

# Seven Languages one Poem: Poetry as Leaven for multi / intercultural Education

Alexandros N. Akritopoulos  
(Associate Professor, University of Western Macedonia)

## Abstract

It's well known that the folk-song, the ballade "Tou nekrou adelfou" in Greek version, is a common property in Balkan's peoples culture. Nowadays, we all have experienced that multicultural and intercultural education means different things to different people. In our presentation we intend to show how Poetry could be used as leaven for multi/intercultural education.

The inter-textual approach of this teaching material (Seven Languages one Poem, that is to say different national languages but one international poem) will provide us a model or a frame for multi/intercultural education. The historical and geographical context, which is reflected in the main theme of the poem, is this in which Balkan's peoples live, that is to say work and live in a foreign country.

The main goals will be: Outline common thoughts and feelings of Balkan's peoples in common historical situations that cross national borders: living abroad, living in family, love of family's members. Accept otherness (cultural pluralism). Subvert, in schools of Balkan's countries and in all over the world, the strong feeling of "xenitia" and convert it into feeling of "xenita", because of neighborhood and common cultural conditions, values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours but also now because of the mondialisation of the economy. Avoid immigration.

**Key-words:** multi/intercultural education, literacy, cultural pluralism, reader response's lecture, immigration.

The Balkan's people intellectual and artistic creation, which is influenced from common history (trade, language, culture, etc.), has created a common cultural tradition. One of those artistic creations is the folk-song, the ballade "The song of the death brother" ("Tou nekrou adelfou", in Greek), which the Balkan peoples said dramatically in all languages of the peninsula and others Europeans in their languages too; hereby the title of this paper.<sup>1</sup>

The anonymous poet of the folk-song narrates the story of a family of nine sons and one daughter. When the only daughter is married and lived abroad, epidemic kills all the sons and then mother asks one dead son for take back her daughter. The son gets up from his tomb and gets back the dear daughter to her mother.

The poem put in an emotional and dramatic mode the compound problem of the emigration, that is to say living abroad, being a foreigner, and the problem of the marginalization and alienation. The poem, by narrating the above question in an absurd mode, submits to the reader the ideas that nothing values more in the world than living in family, with the intimates, with the love of mother and brothers, and rejects emigration and alive separation of dear persons –but we know in all over the world that emigration and working abroad is a social phenomenon which characterizes ancient and modern societies. However, is valid the truth that popular verse says: "The live

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<sup>1</sup> The reader can find the folk-song, translated in Greek, in all Balkan languages, also bibliographical sources for it, in *Aimos, Anthology of Balkan Poetry*, (2006), the friends of the review "Anti", Athens. *Αίμος, Ανθολογία βαλκανικής ποίησης*, (2006), Οι φίλοι του περιοδικού «Αντί», Αθήνα.

separation has not words of comfort”, which dynamically put, as the folk-song does, the above question in our contemporary societies.

On the other hand, in catharsis, by the death of mother and daughter in the end of the story, it is submitted to the reader that nothing is possible to substitute the intimate, the well known and anyone’s lived experience and culture, which is an inalienable value. The triumph of love in the story emphasizes the dynamic relation between anything we have personally experienced, the live experience and the reality. “Anything we don’t love, doesn’t exist”, has written the Greek poet Palamas (Palamas 1964). If we turn it into “anything we love, exists”, we underline the necessity of right in lived experiences and culture, in all those we lived and which deserve as nothing in the world to be kept. In the same time we put the values of democracy and equal opportunities for a radical intercultural education.

The poem neither suggests nor proposes any solutions for the well known and the worldwide contemporary problem of immigration and diversity, as many novels in Children’s Literature do by forming viewpoints of intercultural consciousness, that is to say to form the self ness or/and the otherness (Akritopoulos 2008). Nevertheless it submits, by the re-establishment of catharsis, the power of love and the power of promise -even in an absurd way, but for the poetic art in a very significant mode. In conclusion, the song submits lived experiences, attitudes and behaviors towards the compound problem of emigration, by rejecting the alienation of human.

Thus, today, in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a period which had followed all big emigrations of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, America and Australia and all significant social paradigms of cultural pluralism which had created in the entire world and the educational system of each country had confronted, we are in a new worldwide situation.

So the poetic text, in the contemporary occurrence (wars, immigration, epidemic, diseases, globalization of the economy, economic crisis), could be the subject of a new opportune approach, by the universality and the vitality of the poetic language which characterizes it. That is to say, it is possible, by his *dramatis personae*, the events, and their symbolisms (mother and daughter symbolize dynamically the live reality, the power of love, the well known, the lived experience and lived culture as unalienated values) the poem from language-agent to become language target for an intercultural education; since in many countries and of course in Greece too the education not lost until now its monocultural character, as Greek researchers remark,<sup>2</sup> (Georgiadis &

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<sup>2</sup> As Fokion Georgiadis and Apostolos Zisimos remark “On the contrary, the Greek State, even after the having the experience of so many years of operation of schools for certain ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups, showed an inexcusable reluctance to promote measures that would alter the monolithic structuring of its education system. There is the fear that *“the provisions of the new Act might lead to ghetto-schools, reinforce segregation and nurture socio-political racism in Greece”* (Damanakis, 1998, p.87).” *Migrants’, Refugees’ and Minorities’ Children in European Education: the Greek Experience*. In *Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in the Greek Education*. Retrieved September 9, 2012 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.google.gr/search?q>

<sup>3</sup>There are differences of content in the above used terms. As I know the similarities and the differences between them, I use them either conjunctively or disjunctively in the text in order to show to the reader that they are not synonymous.

Zisimos 2012), in spite of the attempts of the curricula to promote the values and the targets of multiculturalism and intercultural education in schools.<sup>3</sup>

The live mode in which the popular song of Balkans put this compound social and psychological phenomenon, therefore must be the main target of a multicultural and intercultural education of the countries of the peninsula and not only in them. This last contemporary educational perspective, from curricula of the monocultural education, would pivot to a philosophy of a profound educational reformation which wouldn't content in interferences on valid curricula but in a radical transformation of the educational system (curricula, school-handbooks, teaching strategies, and teacher's education) in perspective to change the society, as thoroughly order the international academic research of multicultural or intercultural education.

For the Greek or for any other educational system is not enough to simply accept the cultural pluralism, the variety of human cultures (beliefs, behaviors, perceptions, thoughts, attitudes, etc.). Since all notions of multicultural or intercultural education share until now the intention to incorporate cultural pluralism and social difference to the educational process, as the special researcher in Unesco Viola Georgi remarks, it is necessary that this will be done in a critical way (Viola 2008); that is to say this will be an educational transformation. An educational transformation which would promote the critical intercultural education and not only would be open to the otherness, but would incorporate every a principle, like is recognition, equal opportunities, and social justice. Therefore the strange would become familiar, the alien ours, the foreigner the other our self, and substantially speaking this critical intercultural education would tend (to) abolish the sense of otherness, etc., as in the song all these notions but also human feelings are removed by the re-establishment each defectiveness, each sense of alienation, of weakness, marginalization and alienation. Also, intercultural education must be surveyed and guided by critical pedagogy, so as to become a critical intercultural education, to become a new "intercultural approach, which will get over the contradictions and partialities of the dominant multicultural language, by keeping always in mind the social, political, economic and cultural terms of formation of the identity." (Maniatis 2006).

The teacher must think and act as the unknown Balkan poet does. He must reject, by his teaching language and his strategy in classroom, the existence of otherness and of any cultural difference as permanent and monolithic situations, because they are outside of us; also, the teacher must bring into notice that otherness comes from outside and nests into us. Therefore he must point out, by the preparation of his lessons from History, Literature, Music, etc., that notions as "living abroad" and "foreigner" are not permanent conditions and concern all countries and every a man; they exist and are developed inside every one of us, independently of nationality, race and religion, because they are constructed in different periods of time from social groups for various political, economic and religious reasons. As social situations are created under concretes historical and political conditions and as feelings are constructed and they are lived differently by anyone man. As today happens to young Greeks or Spanish graduates, who emigrate in Germany, while their parents and grand-fathers in the decades of fifty's and sixty's were almost illiterates. And, it is also reasonable that those

young aren't consoled with the songs of living abroad by Kazantzidis performance, but it is certain that they experience the same feelings of failing, of discouragement and defectiveness.

The teacher must demonstrate to his pupils and students that any man who is called foreigner is by virtue the other myself, because anyone who is today native tomorrow it is possible to be a foreigner in an other city or an other country in Balkans or in all over the world. So, nowadays pupils or students in classrooms and also young workers wouldn't live and experience that the Greek popular verse says very eloquently: "In a foreign land I am Greek and in Greece a foreigner". The teacher, by his teaching strategies, must demonstrate that the foreigner has not an ontological substance; and also he must teach to his students that the man, who is a foreigner here, for a group of population, is not a foreigner elsewhere and the converse/vice-versa, because he has not stable and constant characteristic points.

Today, like in the past, a pupil or a student who lives the consequences of the migration of his parents and he resides far "away from his own land" (Seferis 1964), in a classroom with foreign language pupils (what if his or her name is Areti or Konstantis, Konstantis and Thokina, Lazar and Petkana, Konstantis or Voika, Jovan and Jelitsa, as they are named in the poem) he mustn't feel weak, victim of racial aggressiveness or xenophobic violation, as elegantly Maria Piliotou describes all these situations and behaviors of schoolboys and schoolgirls in her novel for young readers *The trees which run*, (Akritopoulos 2004 & 2008). However, as Fokion Georgiadis and Apostolos Zisimos have demonstrated in their research with the paradigm of Greece concerning the children of immigrants, refugees and minority groups in European education, they have many difficulties not only for thorough learning of language but also of the culture of the country in which they live, because they are in a lifelong inner clash/conflict, by living between two cultures, one in school and another in house.

The educational system should follow not only the international academic discussion about multicultural or intercultural education, but apply at least its fundamental and essential principles; that is to say, should respect the native language and culture of the others, emigrates, refugees or ethnic minority groups. Therefore a pupil or a student either, native or immigrant, etc., by the application of the fundamental ideas, notions and values of a critical pedagogy of peace, could well understand that otherness is constructed in the same way/mode for all of us.

In conclusion, the role of Literature in the above described education perspective, as I believe became clear, is very significant. The Balkan pupil, like every other in the planet, I think and I believe that will better understand the other and himself with the presentation of similarities and differences between different cultures. And here we have insisted on similarities, because of the geographical neighborhood of our countries and peoples. By a critical approach of poetic texts, pupils acquire critical attitudes to the stereotypes and prejudices or bias for the other (Ampatzopoulou 1998), while in parallel become conscious of their responsibilities towards the other, because today all of us we live in multicultural societies without borders.

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### **Brief bio**

I am Associate Professor in the Department of Prime Education at the University of Western Macedonia and my general teaching subject is Modern Greek Literature &

Children's Literature. My research interests are History, Criticism and Didactics of Greek Children's Literature. The last book I wrote is *The modern Greek popular Tale as Literature*.