Attitudes of students towards Pontius as immigrants – foreigners

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Abstract

Greece is a country with great diversity and cultural pluralism, both during recent decades, in which it has been a host country during a period of intense migration, as well as previously since it was a country of return. Pontius population group has played a significant part in both the aforementioned period first as refugees in 1926 because of the Lausanne treaty and then as repatriates from the former Soviet Union. This research studied the views of students (N=404) of the first and second levels of education, of Pontius as a refugee - foreigner. The results showed that the age and the origin of the students as well as their participation, or not, in culture societies are associated with their attitudes, while the age of the students is associated with racial stereotypes.

Key words: refugee, foreigner, Pontius Hellenism, attitudes, intercultural education.

Introduction

Greece is a country that has been a point of departure as well as a destination for many immigration movements throughout its entire history. Most of those immigration movements were compulsory and they occurred due to reasons that were financial in nature. Greek population of Black Sea (Pontius) was part of those movements in two immigration waves. The first was during the population exchange that took place in 1922 and the second was during the repatriation of Pontius from the former Soviet Union that took place from 1982 onwards (Fotiadis, 1995:38). The expatriates of Pontius origin that came to live permanently in Greece from the former Soviet Union during the last few decades, and especially during the period that spans from 1965 until the end of the previous century, are estimated to be more than 230.000 (Kelesidis, 2004:18). During the period between 1989 and 2000 alone, according to the records of the National Institute for the Reception and Restoration of Repatriated Expatriates, 143.066 people were registered in order to take advantage of its various programs (ΕΙΥΑΠΟΕ2001α, 2001β).

Immigration flows have certain innate characteristics that can make social exclusion very easy (Kasimati, 2007). Such characteristics are mainly the low financial level of the people being moved as well as their different cultural background. Once those characteristics are detected, the social differences are identified; the next step is the development of a racial stereotype and detachment, which all lead to social degradation.

According to Allport (1954) and Macrae, Stangor and Hewstone (1996), prejudice should be defined as a dislike that is based on a mistaken, rigid and entrenched generalization, that starts at

a very young age and is very difficult to change (Tajfel και Fraser, 1978). It is very often the result of a lack of knowledge and information regarding the characteristics of which otherness consists.

Another characteristic that has always been making the social integration of Pontius is the knowledge of the language (Papakonstantinou & Dellasoudas, 1997:384-390; Vergeti, 1999:75; Kasimati, 2007). Considering that the knowledge of the language is a core cultural element, a lack of that knowledge has negative effects on the communication and the development of social relations with the indigenous population (Gotovos, Markou & Fering, 1987:50) as well as on the education of Pontian refugees. Because of the lack of knowledge of the Greek language many Pontius refugees don't develop relations and a significant percentage of them abandon school and education in order to seek work (Kasimati, 2007), which results in the stigma of failure at school. This has been observed to cause a feeling of rejection (Kolaitis, 2005:202-203), that is experienced by the refugees - immigrants as a devaluation of their presence (Vedder et.al, 2006). According to research that was conducted on schools in Attica, a significant percentage of repatriated students, feel insecure and rejected, regarding the attitude of the indigenous population towards repatriated immigrants (Gotovos, Markou & Fering, 1987:47-55), whom they refer to as "Russians" and refuse to integrate them in their social groups, both in and out of the school (Vergeti, 1999:76). According to Papastyliannoy (2012:36), this attitude of the indigenous population was based on the fact that they couldn't integrate the immigrants in either the -inner or the -outer group, because of the lack of distinction concerning their lineage and origin. Similar studies that took place in other countries have also shown that the children of immigrants demonstrate increased anxiety and stress, aggression, feelings of loneliness, self - devaluation

and are often being rejected when it comes to becoming members of a new group (Asher & Dodge, 1986: 444-446, Coie, 1992).

A study that took place in the districts of Evros and Rodopi is a classic example of this. According to the findings, the indigenous population of those areas have the tendency of moving their children from schools located in areas in which Pontius refugees have settled, because they believe that the co-existence of indigenous and repatriated children in the same school, greatly downgrades the level of education offered by that school.

The theoretical framework of this study, is based on the fact that actions of an experiential character that are associated with learning through experience (Dewey), as well as through discovery (Bruner) offer students the ability to understand the importance of multiculturalism as well as to develop effective processes that will allow them to test new strategies for analysis and control of the dynamic of the social group in which they belong and to create conditions of empathy, self-reflection and self-awareness (Tsironis,2008:125).

Methodology

In this study participated 404 students (boys N=147 and girls N=230) from 14 schools of the first and second levels of education (Primary school N=123, Middle School N=119 and High School N=162) situated in western Thessaloniki (table 1). The students were given a guided tour of an exhibition dedicated to the Hellenism of the Black Sea. A part from traditional exhibits, the exhibition also offered photographic and audiovisual material. One week after their tour, the

students were asked to write down their thoughts and views regarding the subject of the exhibition.

The questionnaires produced 1771 references in total. Most of those were filled out by girls (61.8%) and by students from immigrant areas (79.4%). The percentage of references concerning the level of the schools (39% Primary School, 23.6% Middle School and 37.4% High School) as well as the origin of the students (45.8% students of Pontius origin, 42.5% students of other origin) are relatively even (table 2).

Findings

Once the the classification of the references was finished, four main categories emerged. These are the "Museum education" approach and teaching of historical sources and terms of liking, repetition and the material of the exhibition, "human rights", which concerns the reference to the immigration movement and the immigrants , the morality and the feelings of grief and sorrow to the refugee, the "attitude toward Pontius" which encompasses the knowledge of the culture, the admiration, the empathy and the reference to the origin and finally the "racial stereotypes" about Greeks and Turks as victims and victimizers, respectively (Table 3).

Three of the four categories mentioned above showed statistically significant differences ("Museum education" sig = .000, "attitude toward Pontius" sig = .000 and "racial stereotype" sig = .044, p <.05). The last two seemed to have a statistically significant correlation with the factor "education level". Additionally the second category seemed to have a significant correlation with

the factors "origin or origin of the subjects"' and" active participation in cultural institutions" (table 4).

The references of the category "racial stereotype" were split in two sub-categories that emphasized the aspect of the victim and the victimizer. It was noted that the racial stereotypes are more prevalent in very young ages and they focus mainly on the role of the victimizer. On the (κάτι λείπει) As the age of the subjects grew however, so did the focus on the role of the victim. It should definitely be noted that those references seem to be greatly affected by the historical sources that students are taught at school, which identify the Greeks of Pontus as Greeks. The references of the category "attitude towards Pontius" on the other hand show that students, regardless of their age, don't have full knowledge of the history of Pontius Hellenism. This fact greatly affects their view towards Pontius. It should also be noted that new information acquired on the subject of the history of Pontius Hellenism leads to admiration and a change or shift in attitude. Children of younger ages experience facts with a greater emotional intensity and they display greater empathy. However, as the children become older, the concept of origin becomes clearer and more understood and the students use it as a declaration of identity and pride.

Regarding the attitude towards Pontius in relation to the origin of the students, it is obvious that the highest rates are those concerning in the sense of wonder that students have developed through the new information they received. The necessity of this new information was equally indicated by students of all levels of education. It should be noted that students that are of Asia Minor origin, seemed to have more empathy for Pontius Hellenism. They connect better with the

plight of the Pontius because of their similar experiences and emotional burden, since they also arrived in Greece via an immigration movement.

Finally, a special mention should be made about the fact that no change or shift was noted regarding the knowledge and therefore the change of attitude and creation of feelings of wonder between students that actively participate in cultural institutions and students who don't. The only significant difference seems to be on the importance that the members of each group attribute to their origin.

Discussion

School nowadays is a cradle of civilizations and its goal is to teach students to appreciate cultural diversity (Banks, 2004), since it is the second most important socialization context, the family being the first for each student (Bronfenbrenner, 1996). Each person's personality is formed during the early years of his or her life. That is why the early school age is considered extremely crucial as far as the formation of stereotypes is concerned.

During this age, opinions are formed through imitation of models that can usually be found among the close familial and social environment. The knowledge found therein also plays a crucial art in the forming of opinions in that age. This results in the development of false and flawed images regarding the profile of a person or group, based on often incomplete information. This initial school experience and the quality of the relationship that the children have developed and experienced will almost definitely be transferred to the subsequent school levels (Duncan & Cohen, 1999). This is demonstrated in this study by the rapid and immediate change of attitude

of the students towards refugees after they come into contact with their history and learn more about it. When knowledge comes as a result of experiential learning, then experiences are created among the members that participated in the "process" of acquiring that knowledge. These experiences in turn create common bonds, emotional as well as social. Thus, the experience and the direct relation of the subject with the place where it is being presented create indelible experiences that have significant effects on the attitudes and values of future adults. Thus, the otherness can become familiar and gain not only its own voice, but respect that as well. According to Grant and Secada (1990:148) the greater the exposure and the more time spent on getting to know and to learn the intercultural content borne by the "other" the more successful his or her integration will be. The teachers are also responsible for this, because many times they become frightened of socio-cultural diversity and thus they ignore or overlook the existence of cultural influences in the classroom (Gay, 2002), which results in them addressing diversity through an incomplete and flawed framework that promotes inequality (Ross and Smith, 1992).

Of equal or greater importance is also the fact that children of younger ages seem to be especially affected too much by the way in which history is presented throughout the educational system. The views are formed through the modules taught within history class, seem to be strong and to reinforce national stereotypes. What is really interesting, is that younger children mainly focus the part of the victimizer, while older children and students, focus on the victim as well as they focus on the victimizer. This is probably due to empathy, through which the older students are trying to put themselves in the victim's position and see things through their perspective. This is further reinforced by the view of Hunter and Elias (1999) that the treatment of the other is based on emotional reactions to interpersonal attraction.

It is also noteworthy that as the students get older, they start to assume their national identities, which leads to the precise indication of their origin with pride. The concept of identity is multidimensional. It starts with the acceptance of a subject's existence in the world, in the past, the present and the future and it involves the perception of similarity in spatiotemporal continuity and the simultaneous perception that others to recognize this similarity and continuity (Erikson, 1968). The identity depends upon the involvement of the individual in relationships with other people within various social groups, which contribute positively or negatively, through the interdependence of their members (Catwright, D. & Zander, 1968), the interactions between the members (Bonner, 1934), their common needs (Cattell, 1946) and their concept of integration. Thus, a strong cultural identity has proven to be highly functional for one's personal well-being and it is positively associated with the ability of immigrants to adjust to their host country (Vedder et.al, 2006). The cultural identity specifically, is characterized by a lack of stability, a problematic unity (Vryzas, 1997:183-193) and a complexity in the conditions of the identification process. It seems to be more intense among students that originate from the same country or from countries that are close to each other. However, it is even more intense among students whose ancestors have shared the same or similar experiences. According to Smith (1991) a nation is defined through its culture, while the latter is marked by its history. We see, then, that the common elements of the familial environment can bring closer people of the same intercultural group. According to the social identity theory of Tajfel and Turner (1979) the self-determination of the individual involves issues such as the assessment of the impact that his or her origin in the indigenous population and it defines and influences one's national identity.

What is truly odd or even paradoxical, is the fact that students who actively participate in cultural institutions have developed a sense of origin, which has not been created through a deeper knowledge of their history. It seems that they remain in the development of stereotypes which are formed and cultivated in those specific institutions.

Conclusions

All of the facts mentioned above highlight the need for proper teaching of history, through experiential and interactive methods, which will develop the critical thinking of students and will help them distance themselves from prejudices and stereotypes of the older generations. The attempt to understand and interpret events through the context of social interaction, can provide solutions to problematic situations of the modern educational reality and formulate a functional social group. What is also obvious is the need for cultural operators to transmit culture through meaningful actions and not just through surface involvement with folklore that only serves the preservation of traditions.

Tables

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of sample

SEX		
CATEGORY	**N**	**(%)**
Boys	174	43.1
Girls	230	56.9
Total	404	100.0
SCHOOL GRADE		
CATEGORY	**N**	**(%)**
Primary school	123	30.4
Secondary school	119	29.5
High school	162	40.1
Total	404	100.0
AREA		
CATEGORY	**N**	**(%)**
Pontius refugees	329	87.4
non Pontius refugees	78	18.6
Total	404	100.0
CULTURAL ASSOSIATION MEMBER		
CATEGORY	**N**	**(%)**
Yes	31	7.7
No	373	92.3
Total	404	100.0
ORIGIN		
CATEGORY	**N**	**(%)**
Pontius	185	45.8
Asia Minor	45	11.1
another	174	43.1
Total	404	100.0

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of references

SEX		
CATEGORY	**N**	**(%)**
Boys	677	38.2
Girls	1094	61.8
Total	1771	100.0
SCHOOL GRADE		
CATEGORY	**N**	**(%)**
Primary school	691	39.0
Secondary school	418	23.6
High school	662	37.4
Total	1771	100.0
AREA		
CATEGORY	**N**	**(%)**
Pontius refugees	1406	79.4
non Pontius refugees	365	20.6
Total	1771	100.0
CULTURAL ASSOSIATION MEMBER		
CATEGORY	**N**	**(%)**
Yes	155	8.8
No	1616	91.2
Total	1771	100.0
ORIGIN		
CATEGORY	**N**	**(%)**
Pontius	812	45.8
Asia Minor	207	11.7
Another	752	42.5
Total	1771	100.0

Table 3. Categories that emerged from the analysis of references

CATEGORY	N	(%)	SUBCATEGORY	N	N (%)	SUBKATEGORY ANALYSIS	N	N (%)
Μουσειοπαιδαγωγι κή	489	28.1	Liking	277	15.6	Pleasure	129	7.3
						Interesting experience	70	4.0
						Expressions of interest in exhibition's subject	22	1.2
						Pedagogical approach	48	2.7
			Repetition	26	16.5			
			Education material	197	11.1	Picture gallery	84	4.7
						Photography exhibition	37	2.1
						Sculpture exhibition	1	0.1
						Books-historical sources	8	0.5
						Period pieces	13	0.7
						Audiovisual material	9	0.5
						More than one of the above	48	0.7
Ανθρώπινα δικαιώματα	416	23.5	Reference of refugee	61	3.4			
			Morality	219	12.4			
			Feelings of sadness	134	7.6			
Στάση απέναντι στον Πόντιο	780	44.0	Knowledge	238	13.4	Wrong impression	202	11.4
						Attitude change	34	1.9
			Admiration	317	17.9	For culture	123	6.9
						For religion maintaining	31	1.8
						For courage and militancy	58	3.3
						For history	104	5.9
			Empathy	68	3.8			
			Origin	157	8.9	Pride in origin	102	5.8
						Origin reference (of non Pontius)	55	3.1
Στερεότυπα φυλής	77	4.3	Reference Greeks as victims	20	1.1			
			Reference Turkish as perpetrators	57	3.2			
Σύνολο	*1171*	*100.0*		*1771*	*100.0*		*1179*	*100.0*

Table 4. Sig. categories

CATEGORY	FACTOR		Df	F	Sig.
Museum education	**School grade**	between groups	10		
		within groups	456	9.7	.000
		Total	466		
Racial stereotype	**School grade**	between groups	7		
		within groups	75	4.2	.044
		Total	76		

Πίνακας 5. Stereotype race and attitudes to Pontius according to the school level

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	SCHOOL GRADE			TOTAL
		Primary school	Secondary school	High school	
Race stereotype	Greeks as victims	7	8	5	20
		15.6%	**44.4%**	**35.7%**	**26.0%**
	Turkish as perpetrators	38	10	9	57
		84.4%	**55.6%**	**64.3%**	**74.0%**
Total		45	18	14	77
		100.0%	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**
Attitudes to Pontius	New information	77	56	105	238
		28.4%	**31.3%**	**31.9%**	**30.6%**
	Admiration	113	84	120	317
		41.7%	**46.9%**	**36.5%**	**40.7%**
	Empathy	41	4	22	67
		15.1%	**2.2%**	**6.7%**	**8.6%**
	Origin	40	35	82	157
		14.8%	**19.6%**	**24.9%**	**20.2%**
Total		271	179	329	779
		100.0%	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Table 6. Attitudes to Pontius on the origin

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	ORIGIN			TOTAL
		Pontos	Asia minor	Other	
Attitude to Pontius	New information	105	23	238	238
		28.0%	**25.6%**	**30.6%**	**30.6%**
	Admiration	147	32	317	317
		39.2%	**35.6%**	**40.7%**	**40.7%**
	Empathy	21	14	67	67
		5.6%	**15.6%**	**8.6%**	**8.6%**
	Origin	102	21	157	157
		27.2%	**23.3%**	**20.2%**	**20.2%**
Total		375	90	779	779
		100.0%	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Table 7. Attitude to Pontius in connection with participation in cultural activities

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	CULTURAL ORGANIZATION MEMBER		TOTAL
		ΜΕΛΟΣ	ΜΗ ΜΕΛΟΣ	
Attitude to Pontius	New information	19	219	238
		20.9%	**31.8%**	**30.6%**
	Admiration	38	279	317
		41.8%	**40.6%**	**40.7%**
	Empathy	3	64	67
		3.3%	**9.3%**	**8.6%**
	Origin	31	126	157
		34.1%	**18.3%**	**20.2%**
Total		91	688	779
		100.0%	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

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