult to adjust”. Aliye was in similar lines when she said “There is a different mentality, believe me. We also have different customs” and like İhsan she underlined the different sense of humour “You laugh much easier than us, you laugh with everything, we do not laugh that easily, maybe we do not find funny the same things”.

However, different students are argued to have different abilities to ‘adjust’ depending on their previous track of relations with the ‘majority’. Aliye explained: “In Gimnasio, personally I was not only with the group from the minority, I was talking with everyone. But there were some children who did not

¹⁴⁷ Muslim celebration

relate at all with the children from the school. This depends on the family and the character. My father has always had Christian friends. I grew up seeing this. They were coming to our house, to our shop. If you see since you are small and you call someone uncle Niko you grow up differently, you make friends differently. If a child from Mastanli from Kir Mahalle¹⁴⁸ has not seen not even once in his/her life, has not heard a word from the parents, has not seen his/her mum go for a coffee how then the child will go for a coffee?" İhsan, whose father also had a shop in Komotini has the same opinion: "I grew up in mixed neighbourhood; I would go out of my doorstep and would speak Greek since I was in diapers. It depends on the neighbourhood. If someone up to twelve has not been in contact with other children to what extent h/she may survive in their group?"

Aliye and İhsan explained the 'stick to the group behaviour' as another aspect of the "hysteresis of habitus" this time not regarding the linguistic capital; the ability to speak fluently in Greek but the social capital of having experienced relations with the majority. Those children like İhsan and Aliye, who have been used to mixed relations, who grew up 'seeing' it and observed their parents doing it are less reluctant and afraid to approach the majority at school and make friends.

6.5.3 Intimidation

Another dimension of the distance between minority-majority pupils at school relates to the power imbalance between the two groups at symbolic and linguistic level. The means of communication between them is Greek, a language 'owned' by the majority and improvised by pupils of the minority. Moreover, minority participants say that they perceive a sense of superiority expressed on behalf of majority pupils. Such feeling could reflect the way that broader social relations between majority/minority are understood in Thrace.

¹⁴⁸ Two mono-minority populated neighbourhoods in Komotini

Most of the research participants were students at a Greek university; this gave them a different perspective into their relations with the locals. Without a single exception, everyone agreed and described their surprise between the difference of Greeks out of Thrace and Greeks in Thrace: “They would not come to us. We did not manage to make friends with them. I am an open person I had no problems to make friends at university. Here I would speak to the Christians but they would not talk. I don’t know why. You ponder how to approach the other” said Derya. Meltem¹⁴⁹ made a similar remark: “And do not think that Greeks who have grown up in Rodope are like you or like the people I met at university. They treat you very differently.”

Meltem gave an example of this different treatment. When she was at the university, in one exam she got a higher mark than her Greek friends. To her surprise, they genuinely congratulated and felt happy for her: “It made a big impression on me! In Likio to get a higher mark than a Christian? There was this derogation and jealousy”. Aliye, like many other participants, was led to internalise an inferior image of herself that it took her time and experiences in a different context to start deconstructing: “In this way that you have grown up, in this way that you have got used to, and from this sort of behaviour of those who you live with, even you yourself feel like ‘wow what did I achieve’. I mean in Maths language is not so important neither the others are cleverer; we are all equally clever and still even yourself come to believe it. They downgrade you very much”.

The way Meltem articulated her thinking demonstrates in an opposite way the deconstruction she had to undertake to realise that she had internalised the other’s definition of her as not able to do well. The expressions she uses” “the way you “have grown up”, “the way you are used to”, point to what Bourdieu would describe as the production of habitus. The internalisation, to a lesser or larger extent, of the belief that minority people do not do well at school because they are ‘idiots’, emerged indirectly in other participants’ voices too. Ercan, for

¹⁴⁹ Meltem is a young woman from the plain and was in her early twenties when we met. she has graduated from a Greek university. Her views enrich also chapter seven.

example, reflecting on the low competencies of minority school graduates noted that it is not possible that all who graduate from minority primary school are 'idiot'. Bilgin, in a similar way to Meltem, described how when he left Komotini to study Medicine in Turkey saw that despite the difficulties, he was doing well and taking into account that Medicine only takes the best students he realised that "no one in the world is idiot. Is opportunities that one needs". Meltem, Ercan and Bilgin they all seem to have been engaged in an esoteric dialogue and then reject the idea that for being 'minority' they are 'idiot'. Bilgin associated what is perceived as cognitive inferiority with the lack of opportunities for minority people.

Back to what Meltem described would happen at school if she got higher mark than a Christian; following Goffman's theory we could tell that participants (majority-minority pupils) in this situation (a school experience) had both agreed to the majority's projected definition of it; that a minority student cannot perform better than a majority one. "Together the participants contribute to a single overall definition of the situation which involves not so much a real agreement as to what exists but rather a real agreement as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honoured" (Goffman, 1959: 4). The event of Meltem or any minority pupil getting a higher mark on a test would be a 'disruptive event' in Goffman's terms (p. 15) meaning an event that is not congruent to the definition of the situation. It was for being disruptive that those, whose definition was challenged would express further 'derogation' and 'jealousy' whereas Meltem would share their surprise.

The implications of such internalisation are emphasised by Taylor (1994: 25): "Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being". However, the "confining or demeaning picture" of self was not mirrored and internalised only

at the school space. Meltem made that clear when she said about ‘the way she grew up’, what she has ‘been used to’. Just after she narrated the Maths incident, she said: “I was going to the medical centre with my mother, we were there at nine but the doctor would see the others before us. My mum and in general those who do not know Greek, hold this fear. They show greater understanding to this behaviour because they cannot express themselves”. Meltem’s mother is a veiled woman and therefore, would most likely experience second-class treatment in most public spaces¹⁵⁰ which Meltem would witness “because I was with my mum who was wearing a scarf and she did not speak Greek”. Her mother embodied two signs of interiorised otherness and she could not escape from majority’s ‘derogation’ the word Meltem used to describe her classmates’ attitudes to her doing better.

In a similar way that her mother would remain silent accepting the second-class treatment ‘because she held this fear’ and ‘she could not express herself well in Greek’; many young participants, especially those from mono-populated villages or neighbourhoods, described their feelings of fear and shame that kept them silent at school: “Children are very ashamed, they are very afraid of making mistakes. They feel very embarrassed to talk and refrain even more. They fear that they might ridicule themselves. It is the first time that they meet people from places other than their village” said Derya. Argun, when he talked about his school years in the Greek Likio at Komotini, explained that “We did not know well Greek so we were ashamed to talk with them”. Adalet¹⁵¹ also noted “When I first went to the public school I was very hesitant and quiet (*mazemeni*), I was afraid of making mistakes or using the wrong words. I feared to talk, but later I got more confident and started understanding more.”

Talking about confidence, it is interesting to look at Berna’s story. Berna, a Komotinian girl, was the youngest participant and had just graduated from Likio the summer I met her. Berna had a very hard time at the Greek Gimnasio where

¹⁵⁰ “You will go to the Prefecture, especially if a woman wears a scarf she will be the last to be served after all the rest. It is because they do not speak Greek. In Komotini the view of the scarf influences very much the people” said Meltem.

¹⁵¹ Female from the plain in her early twenties when I met her. Appears again in chapter seven.

she said: “I felt racism very intensively. At the forecourt, we would not socialise with each other at all. We were always amongst us. They would never approach us to become friends. When we had gymnastics, the teacher would appoint two pupils to pick the rest of us in turns and form two teams. Nobody wanted us; nobody was choosing us to be on their team. And then the looks; they were looking at us as if we were... they were making fun of us basically.” Despite this situation and as other participants feeling uncomfortable at the Greek school Berna also never thought to change school. “The only thing I wanted was to improve in the language”. At Likio, some of the classmates who were making fun of her, when she would make a mistake in Greek, were at a different classroom but in general, the experience changed radically for Berna and all became smooth. What changed? I asked. “My self-confidence, the improvement of my Greek, I can say better what I think. In Gimnasio, I was a little bit shy. But in Likio, it was also myself that changed. I started to talk to socialise with them”.

Meltem’s mother did not feel strong enough to defend her rights, she did not speak Greek and was fearful. Likewise, Derya, Adalet, Argun and Berna described a similar fear and shame that held them back at school. For most of the time and until feeling confident in the language they remained muted, quiet, and full of fear that might become ashamed if they did not speak Greek correctly. Berna, having worked hard to improve her Greek, felt more confident in herself. She stopped feeling so shy and fearful and her experience at school changed.

Returning to Goffman’s (1959) theory we can tell from the above excerpts that the participants in the space of meeting with the ‘Greeks’ aimed to project a definition of being equal and not different. For this reason, they hesitated to speak because they wanted to conceal their non-fluency in Greek, considering it shameful and an immediate indicator of not being equal or the same. On the other hand, the looks that Meltem talks about was the majority’s own attempt at defining the situation which was establishing their superiority. The bodily hexis (*‘mazemeni’/quiet*) and other patterns of behaviour at school between the Greeks and ‘the others’ seem to reproduce and reflect the pattern of relations between

the two groups in the social sphere in spaces other than school. Bourdieu when talking about ‘class habitus’ argued that “‘interpersonal’ relations are never, except in appearance, individual-to-individual relationships and that the truth of the interaction is never entirely in the interaction” (Bourdieu, 1977:81).

The perceived superiority of the majority was also implied when some participants explained the fragile balance that had to keep those who would socialise with the Greek classmates. Aliye, for example, explained: “I was never accused why I was friends with the Christians but I was not only with them. But they accused another child who started hanging out too much with the Christians. He was doing everything with them. We were inviting him to join us in our things but he would never come. I think that he had some problem. He thought that if he would come with us then the others¹⁵² would think low of him” (*tha epefte sta matia tous*’).

Nurcan expressed a similar opinion when she talked about her son at high-school and how the minority children are amongst them “Children at school are isolated, far from the others and there is also the stigma if one of them goes with the others. They say ‘ah this one is too big for his britches’ (*megalopiastike*). The idea that if someone gets friends with the Christians ‘is too big for her/his britches’ and vice-versa; that if the Christians would see Aliye’s friend socialising with the minority ‘would think lower of him’ illustrate the superiority-inferiority model of the relations between the two.

Less adept to feel inferior in the interaction and more ready to establish a definition of equality in the relationship were those students who had early on in their lives interactions with the Greeks and had seen positive interactions between their parents and Greeks. Aliye, who had been in the Greek nursery school and grew up with Greeks had confidence already: “I was not feeling ashamed if I would say a word wrong or make mistakes. I had learnt a bit automatic from the nursery school and I was not afraid”. Selale also gave a more positive account of her story at school, very different from Meltem’s although

¹⁵² The ‘Christians’

they are from the same village and have been to the same school: “We have very good relations between us. I am pleased with all. Even now we go out sometimes. On Christmas, all the class went out for dinner. It also depends on your personality”. Aliye had been to a Greek school early on and Şelale grew up in a mixed neighbourhood where her Greek neighbours would help her with her homework. However, it is interesting to notice that in Şelale’s description of togetherness it was Şelale who joined her classmates on a Christian celebration without her reporting them getting together during Bayram for example. In the covering of distance, in all the above cases it has been the ‘minority’ people that need to cover it to meet the ‘majority’.

6.5.4 Football

Males from the minority have historically had increased opportunities to meet and mix with Greeks in comparison to the females. Apart from education, military service and the labour market provide such opportunities. Melik, for example, “had for the first time a picture of Greece and Greeks” when he was in the army. Another space that provides minority men in Rodope with the chance to socialise with Greeks is the football pitch: a shared space “even when the game is as usual Greeks against Turks” as Taşkın noted laughing. It is striking the number of times this theme came up in my interviews. Bilgin, in the seventies, met for his first time ‘the Greeks’ when he registered to the Komotinian football team after *Celâl Bayar* was left without a gymnastics teacher. In his sixties today, he narrated in detail how a Greek, Giorgos, on the first day of training, broke his apple in two and shared it with him. “It was the first time I mixed with Greeks. Think of two societies as if they have a wall in between. My father would meet Greeks only at work but then he would go to the Turkish kafeneio, he was illiterate. My mother had no contact with Greekness”. But Bilgin had made a friend at the football academy and started sharing “the first day Giorgos cut his apple in half and shared it with me”.

Haluk’s friend was playing good football and therefore, he could make friends and didn’t withdraw from the Greek school like Haluk did due to loneliness. Two

more informants explained that they learned Greek not in the classroom but in the football field: Taşkın said: “I learned Greek, but not at school; I was playing football. Both at the academy, where we were only two Turks, and in my mixed neighbourhood”. Nazif despite his harsh transition to the mainstream high school commented that: “They were very good guys. I did not know the language well but still my classmates would ring me. Our communication was through football. I was good at it; we used to play together and I was learning Greek there. I mean the Greek I learned was from my friendship with the guys through football, not from the classroom”. Nazif apart from being a good football player also had a scooter which, as he stressed, also helped him to be popular “Because I also had the scooter, they liked me a lot. I would take them and we would go together to the fast-foods”.

Umut, who while in Thrace had only been in minority schools, explained that he and his friends had nothing in common with the Christian neighbouring village since ‘those were rich’. Things started changing after his village set up a football team “and Christians started coming there to play and so ‘pass the ball’, ‘take the ball’ we have begun chatting sometimes and this is how we started having some contact”. The male stories about football and the chance it gave them to learn Greek through the interaction with the Greeks on the pitch, along with the other stories of interaction in the neighbourhood or the market for some, demonstrate that school could be a less significant space for someone regarding language learning. Especially if the school is not felt like a space of sharing and communication.

Conclusion

By contrast to the big narratives by the group’s elite advocacy networks that attempt to canonise members’ educational choices by emphasising the minority duty to protect the continuation of minority schooling this chapter highlighted the meanings members attribute to their choice for majority schooling despite the suggestions from the top. Greek school in this set of narratives seems to be aspired to as a means to break with the oppression, and in a way with ‘minority’

identity. Minority here does not mean core self identifications such as ‘Turk’, ‘Muslim’ or any other way participants may understand themselves in the world, but connotes the subordinate position by which one is defined in relation to a respective ‘majority’.

Markers of majority schooling as a means of de-minoritisation are found in words participants selected while speaking about the choice. Aliye for example associated majority school choice to progressing “like all families”, Lokman had a complex from his experience of ‘not being able, not understanding’ that desired to protect his daughter from feeling the same, Taylan associated the harassment of his grandmother and the limitations of his wife due to not being fluent in Greek with the decision to send his daughter to the Greek school. In these narratives, Greek school is projected as a positive choice aiming to break with the ‘minority’ experience; the feeling of being left behind or half-way that was well described by narratives in the previous chapter. In this regard, and as the previous chapter illustrated while minority school is synonymous in every day narratives to poor education, Greek school manifests a choice for getting educated, as it was explicitly put by Haluk, Taner and in the previous chapter by Fuat.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, the meaning or definition of terms like empowerment or progress or minority is absent from the public agenda of the elite advocacy. All these terms are taken for granted, charged in the public discourse with a sense of patriotism that yet remains undefined. The friction between on one hand, what is taken for granted, normalised in public discourse with reference to the collective and on the other, the personal meanings some group members generate that differ from the first results in the challenging of belongingness to the group of those who with their educational choices manifest their differentiation from the collective norm. In this regard, this chapter showed how the few group members’ choice of the Greek school was initially interpreted by their community as denial to their ‘minority’ identity as a step closer to losing ‘culture’ and become ‘Greek’. Greek school is viewed through a triplex of fear of assimilation: ‘fear to be christianised’, ‘fear to lose culture’, ‘fear to become

a Greek' along with the most recent meanings shown in the previous chapter 'fear to do State's favour', 'fear to lose our schools'. This is why it was only after the denunciation of the 'administrative harassment' during which group members strongly felt like 'strangers in their own country', 'alien bodies' and 'persecuted' that the choice for majority school was imagined as part of negotiating and asserting belonging-ness to Greece under new terms.

The first who followed this path, the 'transgressors', were stigmatised, excluded and got alienated from the group. A mutual belonging to their 'own culture' and Greek-ness, was not perceived as possible by most people in the group. This incompatibility in perception has also been influenced by the normalised discourse that views 'minority' always in conflict with the State. Therefore, the elite's and community's reflex to those who claimed a new belonging, very well expressed in Bilgin's words "to say this country is mine, this language is mine", was to challenge their belonging to the community. If the Greek State aims to assimilate the group and abolish minority education, then a group member's move from the minority to majority school almost equals a move towards the camp of the opponent against the struggle for 'minority rights'.

Through my interviews it seems that there are two categories of people who found it easier to do the '*extravagance*'. First, are those with a strong internal motive like Lokman and Bilgin. Lokman has always carried the worry of his 'inability' to cope with Greek, Bilgin grew up in an environment of fear, isolation and obedience. They both wanted strongly to mark an end to this minority psychology and manifest a new way of being in Western Thrace. Internal motives like these are particularly enabled by external factors such as spatial identity. It was mostly the 'streetwise', the 'people of the market', those who had 'come out in the society' that made the decision. Here what matters is the opportunity to be exposed to the multiplicity of meanings that different segments within and most importantly out of the community might be expressed. Moreover, as it was noted in the analysis, the more urban a space is the more tolerant to new practices.

Before looking at the specific ways that the experience in majority schooling is narrated it is important to look at the space where this takes place. Places have multiple meanings and are constantly on the make as Massey (2005) argued. In this context and from the minority participants' perspective the space of majority schooling takes on two main meanings deriving respectively from Lefebvre's (1991) differentiation between 'perceived' and 'lived' space. In the first dimension, Greek school is perceived as a space owned by the Greeks ('ours' and 'theirs') and also as a space of empowerment as opposed to minority school; a space where better education can be pursued and also a space through which an exodus is possible from the second to first class citizenship (as Taylan for example had implied it). On the other hand, as a lived space it may as well have the meaning of struggle to move out of the guest -feeling. Greek school as lived space may also mean space of disempowerment where in order for the young people to reach their goal (empowerment, equality) they need first to struggle against their construction and positioning in this space as the inferior Others.

Now the 'lived space' the experience of my participants is largely informed by Lefebvre's (1991) third dimension of space; the 'conceived space' (*ibid.*) the space as product of ideology, space as discursive construction. As it has been well outlined in the introduction Thrace is a space highly defined and sensitised by the prevailing ideologies of Nationalism. Educational institutes, both minority and mainstream are fundamental in securing and feeding this ideology. The way that the positioning and the experience of minority pupils at Greek school was narrated by them reflects this ideology. Participants don't just talk about them and 'a' Greek, the little one-to-one incidents they remember are inscribed in a broader 'us' and 'them', the Muslims and the Christians, the minority and the Greeks, the Turks and the Greeks. It is 'they' and 'I' or 'they' and 'us'. It is also 'Christianity' and 'Islam'. The narratives are narratives of tension over distance and tension over approaching between these two poles the 'they' and 'I'.

Moreover, the two poles take on qualities: The pole where my participants found themselves is scaled as bad, inferior, different. With Turkish-ness and Islam,

come along words like ‘microbe’, ‘bad’, ‘threat’, ‘damage’, ‘alien’. On the other side the distance between this and the Greek pole is preserved and demarcated by Greeks through ‘the way they look at us’, the ‘mocking’, the ‘derogation’, and more directly by exclusion (‘no one would pick us for their team’), and ‘casting away’ (‘we would stand outside in the days of crisis’). It is important to note here that this is the overriding picture that my data make and that there have been acknowledged rare occasions like that described in the last section with football friendship or other socialising that urban streetwise minority pupils had with their peers. The socialising would not take more space in participants’ narratives than ‘I was also friends with them’ or ‘we had coffees but nothing deeper’. Whereas the description of agony over the distance prevailed in the stories and was given through rich and emotional descriptions.

Here there is a need to return, to the conceptual framework I drew earlier, about symbolic power and the way it starts from objective differences that exist in the social space- in this case: different religion and language- to manipulate them and through their ‘symbolic transfiguration’ turn them into ‘symbolic hierarchies’ (Bourdieu, 1985: 731). Turning back to nationalism as the hegemonic ideology in Thrace, according to Soja (1993), “Hegemonic power does not simply manipulate naively given differences between individuals and social groups, it actively produces and reproduces difference as a key strategy to create and maintain modes of social and spatial division that are advantageous to its continued empowerment”. For the power modalities and division to be in place the differences need be in a mutually exclusive form in binaries. This sort of understanding and experience of Greek school is echoed in the narratives about Christianity that mutes and excludes Islam and the history lesson that along with ‘all the eyes spotting on us’ leaves little or no space, as Taner argued, for pupils to express their Turkish identifications.

In a study about the national narrative in the Greek educational system it was found that Turks and their culture “is the main axe in contrast to which the national identity is formed” (Avdela, 1997: 64). Moreover, “the influence of the ‘inferior’ cultures is experienced as trauma and it is repulsed” (ibid.). Inferiority

is ascribed to Turkish-ness and Islam as opposing ‘the West’ and ‘Europe’ with which Greece desires to be affiliated. Young (1990: 169), like Bourdieu and Soja mentioned above, also views group difference to be oppressive when it is defined “as absolute otherness, mutual exclusion, categorical opposition” and most importantly that this sort of oppressive construction “expresses a fear of making permeable the categorical border between oneself and the others” (ibid. :170).

Turks/Muslims are not just - and should be kept- in oppositional and inferior order from Greek/Christians, they also are perpetrators of a trauma the latter had suffered. In her analysis of history text-books Frangoudaki (1997: 367) explains that “Ottomans are the only ones, who are presented to have threatened the cultural national specificity and homogeneity”. Meltem and Cenk gave a glimpse of how this definition of threat or inferiority is internalised even if not fully at least to the degree that needs to be counteracted by them as Young (1990: 59) argued “the dominant culture's stereotyped and inferiorized images of the group must be internalized by group members at least to the extent that they are forced to react to behavior of others influenced by those images”.

Here we have an effect of the fourth face of oppression which according to Young (ibid) is “cultural imperialism”. Both the negation of Turkishness for the pupils (“teacher says you are a Greek citizen, end of story, does not consider you Turk”) and the simultaneous stress of their Turkishness by covert aggression (“all eyes were spotting us”) and in parallel the mute of their Muslim faith (“they never ask about what we do”) which is simultaneously loud when all pupils are in church and (“I stayed alone in class for hours, thinking why they are like this and I am not”) are expressions of such oppression.

According to Young (ibid.: 69), “Cultural imperialism involves the paradox of experiencing oneself as invisible at the same time that one is marked out as different. The invisibility comes about when dominant groups fail to recognize the perspective embodied in their cultural expressions as a perspective. These dominant cultural expressions often simply have little place for the experience of other groups, at most only mentioning or referring to them in stereotyped or

marginalized ways". Cultural imperialism at Greek school seems to result for some minority pupils in a major stress and identity crisis: First their Turkish identification becomes shamed and stigmatised ('after the history lesson how can I dare say I am Turk') and second they navigate through banal Orthodoxy and their taken for granted Muslim identity on one hand is activated by founding itself at the border with Christianity and on the other it is absolutely neglected and excluded from the dialogue in school.

Although as seen, the concern in the community is that minority pupils will become 'Christians' or 'Greeks' if they study at majority school, the small stories suggest that majority school gives them the opportunity to experience consciously and actively their Turkishness and Muslim faith. Through their interactions with the Other they understand these identities at different levels and in more insightful ways. The difference now takes other nuances and filled in with different colours; it is not just the 'Christians' but those who have a different sense of humour, are more open, talk about different things, have different mentality etc.

In this theatre of interactions, the minority pupils who come with higher linguistic and symbolic capital than others in Greek and Greek-ness are better positioned since they feel less 'shy', less 'ashamed' and less 'fearful' for being judged as inadequate ('I will ridicule myself'). This points to the way that the distance maintained and the fears and different constructions are two-fold and the minority pupils due to their feeling or fear of inferiority co-maintain. Derya from the village and Aliye from the town described their experience in very different ways just like Argun and İhsan. The way that the change of inner focus plays a paramount role was illustrated through Meltem's story. When she gained confidence by being able to speak good Greek her experience of Greek school radically changed. And this is where she placed the reason for the change; in herself.

This chapter demonstrated how the transition to the Greek school put identities into new perspectives and for natural or taken for granted made them sensitised

and consciously managed. However, identifications were still talked about and experienced as absolute entities of oppositional character as Greeks and Turks Christians and Muslims. The next chapter amongst other things, will show how these pupils were when they moved out of Thrace and they started questioning the absoluteness of these identifications.

Chapter 7

Moving out of Thrace for Higher Education: “Wherever you go, you are no one”

This chapter moves the focus on the experience of research participants that relates to the university and border crossing out of Thrace. It examines how university is aspired to, what meanings does it carry for participants and how does this new educational experience influence their identity narratives.

As shown in Chapter one in the mid-nineties, the Greek state granted a quota of 0.5% for members of the minority group to secure a place in Higher Education. This policy had a profound impact on the accessibility young people from the group had to Greek universities. Before the 2000s Turkey was the most common destination for Higher education so the newly opened opportunity for mobility within Greece was also significant.

In order to craft an intergenerational understanding of experiences and meanings around higher education the chapter is structured in two parts: The first one looks at the experiences around university before the 1990s. The second is concerned with the stories that the law of 0.5% created in the recent years. I am interested to explore how the outer crossing of the Thracian borders provided the participants with a chance to understand their identities by looking their reflections in the new mirrors that life of Thrace created. This is in accordance to the emphasis that participants themselves gave to these experiences.

7.1 Educational aspirations in the years of ‘no tradition in education’

In this section, I will look at stories of two Komotinians who were in their late sixties when we met: Bilgin and Nehir. I picked these stories because of their richness but also because they stand for significant changes in the community. Fragments of Nehir and Bilgin’s stories have been presented in previous chapters. Here, I will give a more holistic view on their stories starting from their early years of schooling and growing up in Komotini. This will help to highlight better the significance and meaning that access to Higher Education carried for them and their community. Bilgin and Nehir were amongst the first ‘minority’ University graduates in Thrace, from a Turkish and Greek university respectively.

7.1.1 The story of Nehir

Nehir nowadays is a well-respected doctor of the minority community. However, his parents were labourers: “I did not have any tradition in education around me, neither social nor financial”. Nehir was born in Komotini, in a Turkish neighbourhood near the centre and he attended primary school at *Idadiye*. At his school, his teachers were ‘metaklitoi’ (sent from Turkey). Nehir felt very inspired by them: “the idea was born in my head that I had to study at the University”.

This innovative idea was at odds with the ideas that his family carried. “My mother wanted me to learn a craft. She was planning to send me to Edison¹⁵³. For me, this was too low. The thought of sending me to Turkey¹⁵⁴ would make her ill, and she was very reluctant about taking me to *Celâl Bayar*. One day, little Nehir and his mother were working in the tobacco field when they heard by a passer-by that it was the last day to apply for *Celâl Bayar*’s entry exams. “When I heard it, I threw away the basket with the tobacco and told my mum ‘I am not

¹⁵³ A technical school of the time in Komotini

¹⁵⁴ “In those times there were five ten children at the best secondary schools in Turkey”, Nehir explained

working, let's go now to *Celâl Bayar* to register’’. His mother followed him only to find out that the deadline was the day before. The case seemed to be lost but Nehir’s mother insisted and said to the Head of School: “How could I have known? I spend all day in the tobacco field. Register my son”.

That’s how it all started. Nehir graduated from *Celâl Bayar*, which due to the ‘golden years’ was back then “an exemplar school”, as he said, and entered a Turkish University. In 1967 the Junta regime in Greece gave the opportunity to minority Thracians who were enrolled at Turkish Universities to transfer their student status freely to a Greek university. Nehir with other 29 as he said, decided to take this chance. All of them enrolled at the University of Thessaloniki and as he noted “After we graduated and until the affirmative law in 1996 there was no-one from the minority in the Greek Universities”.

‘Why did you decide to transfer your student status in Greece?’, I asked. “By idealism”, he replied, “the minority was backwards. We would be those who would open the way. We ought to study in Greek universities, to learn well Greek. A senior used to say back then that just a couple of people within the whole group were competent in Greek those times”. Nehir associated backwardness with the lack of education (very few at the time were at Turkish universities and almost no one fluent in Greek). The decision was inspired by ‘idealism’ as he said, in order to bring a change in the community and break the backwardness. These thirty people, all men, became the yeast for the creation of the first high-status professionals and intellectuals in the group who were also competent in Greek. Nehir reflected on the impact that this had on Thrace both for the minority community but also the majority people. “There was the first lawyer from the community, a minority lawyer! This was unprecedented!”.

As I understood from other narratives, it was very important back then that people felt that had professionals ‘of their own’ to turn to not only because they could easily communicate together but also because they could trust them. On the other hand, according to Nehir, people from the local majority were not very happy with this emerging class of minority professionals. “It was 1973 and we

were at the court in Komotini, our first lawyer was there and I heard two women saying: “Our biggest mistake was that we let them establish *Celâl Bayar*; see now, they even became lawyers”. ‘Our big mistake’, Nehir repeated with emphasis: “We should have remained illiterate, this is what they believed. The central policy has a great support amongst the public opinion!”. Nehir emphasised a sense of antagonism between minority-majority and in the words ‘we let them’, ‘our mistake’ he signified the superiority feeling he would perceive from the majority and at the same time the victory that he and his peers succeeded against it.

7.1.2 The story of Bilgin

Bilgin, nowadays a doctor, like Nehir, comes from a poor and ‘illiterate’ family as he said. He remembers his father with a friend standing out of a pharmacy in Komotini not being able to understand the note in Greek that the owner had left on the door. His mother passed away “without having learnt letters”. Like Nehir and many Komotinian males of the times, he also graduated from *Celâl Bayar* and then migrated to Turkey to study at the medical school. I asked him how his family influenced his aspirations regarding studies, “My parents were illiterate, for a lifetime scared, for a lifetime terrorised, for a lifetime suppressed. You would not expect from them to support you in your life. By necessity you grow up on your own; saying I am breaking up with this; staying with yourself.”

Fear as a layer of the ‘minority’ identity has been mentioned countless times in my participants’ stories. The notion of fear as a post-memory inheritance across generations was described by Bilgin too: “Fear is being taught by one’s grandpa, by one’s father; for a lifetime the fear has been instilled in us: ‘Be careful, you are minority, do not express yourself’, do not, do not, do not, and do not; from the family, from the state, from everywhere. Especially, if your parents are illiterate”. “To make you understand”, he continued, “I was a good student at school even getting medals. My parents instead of getting happy they would always feel afraid. They had the fear; they could not overcome it; they were illiterate.” Bilgin commented on the way fear comes down from generation to

generation not necessarily in words but as an embodied image: “Usually they would not tell me anything... but the fear, the terror, and they were not saying anything. It was me that I could notice scared, fearful people, closed into themselves”.

This heavy shadow of fear that parents cast on Bilgin’s life led him to activate his resistance strategies by taking distance from it, ‘staying with himself’ and ‘breaking up with this’. When he registered to Komotini’s football academy for the first time he started relating to the ‘Other’ “and therefore, I grew up differently in a way. When you relate, when you live together, when you grow up together...” Bilgin did not name what particularly motivated him to study at University he just said: “it was random; I did not have this goal during *Gimnasio* and *Likio*, I decided it later”. But maybe it was the confidence he gained by his interaction and ‘relation’ to the majority that influenced this aspiration. This assumption stems from the significant narrative weight that he gave to these experiences in between household fear and commence of university studies.

The way he took his decision for studying in Turkey must have been typical of that time: “Those years, it was of our best interest to study in Turkey. Turkish Lira was very low; it was better for us financially and we knew the language, as well. At the admission exams the competition was amongst foreigners, so we had an advantage as native Turkish speakers”. Bilgin had noted earlier that he could not expect support for his life from his ‘fearful’, ‘illiterate’ parents. However, they supported his studies hugely: “I knew that I was a worker’s child and the hardships my family was going through and I was telling myself that I should finish my studies soon so that my father can return. Because he went to work on the ships to fund my studies. He abandoned his home for six years. My mother has been left alone in Komotini doing embroidery work”.

A similar theme appears here as in Nehir’s story. Both Nehir’s mother and Bilgin’s parents were too afraid, or/and had limited experiences that constrained them from aspiring anything other for their sons than to become skilled labourers. Nevertheless, once Nehir and Bilgin appeared certain and decisive on

their educational aspirations, it is as if they passed back to their parents their own confidence and determination. Bilgin's father changed his life radically to support his studies and Nehir's mother did not hesitate to confront the Head of *Celâl Bayar* demanding her son's registration. The parents' fear meets the children's hope and confidence.

Bilgin's transition to university made him debunk gradually the impression he seems to had previously internalised that he was mentally inferior: "Everywhere, you know, it is the best students that make it to the medical schools. However, I discovered that I did not need to repeat any exams. Therefore, I was not any inferior from the best students in Turkey. If someone is appropriately equipped nobody in the world is an idiot. The essence is to have been given the essentials and then you can manage". From the context of his story the essentials that he feels were not given to him was 'a positive approach' from his parents and a good school.

Bilgin explained how unprepared he felt for the university due to the situation at *Celâl Bayar*: "I do not hide that I struggled very much during the first year: Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry. Because in *Celâl Bayar* classes were not taking place, 'metaklitoi' teachers were not sent. Many years were passing by without having even an hour on these subjects". Most importantly his graduation from the university carried a significant symbolic meaning not only for his family but the whole community: "With great efforts we made huge leaps, can you imagine my parents to be illiterate and me to have become a doctor? These have been huge steps".

The leap from 'illiteracy' to higher education that signifies a leap in educational aspirations within the community brought an exit from fear and entrance to dynamic rights' claim. "But I want to stress that for this leap we struggled really much and we paid a high price for. Did I need to go on hunger strike?" The hunger strike Bilgin referred to was one of the first protests in the community against the Greek state policies. Bilgin and other young people when they returned from Turkey as university graduates were met with the state's decision

not to recognise their degrees depriving them of professional rights in Greece. This policy was not outspoken but like all other measures of discrimination of the same period was taking place by its effects. The applications for grant of degrees' equivalence were received by the Greek authorities but the recognition of the degrees would never be registered.

Bilgin, during his years in Turkey, had developed a new sense of belongingness to Thrace and having broken with the local famil(y)ar cycle of fear, he felt empowered to claim it upon his return: "I did not have another choice but to do it. I said this fatherland is mine. I went to Turkey, I studied there but I left my parents back. It is here that I was born, here I grew up and from the very first day, my dream was to return here. But some did not respect my dream". Bilgin was thirsty to return to his homeland and start practising his profession: "I arrived in Thrace at night, I could not wait for the dawn to come and I was faced with all these. These things force you to give a battle, I was not such person at university, I was avoiding rallies, I was far from all these but the circumstances force you. The goal was sacred; we fought for our bread, for our work."

Bilgin remembered all the personal struggle in the years until his university degree was recognised in Greece: "Those four years that I was far from medicine I used to work fourteen hours a day without insurance in a small factory while I had agreed with the hospital's director to be there at the visiting times wearing the white robe so I would not forget Medicine. After the strike, we were taken to the hospital and the doctors denied to examine us, we went there fearful and not a single colleague came to see us. After the strike I was also banned from the visiting hours. They did not make it personal but the council made a decision that would exclude me." The local majority appears here to reproduce the neglect that the State expressed towards the minority group. The doctors of the hospital refused their professional duty to examine the hunger strikers as patients and Bilgin could not anymore feel 'colleague' of them, as his access to the hospital that before was granted to him as a favour, was now banned as a sort of punishment after his strike. Does this mean that the Greek doctors did not mind

giving a favour to Bilgin as long as he did not claim to be equal and not indebted as favoured?

This section illustrated how far from people's lives in Rodope was Higher Education in the past. The first generation of graduates from *Celâl Bayar* started changing the landscape of local educational aspirations and became pioneers. Individuals journeys to higher education had a meaning much broader than personal and concerned the whole community signifying important changes and a new dynamic that started being created by the first university graduates. Those challenged the local status-quo both in the immediate social space by claiming equal rights to the locals (taking professions so far exclusively occupied by majority) and asking an equal treatment by the State.

7.2 Introducing the post-1990s stories

Nehir noted earlier that after the thirty 'idealists' in the 1960s there were not other minority graduates from Greek universities until the affirmative action's introduction in 1996. Haluk, who entered the Turkish university in 1995 said: "Back then nobody was at the Greek university, no one would dare. I did not take the Greek exams, I was telling myself that I would not succeed, it was easier for me to go to Turkey. There they have a special quota for foreigners, the chance to be accepted was much higher there". With the affirmative law for the first time, Greece became a realistic aspiration for university studies and the volume of educational migration waves to Turkey decreased in favour of the Greek universities.

Younger participants' narratives did not have the heroic spirit that characterises those of Nehir and Bilgin but, as it will be shown, a more exploratory character. The affect of the affirmative action must have been significant in that sense. Most of the people now talk about an opportunity that 'was given to them' and how 'it opened for them' new horizons whereas, Nehir and Bilgin talked about the opportunities and horizons they created almost by themselves. Nurcan commented on that: "In our times (the eighties), because of all that was going on

in minority education we were over making efforts to prove ourselves. To prove that we are not what they talked about us, to prove that we could. I consider *posostosi*¹⁵⁵ more negative than positive measure because it makes children relaxed and not making the effort. I would never accept *posostosi* for myself; I would never accept to enter medical school with a low grade”.

7.2.1 Views on the Law of 0.5% (*posostosi*)

“Nobody came to explain in any way to the people here why one’s neighbour, Kazim, will enter university with five while his own child needs to score sixteen.¹⁵⁶ How do you expect such a thing to be accepted in a country that does not know what affirmative action means?” Manolis, a majority Komotinian, said. In the anti-minority speech that I heard quite often in Komotini by some Christians *posostosi* was always one of the things they were accusing the Greek state and the Muslims for: ‘They get into Law School with 5 and then the level of the studies drops for our children’.

Kerem in his early twenties have made great efforts on very little financial resources - he could not afford any *frodistirio*- to prepare for the university exams, he succeeded in the medical school with the support of *posostosi* and when I met him, he was a devoted student of his science. The first statement he made to me regarding university was: “In the exams I scored fourteen, I did not deserve medicine”. I replied, ‘of course you did’ and he said, “Yes, this is what I am trying to prove now, that I deserve to be here. I see the other students I think their parents exercised much pressure on them to enter medicine school, now they live the student life and they do not care at all about the lessons as if they do not want to become doctors. They pass the exams and take degree by cheating”.

Kerem has internalised the belief of many that his place at university is undeserved as it was only due to *posostosi*. Billur, a girl in her early twenties like Kerem, studying Law was in the same apologetic lines: “I entered Law

¹⁵⁵ A brief way to refer to the 0.5% quota for the admission at the universities

¹⁵⁶ In a scale from 0-20

School with thirteen, which is a low grade for Law School. If I were to take the exams now I would have written much better. There are also exceptions, a friend of mine entered Medicine with 18.5.” Billur, a young woman in Kerem’s age and also in a Greek university, proceeded with explaining why posostosi was necessary for most students like her “We enter university because we have ‘posostosi’. In secondary school we do not build subject knowledge foundations, we mostly still struggle to learn Greek. I was never taught Geography, for example, we had only one teacher for the whole school, probably he did not have time. No matter how well you score in the other subjects in essay-writing by all means your general score will drop dramatically”. Billur believes, like Kerem, that to be given the placement at the university does not mean much if she later can not prove that she can cope with the subjects: “The point is not to enter university using posostosi, but how much effort you make at the university and how much you study. Someone may enter with a high grade and then do nothing or someone might enter with a low grade and being very determined to do very well”.

On one hand, the consensus that posostosi is necessary but on the other the scepticism about it as was a very common approach to the issue amongst my participants. Both Kerem and Billur expressed this scepticism themselves. Meltem expressed this dual understanding in a very illustrative way: “*Posostosi* is both good and bad. On one hand it should exist because I cannot write an essay as good as a Greek would. On the other hand, it is bad because children do not have a goal; they think that even if they do not study, they will get a university placement somewhere. You will see children who are university students and do not know anything, not even the basics because they do not have any foundation from school”. Aliye similarly expressed her scepticism: “It is the truth that this law allowed us to be more relaxed. When I was at school, I was very happy to have it, but now I consider it a drawback for us. In fact, we do not study well; it happens in some way conscious or not it is in our mind that all right I will enter somewhere”.

The psychological effect of the law that makes students relaxed as they said needs to be combined with the general absence of tradition in higher education studies around them and also the great struggle they face at mainstream school regarding Greek language competence. The affirmative law has been a remedy to the problem of educational disadvantage for the minority students, coming from the top. As the participants argued, this sort of remedy created an opportunity but mostly in a gambling fashion. The opportunity to enter university is given but like a ticket won in a lottery. In such a meteoric setting students face frustration, the need to prove themselves while it perpetuates the sense of dependency that is strongly expressed within the community in various situations. The dependency sense finds its expression here in the apologetic tone in the voice of students who took advantage of the affirmative action.

One of the first things I was told in Rodope about posostosi was that is like the state is fixing the roof of a house in ruins. Agah explained: “When primary school is a room from the mosque this child will never reach university” pointing out the lack of a sustainable and grounded strategy to address the educational issues that community faces. Haluk, on the other hand, when talking about posostosi spoke about it in very positive terms placing his emphasis in the opportunity it gave to minority Thracians to experience and taste Greece: “It was the cleverest thing Greece ever did for the community. It is a good and clever law because these children have a very different approach. First of all, they get to know the country where they live and they face issues that concern this country, for example, the situation in the Greek universities. Someone who goes to study in a Turkish university gets to know the Turkish reality. The average population here, especially those from the villages, do not know the country where they live. We are a closed society they do not care about what is going on in Greece. They should care more about Greece than Turkey. Tights with Turkey is a gordian knot that will never be disentangled. Is a phantasy that will never drop”. This aspect is what the chapter will focus on the exodus from Thrace.

7.2.2 University: a blurred and ‘abstract’ aspiration

The first reflexes in the group regarding the new opportunity to access higher education in Greece were slow and the first year of law’s introduction not all university placements on offer were taken. Data cited in Yağcıoğlu (2004: 301) suggest that from the 334 positions on offer to minority school graduates, only 126 were sought after. Similarly, in 1998 from the 464 positions reserved only 112 were taken. Whereas, according to Tsitselikis (2012: 503) in 1996 from the average of 400 positions in offer only 96 were taken, 110 in 1997, 109 in 1998, 113 in 1999, 69 in 2000, 135 in 2001 and 178 taken in 2002. In 2012-13 the year of my fieldwork, people in Komotini were explaining that the demand is now greater than the offer. They argued that it became hard again to secure a place at the university since the competition amongst the applicants is higher. Whereas, some informants felt that pupils from Xanthi, the neighbouring prefecture to Rodope, are in a more privileged position because they speak better Greek than them.

Cenk described the change within his community: “When I went to the University of Thessaloniki in 1999 there were not even ten of us there, maybe we were three or five. In the next three years, we became hundreds. They wanted to see what this thing, called university is and to live this experience. The number started rising dramatically”. Cenk emphasised curiosity as the main motive that gradually led more young people to take advantage of the law. He explains both the low initial number of applicants and curiosity as motive, by the unprecedented of this opportunity and experience for members of the group. Nehir had stressed earlier the huge gap between the late 1960s and the early 2000s when people from the community were absent from Greek higher education.

The way Cenk talked about curiosity: “they wanted to see what this thing, called university is; to live this experience” reminded me the way elderly people had described their trips to Turkey back in the late 1950s, for the teaching academies. They were overwhelmed with curiosity for the unknown and seeing new things out of Thrace. A man, in his seventies today, told me about his trip to study in

Turkey in 1959: “I wanted to leave the village, to see...we would go as a group, Turkey bought our tickets we got on the train and until we reached Turkey our faces were all black. We were for the whole trip hanging out of the windows; we wanted to look out and see the places”.

The lack of experiences in higher education in their immediate environment and hence the lack of guidance and advice were emphasised by younger participants. They believe that these factors did not enable the development of aspirations for Higher Education to take a clear shape and form: “They want to go to university but this is all very abstract”, said Meltem, “they have no clear aim, they do not know what they want to study and this is because their parents are not able to give any advice.”

The scarcity of experience as resource to aspiring, points to Appadurai’s understanding of aspiration as cultural capacity: “Because the better off, by definition, have a more complex experience of the relation between a wide range of ends and means, because they have a bigger stock of available experiences of the relationship of aspirations and outcomes, because they are in a better position to explore and harvest diverse experiences of exploration and trial, because of their many opportunities to link material goods and immediate opportunities to more general and generic possibilities and options” (Appadurai, 2004: 68). We can then interpret Meltem’s explaining of ‘abstract’ aspiring in this context. As a lack of relevant experiences within the group that produce a lower capacity to aspire. For example, the story of Nehir earlier illustrated the low aspirations of his parents for him: to become a skilled apprentice.

This is why people who have had this experience of following the journey into higher education are a significant resource for generating aspirations to the others and function as role models. Meltem explained that she personally was privileged because her sister had studied in a Turkish university and therefore she had someone able to advise her. The same applied for Argun, whose brother as seen in chapter four had studied at a Turkish university: “I had in my mind to study. I wanted it very much. For me, it was basically all due to my brother. He

was always five steps ahead of me and he was showing me the way. If I were alone, if I did not have my brother, I would not have managed to go to the university. He opened the way for me. He was advising and guiding me. If you have someone to see him advancing and doing nice things, then you think why I shall not do the same”.

The great significance of role models to follow and the way the lack of them created a vacuum between what could be at the back of one’s mind and what one could clearly articulate as a realistic aspiration was stressed by other participants too. Nazli explained: “In high-school we were not considering to study at the university; our goal was to manage to graduate from Gimnasio and Likio and then we would see. We did not have people before us to see, people who studied and graduated. Especially for the girls when we finish school it is considered the time to get married. Before me, no other girls from my village had been at the university. Two friends and I we were the first females to go. My family wanted me to study”.

Nazli’s parents only had school primary experience, but she already had higher educational aspirations; to graduate from Likio... ‘and then she would see’. This expression shows the uncertainty regarding the university. Nazli could not imagine it as something tangible since she had not seen it happening around her. She, as a girl was supposed to marry after school just as all other girls in her village did. When she and her two friends made it to university, the landscape of what is possible changed not just for themselves but for the other girls of their village too.

The social expectations for marriage are what probably gave a dramatic tone to Lale’s narrative about her dreams to enter university: “I wanted so much to study at the university! My parents also wanted it very much and so did I. It was something that had to be done. Something like an obligation. I will certainly become something. My parents had not studied. Before the announcement of the results I was thinking: ‘What will I do, if I don’t pass?’ These years that I have been preparing for the university exams, I was feeling terrible psychologically.

I was thinking that my life would end if I did not pass. If I did not pass, my life would be over. I did not even want to think about it. It was something that had to be done”.

The stress that Azmi experienced for getting into secondary education when Lale was relaxed (chapter four), Lale felt it when she was uncertain if she would enter higher education. For her there was no alternative; either this or her life would be over. Unlike Argun’s external influence by his brother, Lale had a very strong internal drive; as a sense of duty and mission: she had to become something. By mentioning that her parents had not studied, she emphasises the size of the leap for her that also explains her anguish about it.

Another dimension of the abstractedness of the aspiration for higher education came through expressions of not knowing how to achieve the goal or feeling unable to reach it. Meltem said about it: “I was not studying at school, I only wanted to advance the class and get a good grade. I did not know how to study and how to learn. Anyway, the children here know that they will get a place in a university, they do not worry about it”. Here Meltem relates posostosi with pupils’ efforts at school. One one hand, she felt that she did not know how to study her lessons, how to learn but on the other hand, the thought that anyway she would get a place at the university was comforting.

Agah in similar lines noted: “At school I was not studying because I did not understand, I had no clue what was going on. In my mind, I knew that I had to go to the university. Otherwise I would not be able to do anything in my life. I was thinking about it, but I did not know how I could make it. I was telling myself that in the way that I was passing each grade I would pass into the university too.” For Agah, although the goal appears clear the road leading to it was very uncertain ‘I did not know how to do it’. Passing each grade was an encouraging process for Agah, and seems that it constituted already a success especially taking into account that he was feeling clueless at school as he could not understand what was going on.

The lack of know-how and generally information was emphasised by Derya too, along with her feeling of have opened the way for the next generations in her locality. “Now, another person and I are an example for the other children. I have been the first child ever from the village who went to a Greek high-school (at the end of the 00s). Imagine that in those times we had no computers and the internet, people did not know how to look for things. We did not have an idol to ask ‘how?’” Derya being from a village stresses the isolation she experienced. University is a ‘thing’ somewhere far from her village and she felt that it was very difficult to find guidance on how to reach it.

On the other hand, and despite this sense of isolation, education has been very much valued in Derya’s family. Although she was a ‘village girl’ she was the first from her village to go to Greek high-school and later University. When he was young, her father went to Celâl Bayar “but he stopped because he needed to work to support my uncle’s studies in Turkey”. The peasant family could not afford education for all, Derya’s father withdrew from school to work, but “he also had an idol to set goals, he had his brother. So much he wanted to study. He still has all his notebooks where he has re-written all his homework from school in nice handwriting”. Having grown up in an environment of cancelled educational aspirations, Derya was supported hugely by her father despite the challenges to get into higher education herself.

7.3 At the University: The academic experience

After exploring the ways that people from the group have perceived posostosi, the following sections will look at participants’ experience at the university in recent years, both in Greece and Turkey. This will be looked at two angles: one as an academic experience, and the other as the experience of crossing the Thracian boundaries.

As regards academic experience Agah and Argun’s narratives will be the main source while insights from other participants will be complementing the picture. I chose to present the stories of Agah and Argun in more detail because they

were built in very different terms. Agah talks about his experience when he entered a Turkish University and Argun when he entered a Greek one. Both stories unfolded five- six years ago. What is on focus here is the way that their identity as learners got contested, shifted and developed in their transition from high-school in Rodope to Greek/Turkish university respectively.

7.3.1 From ‘clueless’ to understanding

Although most of Agah’ friends took the advantage of posostosi and entered a Greek university he wanted to study in Turkey: “I wanted so much to go to Istanbul. I could see it on TV and I liked it very much. My uncle studied there, at his times everyone who wanted to go to the university would go to Turkey. My grandmother had to buy a house there. I was visiting, I was strolling around Bosphorus with my grandpa and I loved it. To get the scholarship, I travelled to Ankara to sit for the exams. I only wanted to go to Istanbul. You cannot imagine my happiness when I passed”.

Apart from his textbooks, the only exposure to books Agah had in his childhood were the books that his uncle would fetch for him from Turkey: “In my childhood my uncle had bought me children’s books and you know, I read each of them many times, I liked them. If my parents had given me books, I would have read them too”. Like above in Derya’s story; only one of the siblings could be funded to remain in education for longer.

The transition to the Turkish University for Agah was life changing as he put it himself. From being in an educational space where he could not understand and was feeling lost, moved to an educational space where he could finally understand ‘what was going on’: “In secondary school the teacher was speaking and I was asking the person next to me ‘what is she talking about?’ I could not understand the lessons; language was my big problem. In high-school they were teaching us but I could not understand. At university, I started studying because I could understand the language. When I started understanding, I started changing. It is not that I could understand Turkish perfectly but way better than Greek.”

In combination with understanding, a second big change made Agah thirsty for reading: "When I went to Turkey, my life changed. Before I went to Turkey, I was a very conservative person; I was not like this. During *Ramadan*¹⁵⁷, I was going to the mosque every day to pray. In Istanbul, I understood that religion is a political thing. Since that day, I started reading! And books, of course, helped me a lot. We were taught philosophy in school but I only understood it when in Turkey. At school, I could not understand much. I started looking up for things on the internet. I read about the Enlightenment".

Agah found himself in a completely new world. He was in a big metropolis out of his little village in Rodope and could finally understand books and teachers. A structural pile of himself, religion, suddenly collapsed leaving space for new explorations; He felt this change as leaving behind his conservative self. This narrative is interesting if we put it in the context of previous chapters. One of the main fears within the community is that young Muslims might lose their religion and culture at Greek school. Agah felt indeed threatened and hurt at Greek school when one of his classmates told him 'You will become a Christian' and he strengthened in resistance his Muslim identity. However, it was in Turkey that he 'lost his religion'. The story illustrates that various spaces do not have essential characteristics and cannot influence their inhabitants or passers-by in only one way. On the contrary, they are open to multiple negotiations of meanings.

However, Agah had a long way to cover, after all the years he felt that had been wasted at school in Rodope. "At the hall of residence where I lived all the others were playing games, I was staying in my room to study, because books would help in my development. I had lost many years". At the beginning, Agah encountered many difficulties. "On the first year, I wrote an essay that was marked with only 2/20 points! I did not know how or what I had to do. Imagine we had a multiple choice test and I did not even know that I had to circle one

¹⁵⁷ Islamic fasting period

option! Lessons were very difficult to me. What I did is that I found the Turkish high-school textbooks and started reading those first.”

7.3.2 Falling in uncharted waters

Argun’s experience at a Technical Higher Education Institute (TEI) in Greece was the other way round than that of Agah, as he found himself in a space where he could not understand anything: “During high-school, I thought that I knew Greek. When I went to TEI I realised that I knew nothing; neither the language nor the subjects. I could not understand the professor at all, even when he was trying to explain to me one-to-one. Everything was in Greek so I could not understand even the main point of each lesson”.

There are two issues here: one is competency in Greek and the other, the foundations of subject knowledge. “I was going to the lessons; in the same way, I was getting in the class, in the same way, I was getting out”, said Argun to show that he did not comprehend anything during the class. Another informant described the same blank feeling: “Like little sheep we go into the university lecture theatre and like little sheep we get out; we do not understand anything”.

Apart from the low competency in Greek, young people with a very low mark from school often experience a huge gap to cover in subject knowledge. Umut said about it: “When you enter university with five¹⁵⁸, everything is extremely difficult. They go there the first day, they understand nothing; they go the second, they understand nothing. Afterwards, they close themselves in their room for five years and then they give up. Only those from the city or those with money, who can afford to take private lessons, advance.”

Argun also mentioned that almost all students from his village gave up: “Nothing was easy. From our village only Lale and I stayed at the university; all the others gave up. I also did not know what to do. In the beginning, all subjects were extremely difficult for me. My brother was encouraging me to continue”.

¹⁵⁸ The marking scale at Greek schools is 0-20. 5 is a very low mark. Those with the highest marks get into the most demanded university schools.

Likewise, Kerem had considered giving up already the first day: “they gave me a pile of very thick books, I carried them to my room, sat and started browsing them; endless pages. This was the moment I started crying and I said it is impossible, there is no way I will make it. I thought to go home but then I thought I will stay just for a month and I will leave then”.¹⁵⁹

According to Argun, those who gave up, all regretted it: “Some of them went to study in Turkey. Those who gave up did it for two reasons: either because the subjects were very difficult or because they were overwhelmed with the expenses”. The cost is a crucial element that defines whether young people will leave Thrace to study at the university or not. During my fieldwork, I kept on hearing about students who succeeded to university but they would not go for financial reasons.

Umut left the University where he first got a place and the second year went to another: “If I were not in this University that provides me with a room at the hall of residence for the length of my studies, I would not be here. Now I know that having the room and food in the hall of residence I will somehow manage. If I were at the other one, that free accommodation was not certain, every single month I would be stressed: has my father been fired from his job or not? How will the tobacco crop be this year? Will we have hail or not?”

Argun did not give up. His brother kept on encouraging him until the day everything changed in his mind and Argun gained his confidence that he could make it: “In the second semester, I was sitting with a friend during a lecture and then he turned to me and asked: ‘dude, what does this word mean?’. This moment changed it all; it was as if he gave me a new idea: It was not only me! And then another friend who was a better student than me failed one lesson which I passed. This gave me courage”. This description echoes previous descriptions of Meltem, Hasan, Ercan of an internalised image of ‘minority-ness’ to which every difficulty is attributed. Argun realised that it was not only

¹⁵⁹ The day I am writing these lines Kerem got his degree.

him that like him the native Greeks were struggling too and this gave him new confidence on his struggle.

The strategy that both Argun and Umut developed at university was to observe the behaviour of the others. Umut said: “I used to watch the other students around me, what are they doing, where do they go, how, why, why this, why that. I was observing the others’ methods and I was trying to do the same”. On a similar note, Argun said about himself: “I was watching what the others were doing and I was drawing conclusions. Shall I do this? Shall I do that? I went there with the aim to graduate. I wanted to challenge myself to see if I can succeed”.

7.4 The experience out of Thrace: ‘Wherever you go you are no one’

“Istanbul helped me so much. I learnt much more from Istanbul than from the university. I met people from all over the world”, Agah said showing how moving out of Thrace was a much richer and rounded gain for him than the university and the degree itself. This section explores this aspect of the experience around university; the Thracian borders’ crossing. The experience of young people out of Thrace is extremely significant regarding their identity. Considering Western Thrace a ‘borderland’ between Greece and Turkey, it is interesting to look at how identity is experienced, negotiated, contested, performed, informed, when people from the borderland find themselves in either ‘Greece’ or ‘Turkey’; beyond the Nestos and Evros rivers respectively.¹⁶⁰

7.4.1 Moving beyond the Evros /Meriç

Agah has lived what more or less he would describe as a Turkish life in his village in Rodope: He speaks Turkish at home, his family watches Turkish TV, his grandmother knows more about Ankara and Istanbul and less about the name

¹⁶⁰ The *Evros/Meriç* river is the border between Western Thrace and Turkey. Nestos is the internal border between Thrace and the rest of Greece.

of Greek public services, as he said, “Most people from the minority know nothing for the region. They watch Turkish TV; they know nothing. I tell my grandma I am going to KEP; she does not know what it is. I tell her ELTA¹⁶¹ she does not know what it is. They know nothing about Greece. We live in the area and we don’t know anything about it. We only care about what is happening in Ankara and Istanbul and know nothing about what is going on in Greece”.

Agah has family members who decided to migrate to Turkey when they were discriminated against in Thrace for being ‘Turks’. He lives in the ‘Turkish’ neighbourhood of his village practising many elements of ‘Turkish’ culture. When Agah and I became friends on Facebook, I saw a photo of him with his university mates in Turkey. One of his friends put a title to the photo: “With our Greek friend, Agah.” When we were sitting at the park of *Ayia Paraskevi* in Komotini talking about his story he said: “It is not nice to label people. They put a label on you wherever you go”. I asked, ‘What label did they put on you in Turkey?’ “There, they were telling me, like a joke, ‘you are Greek’” Agah said and chuckled. Derya’s sister said without laughing: “When you go to Turkey, you are Greek. Here, you are Turk or Muslim. When you go there you become another person, when you come here you are yet another person; wherever you go you are nothing. The time of ‘we are all humans’ is passed; we are nothing”.

Durul, who migrated to Turkey already from secondary-school and continued for his university degree there talked in similar lines: “I have been a foreigner everywhere since I was ten. In Turkey I was a stranger they called me ‘giaour’.¹⁶² When I was coming here I was foreigner again because I could not speak the language of the basic society. Here when I was going out for a drink I could not speak in Greek, I could not understand; you can not imagine the loneliness. In Turkey, you say you come from Greece and they say ‘he is Greek’; Each one has their own belief, they have no idea, they do not care”.

¹⁶¹ KEP and ELTA are abbreviations of Greek public services

¹⁶² Expression from the Ottoman times meaning the unfaithful/non-Muslim subject of the Empire.

Derya's sister, who was nineteen during the interview, had the same problem; no one would understand. "In Turkey, they tell you that you are Greek, and I let it go, what shall I say? You explain for hours and they will not understand". But apart from the people she would socialise with, it was through other ways that she would not be accepted as Turk: "Because I am from Greece I need to pay fees. This scholarship that they give to the children here to study in Turkey, if you decide to live in Turkey after you graduate you need to return all the money back". The welcoming funding scheme stops being so welcoming when its recipients decide to stay in Turkey.

Agah also described the foreign feeling in Turkey, when I asked him how did he decided to start connecting with the Rum community in Istanbul: "I thought what am I going to do when I finish with my studies? Where am I going to live? It is very difficult to work in Turkey; you are a foreigner. You speak Turkish, but you are a foreigner. So I decided since I knew a second language, it was a chance to improve it, to learn Greek better. I got Greek books and was visiting Greek libraries in Istanbul".

7.4.2 Moving beyond the Nestos

Moving beyond the Nestos and crossing the borders from Thrace to the rest of Greece has been a very important experience for my participants. They find themselves in Greece, where they have always been but at the same time out of the locality where they grew up. "I created an image of what Greece is in the army and on my campus," said Cenk, very similarly to Meltem: "When I went to university, I felt for the first time that I am in Greece, that I live in Greece. Now things must be better; I have a little cousin who has Greek friends in Thrace". The main reason for Meltem's new feeling was not only that the university was far from Thrace so it was a different 'Greece', but also like her last comment shows because now she had the chance to mix and interact with Greeks in new ways.

Cenk explained: "People in Thessaloniki and Athens embraced me much more than people here. My best mate, Dimitris, in Thessaloniki, did not care about

what I am. Here in Thrace if someone says hello to me is forced ('me to zori'). Cenk set the symbolic border between Thrace and other spaces at the point where identity is free from strict 'negative' definitions: "In Thrace, you grow up and become an adult by learning what you are not and what you should not be". These words echo all the narratives that unfolded in previous chapters about decisions and experiences at the various educational spaces in Thrace. Most of the dilemmas and concerns in that context have been what the students are not and what they should not be 'We are not Christians', 'We should not become Greeks'.

Nehir commented on that symbolic border as well: "Here in Thrace, there is a special regime. It is the space of conflict. Out of here there is no conflict. Here you are asked to clash because this is the tradition". For Cenk the physical border that coincides with the symbolic border is the Nestos. He told me many times during the year of my fieldwork the words of his father that he fully supports, "My father, all his life used to say that from the Nestos and this side you are no one; neither Turk, nor Pomak, nor gipsy. From the Nestos and beyond you are a citizen. From the Nestos and beyond no one cares about who you are".

Another participant also differentiated the 'mentality' in and out of Thrace: "Here there is this mentality. From Thessaloniki and beyond is not the same. Here things are different: 'What my friend will say? What my neighbour? You are Muslim'. With the locals is not possible to make friends, here the people are more cautious. The main reason is religion. You are not allowed to become good friends with a girl. Here, for example, I cannot invite you to my home for a coffee, if I were in Thessaloniki, I would". Therefore, on various campuses in Greece young minority Thracians start developing more freely and less cautiously relations with Greeks. This brings on a different issue.

In Aliye's words, they need more or less to 'explain all their lives': "That is why I am telling you here in Komotini, we all know each other's presence, one the other, all together. So nobody will prompt us 'what kind of language do you speak?' or why do or don't you wear a scarf?" she said. Aliye emphasised the

difference when out of Thrace: “I was asked to give explanations, explanations, explanations: They were telling me you are Muslim and you do not wear a scarf, you are Muslim and you wear tight jeans, they were asking Komotini does not belong to Turkey? I was saying my name and then what kind of name is this? You are always compelled to give explanations, reasons, whereas in Komotini I was never obliged to explain anything to anyone. Simply because the others from Komotini; the Christians, they know about us”.

Adalet experienced the same: “They were saying their names: Zoe, Christina, I was saying Adalet. Where does your name come from they’d ask? From nowhere, I was saying it is Adalet. And I started explaining, I am Muslim, my name is Arabic and my mother tongue, Turkish. They were asking if I use a passport to come to Thessaloniki, they thought that Komotini is in another country! I was explaining that there is a minority group, they did not even know this. I was explaining all my life”.

Being caught up on explaining who they are, participants started researching about their identity and all that so far were taking for granted had to be re-known: Derya gave a nice example of this: “They were asking me why we wear a scarf and I searched a lot about it. We were talking a lot with my friends from the university, we had made a nice group, I was answering all their questions. Our religions have very little differences; they are very similar. Once I got into a church and I saw ... how do you call this woman?” – Panagia¹⁶³I replied. “And we saw Panagia wearing a scarf”.

Meltem, Altan, Taner and others also mentioned the research they started doing about their identities. Hence, moving out of Thrace seems that for some meant being re-introduced to themselves by understanding better who they are in positive terms (not by who they were not) while at the same time got to understand better the ‘Christians’/ ‘Greeks’ too. Going back to what Agah and Taner noted that no one at their Greek school cared to ask them anything about Islam and that any conversation around identity is taboo the experience then out

¹⁶³ Virgin Mary

of Thrace is significant in this respect as they come at the spot of the interest and are bombarded with questions about their ‘identity’.

However, taboo and stereotypical representations of the Muslim/Turkish identities are still found in the new environment. Participants have learned to be very cautious and develop strategies to overcome traps that could isolate them in their new spaces. “They ask you questions like ‘If we enter a war with Turkey, whom will you fight with?’, Taner said. “What would I say, that I will go with the side of Turkey? I would then become the black sheep in the Faculty; now I have the experience on how to talk. Searching for things, remaining silent, talking. In general, you always have to be filtering yourself”.

Umut also gradually developed his strategies after the experience he had when he firstly arrived at his campus. His roommate was visiting his parents: “When he returned and suddenly saw me in the room and heard my name and that I am from the minority he left all his stuff and disappeared for one week. He was terrified! When he came back, he was asking me if I served the Turkish army or if I have a Turkish citizenship”. Umut became very conscious about the way he would present himself after that: “First of all, I would never say my name first thing. I am talking to you honestly; you might think that this is not truth but... the first time is very ...I was trying to give someone the chance to at least to know me a bit. It is OK you can’t have everything”.

Şelale, on the other hand, used a different strategy: “At the university the first day, I met a girl her name was Anna. She was the one who asked first my phone number. She asked me what my name was. I told her and she did not make any comment. Most people when they hear your name they ask ‘what are you?’ Some days later we were in the same group and the talk came to religion. I said ‘I am Muslim’. Anna heard it and she gave me a look as if I were...even I do not know what. Since then she never talked to me again, she would see me and then turn her face to the other side. And what did I do? I changed. I started saying I am Greek but Muslim. Maybe, Anna thought I was a Turk.” Şelale decided to stress her Greek identity wherever she would need to say that she is Muslim. At the

same time, she made a clear implication to me that this is how she feels. She later explained “Some of us say they are Turks. I have argued with them; since you live in Greece you might feel Turk but you are not, you are Greek”.

7.4.3 The gravity back home: Where is home?

Durul as seen above when he moved to Turkey felt the image he had of himself distorted in others' eyes; he could not be seen as he felt being. Every attempt was a failure: “You tell them you are from Greece, and they say ‘ah he is Greek. However, his life in Turkey made him see his Turkishness in a different light, comparing it with Turkishness there. “We might be Turks here, and they are Turks there¹⁶⁴”. He explained: “Everything is very different. Even daily life is very different! Their food is very different; their olive oil is different. The first day I ate pilav at the hall of residence, I vomited. One day a teacher asked me to bring her something from her office. I did not know this word! I did not say that I did not know, I went to the office and was trying to figure out. You might think this is a detail but is a very good example”.

Agah as seen above, while in Istanbul after he felt a foreigner in Turkey, started systematically to learn/improve his Greek with the aim to return in Thrace. I asked him how he feels like after his return: “As if I live in Greece for the first time. I get to know the people from the beginning. I try to see from the other side of the meaning too”.

At the beginning of the chapter Bilgin explained that his homeland is where his home, parents and family are and that he was thirsty to return ‘home’ in Thrace. In the previous chapter we saw him explaining how his parents have always felt foreigners in Greece, ‘an alien body’ due to the oppression they experienced in the country. The interview we had ended with his words “I could have lived in Turkey. There were solutions but it was my choice to live here. I realised that either you want it or not your place (*o topos sou*) attracts you back”. Did not you feel a stranger (*xenos*) here? I asked. “How can I feel a stranger, it is here that I

¹⁶⁴ ‘Emeis borei na eimaste edo Tourkoi ki aytoi einai ekei Tourkoi.’

was born, my grandfather was born here. Sometimes others want to put you there but I never accepted this and I tried to become part of this society. I have struggled for this all my life and I think I succeeded”.

Bilgin here draws an interesting line between the locality ('o topos mou'), the physical geographical space where he feels rooted (he like his grandfather born there), and the 'society' where he needed to struggle to belong. One one hand the attraction to the locality and on the other, on this locality the alienation from 'the society'. Society here it is implied to mean Greek society. Cenk had made a similar statement when he said: "Younger people want now to belong to society, not only to the minority". 'Minority' therefore seems to be felt as not part of the society.

However, there is another 'society', the own society: "I came back to be in my society, to send my child to school. We feel freer here; my child will live its culture. The minority rights are here" Erem said. Here the place is connected to the minority rights, like minority schooling, an important reason for this informant to be back for being part of the 'own culture and society'. Being in his society gives him a sense of greater freedom too. His friend who was present in our talk added: "We had home in Turkey, it never crossed my mind to live there".

Melik said, "I want to live in Greece, if I were given a choice Turkey or Greece, I would say I am fine here". Melik continued saying something that no other participant ever mentioned: "If it were possible, I would call my self Greco-Turk or Turco-Greek. Why it is possible to be Greco-Japan GrecoAmerican and you cannot be GrecoTurk. I am Greek; I am Turks. We, the Greeks. We, the Turks. I say both; I have no problem why the others have problems? They cannot combine them."

Conclusion

This chapter looked at the past and recent experiences and meanings of young people from the group around higher education. Two lenses were mainly used to look at these. The first was the intergenerational differences especially with reference to the times pre and post-the 1990s while the second was the direction of border crossing that university studies required, to either Turkey or Greece.

The journey into higher education appears in the stories to be a significant journey into identities. In Thrace, everything is taken for granted by everyone and no one asks questions that feel unnecessary. Out of Thrace, minority Thracians are asked to explain their whole lives and selves to an audience that asks to know and understand starting from its preconceptions. This new demand: the explanation of self leads to a new need; rediscover and re-know the self from a non-for-granted position. Identity as a narrative is actualised again from a different starting point. This process appeared in some of the stories as a creative and liberating process. Liberating in the sense that there was space given for people to tell their story and creative in the sense that by saying this story they had to draw a new map. Andrews (2014: 87) argued that “Stories always exist in relation to other stories, of individuals and communities, and they rely upon these bonds in order to be ‘tellable’”. Out of Thrace, the tellability of identity stories changes since the bonds between one’s own story and the master narratives that cluster with it become more loose. The listener, an outsider of Thrace does not abide to these and the negotiation of identities’ projections are in relation to broader or different references.

However, this process was also described as frustrating by some participants exactly due to the need to adjust to a different narrative system of reference. The non-negotiable and strict definitions of identities when in Thrace as Turk (non-Greek)- Greek (non-Turk) become all challenged when the agents cross the borders out of Thrace to what is Turkey (non-Greece, non-Thrace) and Greece

(non-Turkey, non-Thrace). Due to the challenge and aporia¹⁶⁵ for the young people to reach a dialogic consensus on either their Greekness or Turkishness, the polar binaries which they grew up with, Thracian identity is realised as a new identity where one finds belonging. After the hybrid, border identity is realised by the self, through this process of ourcrossing Thrace, it is still neglected by the others in Thrace as incomprehensible ('why you cannot be GrecoTurk or TurcoGreek?'). This double boundedness of internal affirmation and external negation leads to the 'estranging' feeling of 'unhomeliness'. In the sense that Bhabha described it different from being homeless (Bhabha, 1994:9). Yet, for most participants 'home' is realised to be Thrace, this is why I talked in the thesis about the Western Thracian minority because this is the most secure home as described in the small stories.

Regarding higher education transitions and intergenerational differences, the aspiration, decision and transition to university has been presented very differently in stories before and after the 1990s reflecting the completely different societal context regarding education and educational aspirations. Before the 1990s, the leap to higher education symbolised a leap out of illiteracy and fear (like in Bilgin's story) and a dynamic new assertion of belongingness (as Nehir emphasised in his narrative). Moreover, due to these first streams of minority Thracians to Turkish universities the first class of educated professionals was created for the group opening up new dynamics of negotiating collective identity.

The stories of that era, some of which were presented here, have something vulnerable but also heroic. Vulnerable because as it was underlined the leap of aspiration was too big and heroic because it was made following an extremely strong and resilient internal motive. However, this path was conditioned as previous chapters demonstrated to enable mainly those young people who were living in Komotini, had the opportunity to attend Celâl Bayar and were predominantly males.

¹⁶⁵ In the ancient Greek meaning of the word: the lack of path, a blockage- and the modern Greek meaning a wonder

The stories after the 1990s are more coloured with the sense of an uncertain step. In the pre-1990s stories, agents were opening the way themselves for their aspirations and claim of identity (as powerful instead of powerless, assertive instead of obedient, educated instead of illiterate). In the post-1990s stories a path was given open and agents were invited to walk in feeling inadequate and undeserving for this as much as excited and curious. Although this time the opportunity was much wider as everyone could be considered privileged, not only males of Celâl Bayar with parents in Komotini, not everyone had the same capacity to follow the path.

Young people with not necessarily adequate competency in Greek or subject knowledge due to all the obstacles and challenges presented in previous chapters knew somehow that in the distant future they could potentially enter university but were uncertain if in the immediate future they would manage to advance from one grade to the other. This feeling underling the sense of the measure as fixing the roof without looking at the foundations.

The first years of *posostosi* the opportunity was there lighting in beacon but there were no networks of guidance and advice as very few people in the group have had experience of Greek universities in particular and Higher education in general. Moreover, Greece beyond the Nestos was a very unfamiliar place for most in the community and the financial means for supporting studies in a place where there were not relatives are most often scarce.

Nurcan expressed her disapproval of this measure for its aspect of making younger people passive recipients, beneficiaries whereas in her generation they ‘had to prove themselves’. However, the sense of guilt and the apologetic tone in most post-90s stories for being the recipient of sort of affirmative action brings also with it a different sort of ‘have to prove ourselves’ for the young people who benefit from it. This is an important aspect that needs further discussion. The way that minority young people are symbolically positioned vis-a-vis the Greek state is very different before and after the 1990s. Before the 1990s when the main

belief within the group- that reflects the hidden transcripts of the State in the confidential archives we have now access to - was that the State wanted to let them uneducated, ‘second- third class citizens. In this context, any manifestation of becoming educated was a personal and simultaneously collective step in the group for breaking oppression and claiming a non-hierarchical citizenship.

On the contrary, after posostosi minority students are positioned not as activists but rather as beneficiaries. Being treated by the state better than first class citizens (as majority complaints have it) or special class/weak citizens (as minority people feel it), the law of posostosi crafts for the minority students a special sort of citizenship, which they need to transform it themselves giving it their meaning: ‘I am now proving that I was worthy it, ‘what is at stake is not to enter but to graduate.

The quota of 0.5% for university access to members of the minority group was introduced in the mid-nineties as an attempt to restore justice in the aftermath of the oppressive policies in Thrace and the discrimination that minority suffered the previous decades. However, as seen in this chapter, despite the impressive numbers of group members that were given the opportunity to access higher education, to move out of Thrace and the impact that this had collectively on the group as a big upward social mobility leap the bottom line of dependency and the uncertainty of pursuing this new goal is in line with what has been learned to be ‘minority’. According to Young (1990: 39), “Justice should refer not only to distribution, but also to the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and co-operation”.

Chapters four, five and six discussed to great detail these conditions that affect young people’s development of aspirations and access to learning opportunities. The chapters drew a rich and complex diagram of urban and rural spaces, male and female experiences, minority and majority educational spaces, State, minority and majority master narratives. Posostosi was in itself a big story, it belongs to the narrative cluster of the State that in the new era of the post1990s

revises its oppressive policies. Yet, the small stories presented in this and previous chapters suggest that there is still much room for struggle on behalf of the minority members with the small stories being themselves a site of this struggle.

Chapter 8

Discussion

This study set out to explore, how do otherness and education in Rodope interrelate and shape both the be(com)ing and the learning of people from the group? The lens of exploration moved from the mountainous area of Rodope to the *yakka* and the plain regions; from the rural to the town and its market; from the representations of older people from the group to those of younger ones; from what is told at the public domain to what is told in private; from what used to be told in secret few decades ago in the Prefecture of Rodope to what is told in public nowadays, and finally from minority schools to Greek schools and from Thrace out of Thrace. In this chapter I pull out some of the main threads as they emerged across chapters to discuss the power of belonging and aspirations and the role of education in people's lives.

8.1 Meanings of Education

The thesis looked into the educational journeys of people from Western Thrace minority group across different times and educational spaces. But what education meant for different people at different times? Formal education seems to have been for all participants a passage; exiting from and entering in a life situation. The meanings that formal education has had for people from Rodope also appear to be inextricably linked to their capacity to aspire and sense of belonging.

In chapter 4, Umut explained that: "We don't set off for studies because it is difficult. People get disappointed and do not pursue it in the face of hardships". Even in the times, when very few from the rural Rodope, would continue schooling after the six years of primary education, it's not that they did not value

it, according to Umut. The practice of education, in Bourdieu terms, was at that point in time and in that area “excluded, either totally without examination, as unthinkable, or at the cost of the double negation which inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway refused and to love the inevitable” (Bourdieu, 1977: 77). These ‘dispositions’ stem from the ‘objective conditions’ of the life people had across many decades fostering, therefore, a collective consensus on what was for them and what was not.

In the stories I collected (with the exception of Lokman and Derya’s father, who were the first who imagined formal education as an important field of investment for their children and they actively encouraged them to make bold steps in it) it was always the youngest of the group that challenged the ‘narrative imagination’ of their parents, appearing to have a greater capacity to aspire. To understand the difference between the previous generations (that of Nehir, Bilgin, Nurcan’s parents, Lokman etc.), those who were in the curve of a change (like Haluk, Cenk, Melik) and that of the young participants in my research like Aliye, Argun, Umut etc. let’s return to the words of Nehir. Nehir in the fifties was privileged in the sense that he was a boy living in Komotini (and not a girl living on the mountain, for example). However, he said: “I did not have any tradition in education around me, neither social nor financial”. “Fifty years later than Nehir’s early years, Aliye said about the 2000s: “It was the parents who made this fashion, and I think the women; our mothers. Everyone wanted their child to be a good pupil, to learn Greek well, to go to frodistiria, to learn guitar, piano, like all families. I think that this is how the minority started progressing”.

These two descriptions set the context of how different collective imagination and aspiring has worked at different times and how the conditions of life and learning have been paramount in shaping the different dispositions. Nehir, Bilgin and Tevfik grew up at a time when pursuing education for working-class people like them was just ‘unimaginable’ for their parents. They were destined by their families to become apprentices and learn some craft so they can make a living. This is what they could imagine, in the sense that Andrews (2014) use the term. They had the narrative and navigational capacity to play out this scenario for the

future of their children. Nehir, Bilgin and Tevfik were not even ten years' old when they imagined something different from their parents. Although, they had the restrictive influences of their parents they had had very little exposure to the dispositions and the collective narrative web that had shaped their parents' attitudes. Tevfik was very pro-active on making secretly the money he needed to go to school instead of the copper workshop. Nehir threw away his basket with the tobacco and ran to school not to miss the deadline for the registrations. This way, these boys created the yeast for claiming new belongings and new possibilities. What Cenk's generation with the change of the policies in the 1990s experienced in a much more enabled way "it was like the lid was removed in a few days". The lid that set the limits of belongings and aspirations.

The meaning of formal education as a 'luxury', not for the likes of them was not only related to poverty and the way labour was prioritised. Education appears to have held very little meaning for people at the time that it could not be visualised or imagined as a passage of exit or a passage of entrance. Argun and Nehir described this well in chapters four and five respectively. Argun said, and Umut agreed with his insights that education was viewed by people in their rural communities as something irrelevant to their lives. This was during the times of oppression when poor people could not imagine, neither enter into a different set of life-conditions nor exit from their situation. Day-to-day breadwinning was what life was all about. Aspirations were set around making some money to allow a decent life and making a family. Isolation has been an important part of the ecology in which these meanings were made.

The Resignification of education as a passage occurred when the imposed isolation was breaking and when people were allowed to experience their belongings in whole and positive terms. Argun, Umut and Cenk who are in their mid-twenties/thirties pointed to this process taking place in the post-1990s when overt discrimination and a series of physical and symbolic barriers were removed for many people from the group. Nehir, who is twice as old, remembers a movement that was created in the early 1950s when Turkishness was not prosecuted in Western Thrace. Both eras during which education was reported

to take on a positive meaning and to be aspired as passage were times that the big narratives were characterised by positive terms, a spirit of approach and openness and liberation of various belongings.

What does education as a passage mean? For Argun and his family education was imagined as a passage to get to know life mainly by exiting the boundedness and isolation of the mountainous zone. For Tevfik was a passage to exit from child labour and form an alternative prospect for his future, it also turned to be an entrance to a world of ideals and belonging to a movement that saw education as empowering. For Azmi, Lale and other females from poor or rural backgrounds, education was also a passage to an alternative lifestyle, an exit from early marriage and family life like that of their mothers. For Bilgin and Nehir education has been a passage to exit from the second-class citizenship and to enter into the claiming of equity and belonging to their country, simultaneously an exit from 'backwardness' and an entrance to progress as they put it. For the younger generations, education was discussed tightly associated with language learning. Linguistic fluency in either Greek or Turkish is connected to their sense of identity as equal citizens. It is a passage from exiting the being-in-the-between to being whole. For those who have benefited from the affirmative action is a passage to know what 'is this thing called university' and 'what is Greece'.

Learning, however, is not bound to formal education in the narratives. A significant element across all stories is that participants kept on bringing into their story from schooling, snapshots from other domains of their lives like family, neighbourhood, locale, etc. The experiences and learning that was taking place in these other domains have been very significant not only in the way participants made various decisions for their education but also in the way they interpreted their educational experiences. For Umut for example, his learning at the mosque was much more significant for stirring up his aspirations. Şelale emphasised the learning in her neighbourhood, whereas the football pitch is where many of the male participants learned to speak Greek and became less embarrassed in socialising with the majority.

Unlike these personal meanings, the big stories see education as political means to strengthen various national and ethnic identities as well as to frame the clash between the group and the state. The minority group's elite does not seem ready to hear the small stories of group's members; education is viewed and reproduced in discourse as a passage to either the Greek or minority camp: strengthening the collective identity and presence of the group or getting assimilated collaborating in Greek state's aims. Respectively, the state following the spirit of the Constitution views education as the primary field for building pupils' national consciousness. The effect of the big stories understanding was summarised in Cenk's word: "Until we go to school we are all the same, it is then that we become enemies".

8.2 Who fears change?

For decades, the prevailing belief for majority people in Rodope, Greek authorities and even people from the group has been that group members' practice of abstaining from education, withdrawing early or be underachievers at school was something inherent to the group's 'cultural identity'. In the thesis, it became apparent that education being a field of investment has been tightly related to minority people's conditions of life. These conditions are not as much regulated by any collective identity meanings as by the workings of nationalism exercised from the top either by group's advocacy elite or by the main player; the Greek state.

Within this broader frame of how life is like and what makes sense to be aspired and pursued and what not, a set of practices that became the 'common-sense' had been established in the group. For example, chapters five and seven demonstrated that learning a craft for the boys and getting married for the girls were practices that worked and made sense for group members under the stability of structure that group experienced until the nineties. Participants in this research very often spoke about their sense of lacking alternatives, not only due to structural limitations (for example restricted mobility rights) but also due to the homogenisation of practices at the social level ('it is all we had seen'). As

Bourdieu (1977: 80) argued, “The homogeneity of the conditions of existence” results in “the objective homogenising of group or class habitus” which then “enables practices to be objectively harmonised”.

In the mid-nineties, the ‘conditions of existence for the group’ changed radically for the better. It was then that a few people were the first to realise the not ‘workability of practices’ under the new conditions (Chapter six). Such transit is described by Bourdieu (1977:168) as moving from the field of ‘doxa’ (what is beyond question) to that of ‘opinion’ (argument and questioning). These have been the transgressors who made the change possible in the community through doing the ‘unthinkable’ such as choosing a majority school for their children. The first community responses stigmatised these behaviours as non-compliant. However, gradually the meanings have changed as the effects of the new practices proved to be working better for the real (versus symbolic) interests of people (“he became a doctor, what about us?”)

The changes that have taken place regarding educational practices for group members are still strongly resisted by the group’s advocates who understand change as threatening to the group’s collective identity as distinct. Bourdieu argues that “the dominant classes have an interest in defending the integrity of doxa” (Bourdieu, 1977:169). As chapter six has shown, for example, one of the influential advocates of the group in his public talk undermined the agency of people and their new practices presenting them as a result of a lack of alternatives rather than as a manifestation of a choice entailing its meanings, dilemmas and contradictions. His talk has been a negation of ‘heterodoxy’ within the group since it does not comply with the ‘orthodoxy’ that is reproduced by the elite.

If the advocates of the group, speak the language of ‘minority patriotism’, the aims of which is the promotion and progress of own ‘culture’ both by external demands from the State and by internal attempt of canonisation and control of member’s practices and if this represents a certain ideology then, “We must remember that ideologies are always doubly determined, that they owe their most specific characteristics not only to the interests of the classes or class

fractions they express (...), but also to the specific interests of those who produce them" (Bourdieu, 1991: 169). Participants in this study suggested that the elite through perpetuating the problem of education bounding it in a clash with reference to 'culture' between group and State maintain their own powerful position in the group and through this hierarchy they can produce more power for themselves that translates both to political power through clientelism, voting and manipulation and also financial power maintaining the business of nationalism flourishing and providing salaries.

That the weaker part of the equation, the minority elite advocacy networks, has adopted the dominant actor's weapon, the discourse of nationalism, to respond and resist it does not mean the defeat of the oppressive for the group State's nationalism but the amplification of this oppression upon and within the group. A vicious cycle is created in which individuals' being and learning is framed by the nationalist terms that are internal (through the elite) and external (through the State) to the group. By mobilising the minority patriotism discourse as a means of dialectic with the State to better the conditions of life for minority Thracians, the collective identity 'minority' or 'TurcoMuslim' has been reduced to mean disconnected and oppressed.

In the small stories, it is apparent that individuals wish to exit from this label. They wish to connect and become equal. But any attempt to connect and claim equality can leave them 'homeless' within the group because these actions are interpreted as undermining the minority patriotism that connects and integrates while it is also considered the collective shield to the threat that State poses. Moreover, small stories touched upon different shades of the internal oppression that is perpetuated through the elite in the name of collective empowerment through the vehicle of minority patriotism. First by fighting against the mantra of homogeneity of Greek nationalism, the elite networks of the group create the second mantra of homogeneity within the group; erasing the multiplicity of experiences and identities within reducing all the diverse needs and desires to a claim for recognition of universal Turkishness for the group.

Secondly, through the mobilisation of minority patriotism and the scheme of nationalism against nationalism, the creative space for exploring and expressing identities is limited: “You are asked to define who you are, by who you are not”. The process of finding home and belonging in the self is canonised by the duties one has regarding identity: “Until seven years old we are all the same, then we become enemies”. This is part of the learning, according to Cenk, that takes place through formal education and social spaces. “Our teachers were fanatic Greeks and fanatic Turks, what could we have learned?”

Being and becoming in Thrace for members of the minority group becomes highly orientated by standing opposite to something, by crafting a clear boundary, by being defined by a binary clash to which one is called to respond. The more the fear is reproduced in discourse, the more the precautions are raised, the fewer individuals are free to come home to themselves and the connection with the Others.

In the realm of educational choices, this is well illustrated by the fear of “becoming a Greek”, the fear of losing what one is. Under these very terms, social mobility and ‘becoming’ are also hindered. At this point, we shall return to the ideology that tightens and closes down the creative spaces of expression of being, of learning and of becoming for members of the group. Bourdieu (1991:167) argued that “ideologies serve particular interests which they tend to present as universal interests, shared by the group as a whole”. The resulting question is whether the interests that group’s advocacy elite includes in their agenda reflect the interest of the group members and whether multiple interests within the group are considered and supported. The absence of alternative voices that tell different stories and use different vocabulary to struggle for equity and fairness, as well as the hierarchical order within the group of the very few that speak from a stage and by microphone and the many that listen in mass, and the many more that abstain from this process is a significant part of the puzzle that needs to be addressed for the liberation of the conditions of being, of learning and becoming in Western Thrace.

8.3 Disentangling belonging, aspirations and mobility across spaces

In the introduction of the thesis, I referred to Anzaldua (1987) and the way she describes borderlands drawing an analogy with Western Thrace. Anzaldua also described two different types of inhabitants in a borderland the “legitimate” and those whom she sees as “transgressors” or “deviants”. Borrowing the definitions that Giddens gives to centre and periphery in regards to power relations, we can locate the “legitimate” at the centre and the “deviants” at the periphery. “Those who occupy centres ‘establish’ themselves as having control over resources which allow them to maintain differentiations between themselves and those in peripheral regions. The established may employ a variety of forms of social closure to sustain distance from others who are effectively treated as inferior or outsiders” (Giddens, 1984: 131).

In the context of Thrace, participants from rural Rodope, residents and users of minority spaces often see themselves as outsiders and transgressors by contrast to the ‘established’ and ‘legitimate’ people who live in Komotini, in a mixed or majority neighbourhood, or those who speak fluently the standard varieties of Greek and Turkish.

In participants’ narratives: rural, minority and Thracian spaces have largely been built discursively as peripheral or marginal to what in the stories was regarded as central: the urban, the majority spaces and the imaginary of big cities like Athens or Istanbul, representing ‘Greece’ and ‘Turkey’ respectively. It is important to make sure that these pairs: minority-majority, urban-rural, are not seen as polar binaries but are used as analytical schemes for talking about the continuum of space in Rodope.

Moreover, distances have different degrees. Therefore, a Komotinian school might stand as ‘centre’ for a rural school pupil, but peripheral for a Komotinian pupil, who regards Idadiye school representing ‘the centre’. Or the mountainous village of Organi might be regarded as peripheral in relation to Komotini, but Azmi regarded Organi the centre in relation to her mountainous ‘peripheral’

village. Participants in the study recounted their experiences by basically developing their story line around their struggles across these distances and the differing degrees of access to and belonging in these. These different degrees of access and belonging-ness is what distinguishes in the narratives the 'established' or 'legitimate' who feel at home and those who are constructed as 'outsiders' or 'transgressors'. Females and Pomaks also appeared through the small stories to fall in these categories.

In their stories, participants appear to be moving in space, in a non-linear fashion, crossing or acknowledging various virtual boundaries, which are often denoted by physical markers. The space continuum in the narratives consists mainly of home, immediate neighbourhood, broader locale, school, Rodope, Thrace and space out of Thrace. This is a multi-dimensional space where home is looked vis-a-vis other homes, neighbourhood vis-a-vis other neighbourhoods, school vis-a-vis other schools (Chapter Four). A way to understand better the multiple dimensions of this mapping and the way that centre and periphery, as well as distance, take relative values according to different points of reference is to review the stories by looking at how boundaries are created and contested by participants' belongings and aspirations.

The sense and idea of belonging as expressed through the stories are what mostly points to the boundaries and 'virtual checkpoints' in participants' mental maps. Linguistic, class and gender boundaries that are described in the stories can be merged under the major boundaries that these suggest between rural and urban, minority and majority or mixed spaces, as well as between what is Thrace and what non-Thrace. It is then gender, economic and social background and linguistic capital that along with other identity attributes may play out the differing degrees to which one feels capable of or comfortable in moving across these spaces transcending boundaries (minority-majority, urban-rural, Thrace-non-Thrace) that are often multilayered holding more than one qualities.

The virtual borders arise narratively in the stories once feelings of either bold, fuzzy or contested belonging come into the surface declaring a passage from one

state of belonging to another that needs negotiation and work around it. For example, in Argun's story, the square of Komotini was a place that during his school years he felt he did not belong to as he would find it very unnatural to be there talking with square's regular users in a language he was not comfortable in (p.95-99). In his mental map, it was an urban space linguistically intimidating where it would take a great energy to be, even to the extent of creating a very excuse for being there, in comparison to his rural linguistically safe and familiar place where his home was, and he could naturally be. Therefore, a boundary was formed between his familiar, rural space and the unfamiliar, urban space of the Other.

Aspiration is the other element that by effect also indicates where the virtual checkpoints and boundaries lie in the narrative universe of participants. For example, the way Umut experienced learning at his school made him visualise the majority school as 'normal' in comparison to his and pushed him to aspire to move from one to the other. The aspiration pointed to the boundary he had to cross if he wanted better 'normal' schooling. However, the fear of not fitting to the majority school pulled him back and made him remain at his minority school. This part of his story clearly points to the internal boundaries in the space that defined Umut's ratio of mobility and comfort-zone according to his sense of fitting in and belonging. Similarly, Argun's story describes how differing degrees in the capacity to aspire to formulate different boundaries. Argun wanted to see what was out of the mountainous zone and to explore the unfamiliar and slightly intimidating Komotini. The virtual boundaries, in this case, were placed between mountain and plain, rural and urban. His brother, who has already found himself out of the locale pursuing education, tried to strengthen Argun's capacity to aspire by talking to him about the worlds he could experience out of Thrace, placing a different more extended sense of boundary.

8.4 The push and pull of belongings and aspirations

A recurrent pattern in the stories is that the sense of belonging seems to pull the minority participants back to 'their place', this often being peripheral or marginal (minority school, minority neighbourhood and social spaces, village etc.). On the other hand, aspiration pulls the participants towards the centres, that are often considered to be a majority school, a mixed or Greek neighbourhood, social networks that enable a good job, the city, social spaces traditionally owned by Greeks. This movement often equals the aspiration of 'becoming like everyone else' (p.181) exiting from the minority label and feeling.

The centre is considered the locus of power resources such as social status, opportunities for wealth, better education, speaking fluently the elite variety of language etc. Through their aspirations participants appear in their stories to be desiring to participate in the centre in order to reap for themselves some of these resources. This aspired movement towards the 'centre' signifies at the same time the aspiration to break from the feeling of being periphery and margin that 'minority' connotes in the local context. I need to underline here that by minority I do not mean their dear identifications either as Muslim, Turk, or Pomak or any other identification that they find home and belonging in but the sense of being in minor.

The presupposition I am making here is that while this play of powers is patterned in the stories as belonging-aspiration, pull and push, periphery and centre, things are slightly more complicated. This is because this pattern of balancing different driving powers and motives has another face too. The small stories of the participants suggest that the real challenge, their concern and agony is for holding or making a belonging to both: where they come from, and where they want to go. Aspiring not only to become 'something' as they often said but also to honour this that they already are. The aim seems to be to make a new belonging without losing or neglecting one's home, to hold on to both. To aspire

something standing confidently in what home is; home at one's self and non in a minority-minus label which is felt like "a forcibly worn cloth" (p. 200).

'Home' in most stories is closely associated both with 'being minority', the sense of marginal periphery and being left out especially with reference to aspiring the centre, but also the centre of one's safe place of belongingness which is in itself a power resource for resisting alienation and potentially racism out of where home is. Meltem, as a child was not less attached to her mother and nurtured by her because she, as a non-Greek speaking veiled woman, was a target of second-class treatment in public (p.207). Bilgin after getting his degree in medicine had a big urge to return 'home', despite this being the place where he could witness his parents always bending in obedience not knowing what rights are (p.182). Home is simultaneously a point of departure and a point of return. Home is simultaneously a point for resistance and a point to be resisted. hooks (1990:43) talks about "homeplace as a site of resistance and liberation struggle". She underlines the big significance of the nurturing taking place and community of resistance forming 'on the inside' for fighting the alienation on the outside.

It is important to bring in these meanings and to understand belonging and aspiration as double-edged, although these are often reduced in public discourse in Rodope to be mono-semantic: Either wanting to become Greek, "get out of the ghetto" (p.163), or wanting to be Turks, 'they do not want to learn Greek' (p.164). The double edged belongings and aspirations appear through the narratives to be felt and experienced by participants in a natural to them way 'why can't I call myself a GrecoTurk?' (p.246). Nevertheless, the closure scheme of one or the other that is perpetuated by the means of doxa and orchestration of habitus is internalised by them to the extent that they have to respond to it, or interpret themselves in relation to this established system of reference. This being the result of the learned ways to believe that identities are solid with clear boundaries and the way that in Rodope there is a constant public talk and pressure for one to choose and declare 'which side they are on', as identities are seen to be mutually exclusive.

Which side are you on; a question that is recurring not only in educational spaces through the interactions between teachers and pupils, state and teachers, among pupils themselves, but also in the neighbourhood, in the family domain, at work, in the room of public discussions at the Prefecture of Rodope, a voice echoing in the espionage archives of the State in the 1950s and 1960s that are accessible to us. No space is left for the middle-way, for an identity that does not fall strictly in one or the other box that at the same time does not connote both loyalty and enmity or threat. Across all chapters we can see how various projections of identities keep on failing because what is experienced inside cannot find an affirmation outside, leaving participants in a space where they cannot find themselves whole. There is always some part of them, some aspect of their identification that needs to remain muted, or hidden, to be concealed, or when expressed to be rejected or even get sanctions for it.

Coming home

By the very mobility for the sake of education, participants in the study have been given the opportunity to test the waters of their identifications in many ways that are not clearly prescribed by the mode of doxa as this is expressed locally in public discourse by people of authority and neither is shared by people of older generations, whose mobility networks were much more restricted. If there is one thing participants learned through their educational itineraries (that meant mobility, border crossing and contact) this is the fluid nature of identities and the multiple belongings they can claim.

The breakthrough for this realisation in participants' stories comes especially when they exit Thracian spaces and find themselves 'beyond' in the sense that Bhabha uses the word: "The 'beyond' is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past (...) we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond': an exploratory restless movement (...)" (Bhabha, 1994:1). In the beyond, being physically out of Thrace but having Thrace within (as part of what makes up the self) and looking at it

from a distance, from the other side of the window from a new standpoint with the gaze travelling from the outside inwards, participants slowly start deconstructing the Thracian closure schemes of mono-identities.

Although conditioned in Thrace to function in a space that calls for mono-identities manifestations, these are challenged and often fail when out of Thrace resulting in a major shift in the understanding of self. Wholeness is not to be found in purity but border identity is realised, with this realisation often experienced traumatically as perpetuation of non-fitting “wherever we go we are nothing” (p.140). Moreover, Thrace can be both the place where ‘you are nothing’: “Before Nestos you are not Turkish, not Pomak, in Thrace you are nothing, after that you are citizen” (p.242) and the place where you are someone, you exist: “In Thrace it is different they know about us” (p.243). Simultaneously, a place of non-existence and existence. This alienation from the self because of the distance between the inside feeling and the lack of affirmation outside, the experience of being no one and someone results to what Bhabha (1994: 9) described as ‘unhomeliness’: “to be unhomed is not to be homeless”.

Conclusion

“And now, what’s going to happen to us without barbarians?
They were, those people, a kind of solution”.
K.P. Kavafis
(From the poem published in 1904 ‘Waiting
for the barbarians’)

The poem of Kavafis¹⁶⁶ was in my fieldnotes. I felt that represented very well the situation in Rodope between the two nationalist camps in opposition. The nationalist discourse of either side; the Greek nationalism of the State and the minority patriotism expressed as a kin-state Turkish nationalism are vernacularised in Rodope permeating every segment and expression of life locally. A little bit different from what ‘the barbarians’ represent in the poem; In Rodope the barbarians are the Others, the fear of them and the threat they pose to one’s ‘identity’.

¹⁶⁶ Full poem at: <http://www.cavafy.com/poems/content.asp?id=119&cat=1>

What would happen in Rodope, if one day the castle of nationalism, the fear of the barbarians that are always about to come, would collapse? For many decades now it seems that this scheme has been ‘a kind of solution’. What the newspapers would write about? What the spokesperson would advocate for? What the schools would be for? What the people would tell behind one another’s back? How many people would lose a wage and a salary for guarding the gates? What the stages would be for? What the Greek, Turkish and Pomak associations would do? How many miles of pages for Thrace; the trauma and the perils would not change hands?

Lessons learned: Educational Itineraries

The small stories, the personal narratives of experience in this thesis elucidated the journeys of participants, as young people across different generations, in pursuing formal education in conjunction with some sort of aspiring or goal setting that they aimed to fulfill. Narrating this journey, the stories present several points during which critical decisions had to be made entailing mobility and/or transitions between various spaces: minority and majority schools, social spaces, Thracian and non-Thracian land, Greece and Turkey and even different imaginings of self positionalities.

At these important crossroads as presented in the small narratives what ultimately emerges is the multiplicity of factors that need to be taken into account for getting agents closer to their aspirations. Multiplicity and complexity that lie far away from the mono-truths advocated from the various elite interest networks: whether these are minority, majority or state ones. The real life interests of individuals seem to be filtered out of these big plans that are designed on a relational understanding between on one hand the saviours (of whatever kind and issue at stake: such as of the patria, the community, the identity, the national security) and on the other the rights’ and obligations’ subjects; the ordinary people that weave their life stories around the big plan saving patterns of the elites at the backbone of history and social life in Western Thrace.

What the small stories mostly challenge is the fixed and long-standing meanings of the community master narratives regarding the various educational, social and geographical spaces. Instead they provide an experiential perspective of largely fluid, and time and context bounded meanings or power that the various spaces may hold for the agents. People's agency and the intersectionality of their power positionalities into the geographical and social map do shape in various ways their educational experiences producing different personal meanings that often contrast the master narratives of the group's political elite and advocacy establishment. In other words, minority school does not mean only one thing just like majority school is not experienced or conceived in the same way by all in the community. The illusion of a community consensus. a single story about educational meanings and the educational minority politics vis-à-vis the Greek state is cracking under the multilayered personal and not advocacy stories.

At a practical level, people in Rodope may think while deciding their educational itineraries beyond the 'minority' label. Across the four chapters' different facets of the minority experience in Rodope have been highlighted showing that each agent needs to take into consideration other identifications and groups they belong to for making better decisions and selecting the best strategies for challenging what has been established socially and in discourse as 'for' or 'not for the like of them'. People residing on the mountain or rural areas have a very different set of issues to consider in comparison to urban dwellers and people 'at the centre' like people of the market or any other social status that confers to them capital. Likewise, women have to take different struggles as opposed to men while transcending various spaces depending on a multiplicity and complexity of factors that some of the stories examined in this thesis have highlighted. Acknowledging the diversity and the complexity of these experiences, backgrounds and starting points instead of the single identity: "oppressed 'minority'" around which the dominant debate is evolved would strengthen people's strategies to pursue learning and their aspirations.

The challenge lies in that it is usually a male Turkish or a Greek official voice of some privilege that gives advice to all pointing to the appropriate choices and flagging out the various hazards along people's educational paths. This is something that is becoming more and more realised and challenged by some people at the grassroots in Rodope. This understanding is usually shared in the small circles of the kafeneio or the home domain but rarely openly or in public debates. Moreover, the dependency that participants have attributed amongst others to a poor track record of formal educational experiences reinforces the positions and the navigational maps of the few ones on power advocacy positions.

Another element that the stories have pointed to is that at the individual agency level, no choice guarantees a straightforward or linear outcome. Many of the small stories presented here have shown that often a feeling of empowerment in relation to learning comes out of a very disempowered and uncomfortable trajectory, either in real or perceived terms. Likewise, following an empowering choice, again in real or perceived terms, might lead to a very success might mean to different people in relation to education.

Finally, what all these stories suggest is that under the current institutional circumstances the educational sphere might actually have very little importance as regards achieving integration and social equity. It is the social field that defines mostly the opportunities one might have in learning and practicing Greek, if this is the matter at question, or be given opportunities in advancing meaningfully one's mother tongue and pride in it. Not only the neighbourhood, and other alternative to formal learning spaces such as a mosque might be crucial in the opportunities someone from the group have to enable her/his navigational capacity and aspirations and strengthen their resources to pursue them. But also it is the social networks that can be decisive in constraining learning and aspirations regardless of what formal educational establishments and opportunities are in place.

Changing metaphor

In Western Thrace the mosaic metaphor is the first to be used to describe the coexistence of different cultures. In the area where this is by default considered a problem, a touch of euphemism is added through the expression ‘beautiful mosaic’ used often by public spokespersons, politicians and in travel articles. Words create worlds, meanings and frames of understanding. The ‘beautiful mosaic’ feeds into the politics of silence locally perpetuating at the same time the nationalist ideology.

Metaphors are incredibly powerful since they speak to a part of our imaginative perception that takes us to visualisations often unprocessed and un-questioned by the critical mind. Mosaics traditionally consist of pebbles that are positioned one next to the other. Thinking of mosaics is thinking of stillness: they are very static, stones are fixed in essence and feel eternal in their nature. Beliefs about the fixed and essential nature of identities and belongings seen as single, perennial, solid and unchangeable are reflected in the popularity of the metaphor. Moreover, the colours of the pebbles are seen apart from fixed, as given and unmediated, natural. This way of imagining identities immediately blocks the passages to a deeper understanding of the multiple connectivities of identities and the various layers of power relations that underpin coexistence and diversity.

One of the most grounding and spiritual experiences I had, while in Komotini, was my training by an elder wise man into the art of Ebru. Ebru was giving me a sacred third space out of my fieldwork frustrations to touch a calm base. More importantly, it gave me an alternative metaphor to think of cultural/ethnic/religious diversity and the politics of difference. Ebru is translated in English as ‘marbling’ due to the marble, mosaic resemblance of some artworks. This is a wonderful twist as by contrast to the translators’ interpretation, the Persian origin of the word means cloudy with fluidity being what mostly characterises the technique. Ebru is an Ottoman art of drawing on water employing both visible aesthetics and invisible chemistry.

An ebru workshop comes with many small glass vases that contain different colours each, a bigger jar with fresh water and another quite smelly with bile acid from a male bull. There is also a tray of water the texture of which is thickened with the mediation of carrageenan and tragacanth powder while the brush used is made specifically with rose stem and horse hair. The artistic imagination leads the pattern of the artwork, but there needs to be a very sharp and concise consideration of chemistry all along.

Colours get a stronger or weaker capacity to spread on the water depending on the different proportions of water or bile acid they are mixed with at any time during the making of the artwork. The mobility ratio of the colours as well as the interrelations between them is principally defined by their different power as this has been injected to them. Therefore, the first layer of power within and between the colours is hiding there. We can parallelise this with the different volume and consistency of capital in Bourdieu terms that acts in enabling or constraining ways.

Moreover, the water-base also silently influences the way colours glue and spread on it. Multiple unnoticed factors such as the room temperature and the amount of time the water has been in the tray further alter the water's texture. I parallelise the water base that is conditioned by these influences with 'habitus'; the air that one breaths without taking notice of. Different habitus are formed by different invisible to bare eye influences into a glue-like material that defines representations and practices. Similar to the Ebru water-base these are in interrelation with the agents' capital and the connections between them.

My teacher, a spiritual person, would always play Sufi music in the lab and tell me that the artwork is also influenced by the feelings, emotions and energies of people that would be involved. I parallelise these intangible influences with the feelings that collective memory and post-memory evoke to the actors involved in societies that have witnessed and experienced conflict and trauma, energies that are within and part of the situated ecology. Ebru points at the fluid and contextual nature of identities and belongings the hidden power interrelations,

and all that is taken for granted or goes unnoticed as natural whereas so much is going on at multiple layers.

A dormant conflict

This thesis has treated the concept of identity, not as an attribute or possession but as an on-going narrative process. Identity as a narrative is a story; a story about who we are. This is a story that we may tell others or different stories we tell to various others, as well as a story that we tell to ourselves, or different stories that we tell to ourselves at different times. The story we believe is true, the story we want to project as true, the story that we negotiate, agree upon with or disagree about. The story that sustains the order that surrounds us, so that the world ‘makes sense’, or the order inside us, allowing human-subjects to keep going within a familiar and ‘sensible’ frame. However, an identity narrative could also take the form of a story that grounded in a conflict between different ‘makes sense’ - ‘doesn’t make sense’ attempts to disrupt the established order and create an alternative one. This sort of conflict is discursively expressed through the various stories in offer: both identity stories and stories about the meaning of the various situations the tellers are involved in. We can imagine identity stories like a Russian doll; these can be personal, for ‘me’, but also collective, for ‘us’. A story can be inside the other; include the other; frame and defined by one another but can also stand for itself. Personal and collective interconnected but also not firmly co-dependent.

Turning to Bourdieu, the world that makes-sense is a mirroring of ‘doxa’; the effect of consensus on what is natural, normal and on how things are. Doxa is sustained by stories: stories that are widely told, stories that are widely circulated, stories that are uttered or signed by people whose voice, due to their accumulated capital (economic, social, symbolic, etc.), has an added value that enables their stories to be heard and believed, often unquestionably. Although, Bourdieu emphasises the way that ‘misrecognition’ ensures reproduction of doxa, even by those oppressed by the world order that doxa advocates, there is still possibility for human subjects to transcend the borders of doxa and move

into the field of opinion. There orthodoxy and heterodoxy are two options; the world does not have only one reading but also alternative ones that claim legitimacy. Those who suffer some form of oppression are more likely to realise that their oppression does not make sense, at least to them. However, their offered story, part of heterodoxy, is likely to be persecuted, silenced, demonised or derogated by the mechanisms of doxa.

In this thesis, I called big narratives the narratives that serve and are components of ‘doxa’ in Thrace and small stories the counter-narratives that come to challenge what is established offering an alternative interpretation of the world, and a projection of identity that is disrupting to the established order. It is not by coincidence that big narratives here are those heard on public spaces, often communicated from a microphone or the press, whereas the small stories are mainly told privately to selected trusted audiences and often physically in a lower voice. It goes without saying that the counter to doxa stories are characterised themselves by one or more dominant, and other peripheral ones that are left invalidated, for every group is heterogeneous and intra-group power imbalances play out in the way that certain voices are heard and others are not. Therefore, there are differing degrees of marginalisation for stories/interpretations of a situation and stories/identity narratives depending on their degree of distance from the core of doxa and the core of the heterodoxy field, which in a way is degrees of access to power resources that make some voices louder and more legitimate than others.

Looking at all the three narrative areas in the thesis (discourse in public, stories narrated in private, historical archives) and getting insights into both public and hidden transcripts (Scott, 1990) has allowed to understand the way that a conflict is daily sustained in Western Thrace, while maintained hidden, ‘under the carpet’. Western Thrace, unlike other regions in Europe (e.g. N.Ireland, Cyprus, former Yugoslavia) draws very little interest, out of Greece and Turkey, as a site of conflict and social division. It is assumed to be a non-conflict area, a non-divided society: it is talked publicly by the minority and Greek State officials as a “peaceful multicultural society”. However, this thesis suggests that the area is

indeed a deeply divided society characterised by an idiosyncratic form of conflict; a dormant conflict that is believed among Thracians to be ready to erupt at any time. Although one might think that a dormant conflict goes unnoticed, it is by the effect of all the actions that cautiously and consciously attempt to sustain it hibernating that is simultaneously pronounced on a daily basis. Private narratives and public narrative performances are crucial in understanding and unravel this type of conflict.

During my fieldwork hidden transcripts from both sides were coming to my attention while I was also observing the public transactions of minority and majority agents. ‘Hidden’ here is not symbolic but depicts exactly the essence of the type of conflict that is going on in Rodope. I will use an example from a random day in Komotini to explain what I mean by ‘hidden’. “They should all be slaughtered,” a clerk told me while I was doing a bank transaction. He was referring to the people ‘from the minority’. Many of these people were standing in other kiosks or waiting for their number to show on the queuing monitor, being physically present in the room. The story of the majority bank clerk was available for access at that moment only to me, a majority client, and would be silenced in an interaction between the Christian clerk and a minority customer; it was a hidden transcript in a casual encounter and setting. In a similar note, a minority household may have a portrait of Sadik Ahmet on the wall, a hidden transcript in itself since no majority people are expected to the house.

The hidden transcripts, I found, come in bodies and are consistent to one’s ‘makes-sense’. They are consistent along a certain reading of the world and a personal and collective identity understanding. For example, for the bank clerk shown above his hidden transcript reflects his reading of the ‘coexistence’ in Komotini as well as the threat he feels by it and his anger that makes him visualise a deserved, as he feels, punishment for the Other that would take them out of the way. There are some identity nuances here both personal and collective, but what is important to note is that the hidden transcript is a part of a broader narrative and consistent within it. Similarly, a photograph of Sadik Ahmet, who stands for many people in the minority group as a symbol of

resistance to Greek oppression, signifies a larger narrative; that of victimisation and oppression and clash with the majority. Again the transcript is highly related to identity narratives; personal and collective.

Although these transcripts are hidden, because they are present, edges of them might be felt or appear when they are not supposed to. In the memorial service of Sadik Ahmet, a hint of the hidden transcripts of many people, appear in public and is then that the conflict makes its presence under the carpet's edge. Similarly, when the bank clerk yells at a 'Muslim' customer for not speaking Greek well the conflict also makes its innocent micro-presence since this transaction is a reflection of the hidden transcript of the situation. These edges along with the smell of the freshly grounded coffee are part of Komotini's atmosphere; something that you sense but can't exactly and readily pin down.

Looking for the connective tissue

According to Rappaport (1995: 796), "For many people, particularly those who lack social, political, or economic power, the community, neighbourhood, or cultural narratives that are available are either negative, narrow, 'written' by others for them, or all of the above. People who seek either personal or community change often find that it is very difficult to sustain change without the support of a collectivity that provides a new communal narrative around which they can sustain changes in their own personal story". Rosenwald (1992: 265) explains that cultural narratives can be very oppressive: 'through such narratives people are brought to the point of wanting what they must want in their society as well as regard these wants as reasonable'.

The community stories I witnessed in Rodope, were stories of victimhood and blame whereas the small stories were stories of resilience and growth. The big stories would start from a point of addressing an external power: the Greek State. The small stories would start from a point of looking for an internal power: the self. To disentangle the threads between the personal and the collective and the contrast in the identity projections, a good point to begin is to explore views in

the stories related to power and oppression and do so mainly concerning education.

The collective identity of the group seems to repeatedly be associated in the group master narratives with victimhood, powerlessness and dependency. An effect of this is that the group's collective identity appears in fragmented connectivity with the collective identity of Greekness. Through the recurrent discourse about victimisation by 'Greece', distance is generated and emphasised between these identities: the minority and the national. The notion of citizenship that is so often evoked within this discourse of clash either to claim rights or to cast responsibilities is an expression of this fragmented connectivity and distance between being minority Thracian and being Greek. It connotes alienation and depending on the context it might even sound like an insult, a denial of identity. Seeking a safe space in the name 'citizen' seems like a quest for a third space that expresses disconnection from any emotional belonging. To be a citizen is to have rights and responsibilities, not affinities.

The contribution of this thesis is the offering of a door to exit the regime of the single story that dominates the public perception of the minority experience in Western Thrace and enter into the multi-storied experience of members from the minority group. Part of this experience, through this study, found expression and claimed meanings in its multiple narrative layers: stories from different domains, spaces and times. Understanding through this means experiences of being a minority and striving for learning and becoming, in other words, aspirations for educational and social mobility and self-realisation, can then allow for developing more effective strategies in accommodating these experiences promoting social equity and enabling the development and realisation of aspirations.

It is important to note here how the thesis has shown the differing pace by which individual and collective imaginations evolve. Individual imagination; the aspiration of different possibilities and the claim to realise them change much faster than collective imagination that is much slower in following. The thesis

has shown how across several decades and different generations small stories of certain agents sowed the seeds of change in the community. These small stories constituted simultaneously dynamic claims and manifestations of a new personal identity that did not draw for its building on the available materials of the collective identity story that is established in the community through that elite advocacy networks that circulate and reproduce it.

A challenge that emerged through the thesis is the limitations and restrictions that the collective imagination that is expressed in the community single story poses to individuals. The thesis demonstrated the way that small stories, as manifestations and possibilities for occupying new identities have been, each time they emerged, perceived as threatening to the community and were resisted. Moreover, it was further demonstrated that the disconnection between the small and the big stories is not only explained by the different pace in which individual and collective imagination develop. Nationalism as the most powerful ideology locally plays an important role in maintaining and preserving the community story in use over the last decades. This is because the single stories that are produced by the various centres of nationalist ideology: Greek State, Turkish Consulate, some minority and majority associations in Thrace they all sustain the political narratives needed for the nationalist policies to grow and maintain their space in the public arena holding the power relations and hierarchies intact in the area.

In Thrace where, as research participants suggested, so much can be compromised by taking a ‘wrong’ stand in public the small stories get disconnected from the weaving of the public meanings. This disconnection along with the politically correct silence and the excessive workings behind the scene allow the single story to develop in ways of neglecting, undermining or completely ignoring the smaller stories. This study suggests that there is a need for a connective thread to be reclaimed between the small and the big stories, between the personal and the collective imagination. However, within the political context described above, there is also need for the creation of new political narratives that enable this connection. These are to be woven using

materials from the small stories contributing like this to a different way of collective imagination and activism for equity in Western Thrace.

Looking for a different passage: A call for community healing

Finding a new vocabulary

What is observed in W. Thrace and was described in the stories presented in the thesis is that activism for the minority rights in Western Thrace expressed through the elite advocacy networks of the group has adopted the language of its opponent, the Greek State. In other words, the oppressed use the tools of the oppressor to struggle for freedom and empowerment but landing instead in a vicious cycle of powerlessness informed by the master narrative of victimisation and dependency.

More than this, small stories here have demonstrated the effect that the patriotic advocacy rhetoric, along nationalist lines, has had within the group. Namely, the internal oppression that this creates not only to those who do not comply with the homogeneous TurkishMuslim standard but more or less to everyone who does not fit in the given scheme of mono identities. This rhetoric, that has turned into a master narrative “a dominant cultural narrative” (Andrews, 2004) that assumes experience as universal and normative creates for the members of the group the need, duty and pull to comply with a monostatic identification ditching alternatives, and self- identify in negative rather than positive terms: ‘I am what I am not’. Small stories showed how people are walking in circles pushed and pulled between the need to be either this or that or not to be this or that, deprived of the freedom and creative space to just be.

In addition, by embedding this activism in a frame of clash with the State the collective story from which individuals are expected to draw elements for their personal stories is restricted to a standpoint of alienation and non-belonging. The sense of powerlessness is mainly reinforced through the collective story that this advocacy builds, which places the group and its members in the position of the

victim, the dependent and the opponent. This then constrains the ‘tell-ability’ (Andrews, 2007) of stories that fall out of this frame. As Andrews (*ibid.*:33) emphasises: “We are socialised to think of our lives in particular ways, and (mostly) we construct the stories about our lives in relation to those expected tales”.

The absence of the young generations from the spaces where public dialogue is carried out, underlines their back turning to these old schemes. The small stories collected for this study suggested that the master narrative in the community does not offer meaning relevant to people’s lives, stories, struggles, dilemmas and aspirations. What is needed then? A renewal of vocabulary and a build up of a counter-narrative in collective terms that will enable the ‘tell-ability’ of newer stories that are relevant to young people’s lives and can foster belonging and connection that they seem to pursue. For the renewal of the vocabulary, one step would be to weave a new story using words that spring from people’s hearts, souls, tears, dreams and life paths and not words subsidised by the nationalist fountains that operate in the region. The enablement would start if the stories told in the margin of the public events: the corridors and the smoking area outside which are silenced in the main room where debates take place; the stories that circulate in private and often in lower voice because of the awareness of their un-tellability start building body, owing and claiming their space. As the thesis has shown, finding refuge in the collective by making small alliances and sub-groups of new practices has been recurrent in many of the stories. Therefore, the creation of new alliances that offer a sense of safety for initiating the counter-narratives in the public realms would possibly enable the process.

To tell a new story

The thesis started with the context chapter describing the trauma that has been experienced by almost everyone with ties to Western Thrace. The trauma is flowing through the generations, feeds the Thracian soil and respirates in the Thracian air through collective memory, post-memory and most importantly the stories people live by. The cultural trauma is processed in two different domains: the minority and the majority, in isolation from one another. Both domains have

their stories of trauma, their stories of pain and disconnection, their stories of fear and threat. Both narrative domains have their heroes, their saviours, their traitors, their victims, their villains. They have the memories, the stories, their mourning songs, their beloved and their enemies. They both practice through the subsidised by nationalism public performances commemorations of the trauma, the loss and the struggle for connection to their roots and sense of full identities as one part always seems to be missing.

But these narrative domains with their representative master story each, never meet each other and rarely, if ever, share their audiences. They know of one another, they speak indirectly to one another, and they feel threatened by one another, often considering one's commemoration of trauma a blasphemy for the trauma of the other. Western Thrace is a community that craves for healing as a whole, but looks for it in alienation, through a path that only brings more pain and deeper disconnection.

Healing can begin when people start hearing and seeing one another's small stories beyond the reign of their master cultural narratives, that are narratives of disconnection, alienation and fear. When they will share their stories and they will respect each other stories with compassion. There is a trauma that needs to be acknowledged on both sides, there is a need to say 'I see you', 'I hear you', 'tell me your story, I want to hear it in your words'. There is a need in Thrace to start making and weaving a new story for the community as a whole.

There is a need for the stories of connection and compassion to find their tellability beyond the private and the atypical and claim a space in the normative sphere. Although the trauma has been worked through its social process, this has happened in "two societies with a wall between them", as Bilgin described Rodope. Moreover, it happened in the terms of nationalism that state archives, examined in this thesis, eloquently explain they way it subsidised the deepening of the trauma and the fortification of the division that underlines and commemorates it daily.

The making of a new story entails a new social process of the trauma that will re-make the community in Rodope as a whole. Small story circles unsubsidised by any of the common suspects, could serve as a safe space to open up these channels. A space where stories can be shared, held together, get contested and retold. A space where participants can strike a balance between the excessive remembering and forgetting to introduce the untellable giving it a chance to be reformed in productive ways. The use of expressive arts can play an important role in the process offering a third medium through which transformations can happen by collective work. A medium that emphasises the common goal and a shared process lifting the obstacles of individuals being on the spotlight and stage themselves, directing the attention to the medium providing this way with an additional sense of safety to the agents of change. More than this, arts can liberate from language barriers.

The remaking of the community by crafting together a story for all needs also to step away from the old schemes that have maintained the two opposing master narratives. The setting of a panel of speakers and a microphone and a large audience is unlikely to work. The process needs to be participatory in nature, in a circle giving voice to each and everyone and not by microphone since the circles will be small enough so that one can hear from the other mouth to ear. The outcomes of this process can then be mobilised in a larger scale to engage more and more people from the area into hearing and co-making an alternative story that will have the potential to counteract the nationalist mega-narrative offering eligible alternatives at a collective level.

The motion into building up consistently a counter-narrative to the mega nationalist narrative that rules in Western Thrace will be resisted and confined to the margin. Is this margin that by occupying it, by occupying the small stories and the margins in Western Thrace as sites of resistance and ‘radical openness’ rather than a place to escape from or to conceal may bring new dynamics in the field able to bring some fresh air of freedom in that borderland.

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