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REVIEW



A case study of immigrant students' construction of national identity through the analysis of their discourse in a Greek Intercultural school

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ABSTRACT



A central issue in the academic discussion related to immigrant groups and their integration in 'their new home' is national identity. This paper focuses on the methodological choices during a case study of the students' subjectivity in an Intercultural School in Thessaloniki in Greece and on how immigrant students form their identities. Most students as second-generation immigrants constantly negotiate multiple identities. This negotiation leads to the construction of ambivalence and conflicting identities that are represented with uncertainty and equivocation in their discourse. In this paper, I will present briefly a conceptual placement in social constructionism and the distinction between primitive and modern nationalism and will continue focusing on how the ambiguous and conflicting identities of immigrant students are shaped based on conception of national identity, the role of nostalgia and memory and finally on the polycentricity of the construction of national identity of students.

KEYWORDS

National identity;
immigration; intercultural
education; discourse analysis

Introduction

Having to deal with the new multicultural and multilingual student population that rose significantly in the decade between 1990 and 2000, the Greek Ministry of Education was obliged to regulate the adjustment of the Greek educational system to the new academic reality. Hence, *Reception* and *Remedial Classes* for immigrant students, active since 1980, were extended and, along *Schools for the Repatriated*¹ active since 1985, *Intercultural Schools* were established in 1996, so that immigrant students would be integrated in a school environment that would respect cultural difference and facilitate the coexistence of local and immigrant students, and in which cultural specificity would be validated – legally, at least. This paper aims to present the structure and the methodology of a doctoral research conducted in an intercultural junior high school, where the ways and discursive practices in which immigrant students construct their national identity were studied, the interpretation and explanation of which delineates the respective subject positions they occupy.²

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This paper focuses on:

- the reasons why the specific methodological approaches for analysis were selected in a field research in an Intercultural School
- the ways and practices according to which immigrant students construct their identity through their discourse. The interpretation and the explanation of these show the subject positions they take while representing their identities.

The axes that are studied in this paper are firstly about the conflicting identities, secondly about the essentialist construction of national identity and thirdly, about the reason of nostalgia and memory and their need or not to return.

In the fields of both deconstructionism and social constructionism (Burr, 1995, pp. 16–26 and 61–63), identity is defined as a social construction through the acting social subject's discourse. This paper adopts the thesis that discourse is a social practice, constructing subject positions for the subjects participating in communication in any social situation, while the models of Gunther Kress (1988, 1989), Hodge and Kress (1988, 1993 [1979]) and Norman Fairclough (1989, 1992, 1995) are used as epistemological framework and as methodological approaches for discourse analysis.

A multi-dimensional national identity is constructed by subjects who represent it through their discourse at the same time that they are constructing their own subjectivity (Henriquez et al., 1984; Turner, 1984, Kress 1988, 1989; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Hall, 1996a; Yudell, 2006; Ross, 2007; Dragona, 2008). Contemporary approaches reify the concept of national identity and attribute a social and political origin to it, juxtaposing it to the idealist concept of a national identity and the 'natural' inclusion of the individual in a particular nation (Gellner [1983]1992; Hobsbawm, 1994; Balibar, 1996).

Research aims and framework. Conditions and context of research

The research was conducted in the Intercultural Junior High School of Thessaloniki. Before the actual study, there were visits to the school, observation of the lessons within the Reception and Remedial Classes, and contact with educators and students alike. The study began in January 2005 and concluded on December 2005. It is a case study utilizing the techniques of the ethnographic method. Thirty-one interviews, of 16 male and 15 female students, were based upon a loosely structured protocol of questions which constitute the research material. The questions' guidelines were configured according to the research aims and the common elements of the theories for the construction of national identity, such as language, tradition, historical memory, common rights and responsibilities in the name of the students' shared attributes as members of the same ethnic group, common ethnic origin. The students' linguistic level and the special conditions of their particular descent were taken into account. Students come from Albania, Russia, Georgia, Bulgaria, Germany, Kazakhstan, St. Dominic, Armenia, Azerbaijan.

The basic research questions were as follows:

- What are the students' conceptions of the national self? What are the 'characteristics' of national identity that they employ in their discourse? Do they create a consistent or ambivalent national identity?

- How do students define the concept of ‘homeland’? Do they wish to return?
- Does the group of immigrant students with only a few years of residence in Greece present more consistent characteristics of national identity or not, when compared to the rest of the students?

Over the last years an attempt for ‘new conception of Greekness’ has been made, according to which being Greek is the individual’s choice, where ‘choice’ means the negotiation of the content of national identity. This means the expansion of the concept of multiple identity to different ethnic groups. This ‘conception of Greekness’ is institutionally expressed through intercultural education and the creation of intercultural schools. Intercultural education distances itself from what have been considered objective criteria for the student’s national identity, her ethnic origin and characteristics, and gives precedence –at least at the legal framework level- to the student’s participation in the social reality, her equal access to education, and the responsibility that comes with her integration in a multicultural collectivity.

Intercultural Schools were established in 1996. The Law [2413/96](#), Government Gazette [124 i.A/17.6.1996](#) indicates that intercultural schools can use a different curriculum, providing the students with extra classes, and the educators with fewer teaching hours, while distributing a smaller number of students to each class. The schedule is in accordance with that of the school system, and is based on the same principles and legislation. According to article 34 of Law [2413/96](#):

The aim of intercultural education is the organization and operation of primary and secondary education for the provision of education to young people with academic, social, cultural or educational particularities. The same programs that delineate the operation of public schools are employed in intercultural schools, which adjust to the special academic, social, cultural or educational needs of their students.

Two kinds of Reception Classes exist in intercultural schools, with Reception Class 1 being in session for one academic year and focusing on the instruction of Greek as a second language, and Reception Class 2 providing additional classes and lasting for two academic years, or even three in ‘exceptional cases’.

According to relevant ministerial decisions, educators in these schools are allowed to adjust the curriculum according to the immigrant students’ needs, and to select ‘the format that works effectively and efficiently’ (Government Gazette [10/20/Γ1/708/7-9-1999](#)).

Along the regular school handbooks that the Ministry of Education publishes, educators in language classes use the books published by the Centre for Intercultural Education. According to the legislation, the immigrant students’ languages and cultures can be taught in relevant classes, on condition that a minimum of 7–10 students is met.

In September 1999 new amendments were ratified, so that a legal framework has been established, one that allows for educators in each school unit to choose the most effective format in accordance with the students’ academic needs (Paleologou & Evaggelou, [2011](#), p. 118).

It is worth noting that the students’ age is not taken into consideration for their participation in reception and remedial classes. This also happens in ‘regular’ classrooms – especially where there are no reception or remedial classes in the school –which can ultimately lead to the students’ not being integrated in the class or to their dropping out of school altogether (Mousourou, [2006](#), p. 237).

In 2010 the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki promoted the program 'Integration for immigrant and repatriated students' which was concluded in 2013. The general aim of the project was to prevent immigrant and repatriated students in the Greek school system from academic failure, by creating advantageous conditions that would allow the principles of intercultural education to be put into practice (Paleologou & Evaggelou, 2011, pp. 133–134).

This case study was conducted in an Intercultural Junior High School that abided by most of the principles formulated by the relevant legislation.

The selection of the ethnographic approach, interview and case study

The research approach and the methodological approaches of analysis, that were adopted for the study of the field and the interpretation of the data, were not chosen in advance, nor did they remain static. On the contrary, the field research and observation, along with the evaluation of the conditions of the study were, among others, the factors that contributed to the interpretation of the data.

An ethnographic-interpretative study and a study case were chosen, or, according to Avgitidou (1997, p. 68), 'the ethnographic case study', during which observation in the first phase and interviews in the second phase were used to gather data, since the application of qualitative methodologies aims at the revelation of the restrictions that cultural norms impose on members of vulnerable social groups, while at the same time giving voice to these marginalized groups. The case study does not constitute sampling research, and so focuses on the study group's singularity. Thus, the subjects' multiple realities, and their diverse or conflicting conceptions are put forth (Atkinson, Delamont, & Hammersley, 1993; Lecompte, 2002, p. 292; Stake, 1995, pp. 4–12).

The study on the concept of the nation through discourse does not mean that emphasis is only given to language or the relevant rhetoric. It also aims at changing the concept of nation as object of study, a concept that is diversified through the alternative aspects that are given it by various groups of people, by youth, nostalgia, new ethnicities (Hall, 1996a), new social movements, the politics of difference, all that allows for new interpretations and different directions in the process of historic change. Bhabha (1994) suggests in his theory a range of different readings that do not take homogeneity and the past history of the nation for granted. Such a reading can come from minorities and immigrants, which was done in the present study.

The study group consists of immigrant students of the Intercultural Junior High School of Evosmos, in Thessaloniki. The cases were chosen so that the discourse of both students with a long residence in Greece and students with only up to one year in the country would be analyzed, since in this way it was possible to focus on discrepancies among the different cases (Meyer, 2001, p. 334). The student population of this school consisted of 40% of immigrant students and of 60% of non-immigrant students. This student population percentage is obligatory for an Intercultural School in Greece. Therefore, the Intercultural School of Evosmos in Thessaloniki was the only one that fulfilled the above condition. The participants were all the immigrant students that attended Reception Classes and immigrant students that were integrated in the mainstream school schedule. A basic condition for their participation was that participants had to communicate fluently in the Greek language. It was also taken, of course, under consideration that the number of

the participants was appropriate for an ethnographic approach and that research conditions were in accordance with the ethical code.

Over the course of the researcher's visit to the school, the contact with the teachers during class hours was very important in that it allowed the comprehension of the school and classroom processes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 80, 87). What was also constructive was the continuous collaboration with the instructor responsible for the program's curriculum, as his perspective on the school's processes was helpful to understand the operation of classes, as well as the instructors' practices in both teachings the Reception and Remedial classes and approaching their students.

The individual interviews were, finally, the most effective in retrieving and collecting data on complicated and sensitive issues such as that of identity construction, one that requires the ability to instigate the subject to express her conceptions and explicate her theses, so that her representations of the world and its experience are understood. Besides, it is what the subjects say during an interview, and the way in which they say it, that matters to the researcher (Brown & Dowling, 1998, p. 72–73; Bryman, 2004).

When describing the social situation – semiotic process in which the students' discourse was produced, it is worth noting that the loosely structured interviews were conducted during class hours. Each interview took place in a small classroom that was selected after some search in the school premises. Therefore, the space that the interviews took place in was familiar to the students who had also already become familiar with the researcher's presence in their classrooms. The students' participation was influenced by their teacher's admonition –it, somehow, constituted an obligation- without this meaning that students were denied its refusal. In fact, four of them refused to participate and two of them, on the other hand, asked the researcher if they could take part as soon as they spoke fluent Greek. However, the subject position in the classroom did not leave much room for students to refuse the interview -since much as in the context of the school environment, so in the context of the interview, the respective limitations of the logonomic system exist.

From discourse analysis to Social Semiotics

Having made the decision to use Discourse Analysis as the preferred methodological approach, I believed that I had chosen the most appropriate method in order to analyze oral texts. However, some difficulties appeared that were related to the application of the method to the students' oral production during the interviews, and so the question was raised whether Discourse Analysis can help with the data analysis, or whether there are limits to the method's effectiveness. At what point does this method stop leading to reliable results, so that some other method needs to be employed?

After relevant discussions and with the help of Gunther Kress³ Social Semiotics was chosen as the methodological tool for the analysis of the students' texts complementing Discourse Analysis, whenever deemed necessary.

In the particular case of immigrant students' discourse analysis, employing Social Semiotics was considered the most relevant approach. The students' discourse was produced in the context of an interview, a kind of text in which power relations are defined by the logonomic system that delineates the boundaries of communication.

The combination of the two methods mentioned above –Social Semiotics and Critical Discourse Analysis– came about because of the specific characteristics of students' discourse and the difficulties that occurred on how to handle the discursive oral text of students who couldn't use the Greek language fluently. This led me to a further study of these two methods and to the conclusion that the two methods –apart from being used in the fields of deconstructionism and social constructionism (Burr, 1995, pp. 16–26, 61–63) which is crucial for the reading and interpretation of texts– share many common features in the basic units of analysis which are mainly discourse, type, text and context. Similarities between the two methods are observed in semiotic functions of grammar, negation, modality, transformations, syntax and subject positions. The authors use similar interpretation techniques in the linguistic analysis of the text and in the interpretation of ideological complexes and logonomic systems as well. What is particularly important is that they have many similarities, which contributes to the effective use of both methods of Discourse Analysis and Social Semiotics. These two methods have contributed to an unusual and interesting interpretation of the data.

Although this research agrees with the postmodern approach, the creation of notions and the construction of national identity, a traditional approach to the interpretation of students' discourse shouldn't be excluded.

The survey was conducted in the Intercultural Junior High School in Evosmos, in Thessaloniki in Greece, involving school visits, lessons' observations in Reception Classes and Support Courses and contacts with teachers and students. There are 31 interviews– 16 by male students and 15 by female students which the research material is based on.

Epistemological context

In the relevant bibliography, two approaches are found for creating nation-states: the traditional and the postmodern approach. In the traditional nationalist historiography, national identity is seen as stable and unchanging, as an integrity through time and history of each nation. National identity determines the construction of individuals in a national group by giving forms of solidarity and expressing common traditions, memories, common linguistic style and the possibility or not of the incorporation of a nation in a state. The more recent approach is adopted, according to which a multi-dimensional national identity is constructed by subjects who represent it through their discourse at the same time that they are constructing their own subjectivity (Henriquez et al., 1984; Turner, 1984, Kress 1988, 1989; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Hall, 1996a; Yudell, 2006; Ross, 2007; Dragona, 2008). Contemporary approaches reify the concept of national identity and attribute a social and political origin to it, juxtaposing it to the idealist concept of a national identity and the 'natural' inclusion of the individual in a particular nation (Gellner [1983]1992; Hobsbawm, 1994; Balibar, 1996).

The postmodern approach of the construction of the nations and national identity produces a reason for the construction of national identity comparing it to the essentialist operation of national identity and the natural integration of the individual into a nation and giving materialistic features and social and political origins. Specifically, a group of people becomes a nation when they acknowledge the rights and obligations of each member in the name of their common property as members of the same ethnic group – since nations are constructions of human perceptions and solidarities and power

(Gellner (1983)1992; Hobsbawm, 1994). Members of a nation share a unified political will, they are united under a common culture and a political ideology, common memories, myths, symbols and traditions.

Individuals are established as national subjects of the nation-state and its mechanisms, such as public education, and it's the nation state itself that builds an imagined community through which cohesion and solidarity are produced (Anderson, 1991; Liakos, 2005).

Therefore, an imaginary ethnic group is created based on the official language and the establishment of a 'racial' community in the sense of kinship of the national population which ensures 'the kinship of the children of homeland' (Balibar, 1988). So, consequently, a brotherhood is constructed among the other members of the same nation and those of diaspora. As Balibar claims 'the myth of national continuity is an essential ideological form which every day constitutes the imagined uniqueness of national formations' (Balibar, 2017, p. 138) as Benedict Anderson (1991) advocates as well. Homi Bhabha (1990, 1994) demonstrates the absence of immigrant groups from theoretical approaches and from the study of nations and shows that they are treated as if they have always been non-existent in the world of nation-states. The new ethnicities mobilize identities both by reference to the present and the cultural context and the past and its 'hidden' stories and memory. In this new nationalities, members of minority groups and immigrants are included (Hall, 1996a, pp. 345–349).

In the analysis and interpretation of the data of my research specific assumptions are taken into account regarding the construction of national identity. First, national identity is constructed through discourse. Identities are produced and linguistically formulated through interactions. The rhetorical promotion of national identification and the discursive construction and reproduction of national difference are taken into account (Fairclough, 1989, 1992; Kress 1988, 1989; Hall, 1996; Wodak, 2009). Finally, national identity and the conception of the nation are imagined (Anderson, 1997).

The post-modern approach to national identity speaks of multiple identities and not just one. When it comes to immigrants or minority groups then, not only multiple but ambiguous identities are constructed. In the context, of primitive conception of the creation of nations (Smith 2000), the concept of ethnic identity is used, an identity that is somehow part of the national one but is associated with potential nations and determines the cultural existence of the dominant ethnic group in a state. The ethnic identity is recreated by the members of ethnic communities even when they live outside their country of origin.

Conflicting and ambiguous identities

Identity is constructed through the production of a variety of factors. Immigrants produce new voices and new identities are constructed often through competitive discourses that structure conflict or ambivalent identities. Ethnicity is not handed 'naturally' but discovered through history, storytelling and memory.

The new ethnicities mobilize their identities both by referring to the present and their cultural context and by referring to the past, its hidden stories and memory.

Vassilis from Georgia (he has been in Greece for one year) tries to describe his identity saying: 'I am Greek. What should I do now? I want to go back to Georgia but everyone is here. What should I do? I'm not Greek. I'm Pontios⁴ from Georgia'.

Vassilis finds it difficult to define his father's identity as his own, and immediately afterwards declares that he is a Greek, since his whole family is in Greece, while he wants his return to Georgia. The repeated question is 'what do I do now', which suggests the necessity of his stay in Greece and his inability to change things. Questions give uncertainty to the subject's mimetic formulations. His inability to speak clearly about his identity is obvious.

Another girl from Russia, who was born in Georgia but doesn't mention it from the beginning says:

'I don't know. I am Pontia ... I don't know. We have a small percentage of Pontian origin, a small one ... I am Greek' and her brother answers: 'I am not like a foreign person in Greece, because we are Greek-Pontii' [...]

Philippa from Georgia (one year in Greece) and Peter from Russia (five years in Greece) express themselves in a similar way and we can notice a dilemma in their discourse: 'I wanted Georgia to win (he refers to a football match between Greece and Georgia) but when we lost I didn't feel sorry, because I am here in Greece, I just wanted Georgia to win'. Peter wavers when he is asked about his homeland: 'Russia. Oh, not, Greece but Russia draws me'.

Elias from Kazakhstan has been living in Greece for the past three years. He introduces an 'intermediated identity'—according to the term 'in between' introduced by Homi | Bhabha (1990, 1996) for the new ethnicities—which are basically made up by repatriated students. When asked about his country, he says:

My homeland? You mean where I was born? Greece (he answers quietly). But if we think about in such a way ... I can't understand this: let's say that, when you say home, you mean I feel as if it is my home? I still feel as if it is.

Abraham from Armenia, (10 years in Greece) claims that he is 'like a Greek', because everybody recognizes him as Greek, and that in a football game between Armenia and Greece will remain 'neutral'. But in a football game between Greece and Russia he will support the greek team 'because he lives in Greece and his football coaches are Greek'. It is important here that firstly, his identity is constructed through the eyes of other people (Hall, 1996) around him and secondly that the significant parameter isn't his origin but his love for football.

Students in their discourse show multiple identities that involve their birthplace, their parents' and grandparents' origin, how their family migrated and their current residence. Therefore, the subjects of the research construct their identity and produce a variation in their discursive practices which appears due to the grounds and practices they have experienced in their homeland and due to those that either collide or agree in the host country and their new cultural environment.

'Blood relations' and the essential perception of identity

National identity is noticed in everyday life, in the world of nations-states. Members of an ethnicity share common myths, common memories and traditions that either do or not find a political expression in the nation-state where they belong. National identity in the traditional discourse is constructed as a 'natural' as having 'one nose and two ears' (Gellner: 22).

Meanings such as unity, identity, brotherhood and homeland form a national symbolism. According to Hobsbawm (2004) the invented tradition and the constructed past function in a similar way. National ideology often refers to 'blood relations' (Billig, 1995, p. 55). Blood relations links origins from family ideology. So, relating to an ethnotic group seems like a 'legacy' and a 'natural bond', concepts that characterize racist discourse.

In Ilirianas' interview (from Albania, one year in Greece) and Boris's interview (he comes from Georgia, he has been in Greece for one and a half year), we notice a stable national identity that is represented as hereditary. The relationship among the members of ethnicity is based on 'blood relations'. It is a metaphor noticed in such cases 'because his blood is Albanian, he will remain Albanian'. Therefore, blood is personified and acquires national dimensions. It becomes 'Albanian blood' and remains as it is through time. The use of future tenses 'will be', 'will remain Albanian', connect 'national blood' to the future giving continuity to the national identification.

Boris said:

Why ... the blood is Albanian, so it will remain Albanian. That's all. There is a pupil in my class, an Albanian, he forgot his language and acts like a Greek. I tell him: 'Do not forget your language'. He doesn't remember anything. He says: 'I came here when I was four, that's why I forgot all this stuff'. I tell him not to forget. It doesn't matter how old he came or how old he will become. Even if I was born here it wouldn't matter. I wouldn't be Greek, because my parents are from Georgia. Why would I want to be Greek? I like Greeks, I have no problem being from Georgia. I like the fact that I am from Georgia. None can be Greek when he comes from another country. He can talk, and talk and shout that he is Greek but he is not Greek at all.

Vladimir, another student from Russia (seven years in Greece), refers to 'roots' while he is talking about his origin. This metaphor of the national subjects as if they were 'implanted' in their homelands is an intertextual form of a botanic discourse and it is a construction of an ethnocentric discourse (Malkki, 1996, p. 437).

National identity is motivated and presented here as a characteristic that the subjects are born with. Identity is related to a traditional national discourse that gives identity its 'inherited dimensions'. Students refer to identity as something passed from one generation to another as it is inherited by blood. This metaphorical use of blood as a natural bond reminds us the racist discourse of 'race purity' which now becomes a 'national purity'. This essentialist representation of national identity as an inherent characteristic is associated with the representation of the country in terms of family, mother country and homeland but also with a biological nationalism (Billig, 1995, p. 105; Frangoudaki, 2004, pp. 21, 29).

Nostalgia and memory

Most students miss their homeland and this is noticed when talking about their country, relatives and friends. Sometimes they refer to their birthplace and to the people – relatives and friends – that they miss and other times they refer to traditional practices that function symbolically in the recreation of their identity. These have to do with traditional food, holidays, exchange of gifts, playing in the neighborhood: 'My grandma, my grandpa, my cousins, my friends I hang out with, the places I went to', 'all my relatives, my school, my house, I miss them a lot', 'my house, my school, the thing we did there, the holidays

and celebrations I remember'. All the above is mentioned by Ivanka from Bulgaria (two years in Greece), Philippa from Saint Dominic (one year in Greece) and Elira from Albania (one and a half years in Greece).

Iliriana comes from Koritsa, Albania. She shows nostalgia when comparing Koritsa and Thessaloniki. The criteria of this comparison are the roads, the big houses and the climate. The experience of nostalgia is delivered by emotion: 'When I watch TV and they speak Albanian, I cry and tell to my mum "I want to go back to Albania"'.

Those students who have been living in Greece for a few years, give detailed descriptions of the towns and the villages they come from. On the other hand, the memory of students living in Greece for many years is weak as they claim that they don't remember anything.

The detailed description given by Boris who comes from Georgia and has been living in Greece for two years is a characteristic one:

Houses have three or five floors ... where I lived, the town had two sides, there was a bridge and a river – you might know– it's called Doukouvari –we called it the left and the right side. On the left or on the right –I can't remember– a bit old or new, it was 20 years ago, everything there on the new side were 8 and 9 storey houses. On the old side, under six floors. It was better there. At first, there weren't roads but they built everything. There was a park and a lake and a boat to row. Many games and something like a park for animals.

In all of the description, students used the adjective 'big' to describe the size and the opposites 'big–small' when comparing their homeland with Thessaloniki. Most students who have been living in Greece for many years say that they couldn't describe their town as they don't remember it and at the same time they are not very nostalgic. To my surprise when a student was asked to describe his city he briefly described Thessaloniki. The fact that national identity is kept in mind is because it is a part of the daily practices, so the members of each national community are so familiar with these, that reproduction and preservation are considered as natural. So, the symbolic reproduction of identity is 'naturalized' (Billig, 1995, p. 37–38, Hobsbawm). It is particularly interesting when students attempt to describe in detail the space, the place by referring to the blocks of flats in their neighborhood, their parks, the schools and the roads. Students through discourse regenerate the outer material reality of spaced buildings, roads and other familiar spaces, interpreting each time its various parts (Lagopoulos – Boklund 1992, 39–41), as they recall by telling the place they used to live and giving interpretations such as of the country they feel nostalgic about.

The complexity of their identities and its conflicting sides are noticed in the descriptions of the place they come from and are compared to the place of reception. This students' multidimensional subjectivity is mobilized every time they asked for clarifications about the place, in order to construct their discourse. The identity of these 'imagined communities of diaspora' is daily made through the engagement of different and possible conflicting parameters of the social environment (Brah, 1996, p. 183). Since students talk about it, we can see the relationship between space and social significations. Material dimensions are associated with the cultural ones. Therefore, space is simultaneously a materialistic and a cultural system. Through discourse, space is reconstructed as students choose, organize and interpret the signs (Lagopoulos & Lagopoulou-Boklund, 1992, p. 43) by speaking about the nostalgia they experience or not related to the place of origin.

'Enough with moving, enough! the return'

Migrant group members know that returning to the countries of origin is rather unrealistic. However, they do retain imaginary connections with their homelands while at the same time attempting to construct an identity that incorporates the daily practices of the new reception country. Second or third generation migrants are the ones who recall the traditions of their homeland through the imaginary representation of their identity, all the while knowing they will not return. This identity is usually constructed through conflicting discourses, practices and conditions (Hall, 1996b, pp. 3–5).

Marianna from St. Dominic (four years in Greece) reluctantly claims that 'she will probably stay here', after having said that 'she does not mind either staying or leaving'. The casual modality which covers her words with uncertainty is expressed through the adverb 'probably'. The reason why she chooses to stay in Greece is her studies, about which she speaks with certainty, since she uses the future simple as form of modality 'I will study'.

Philippa (one year in Greece) refers to three different countries: she wishes to live in Spain, later, however, she refers to the possibility to live in Georgia, where she comes from, about which she reserved, talking about realistic difficulties that she would probably have to face there: 'I don't know how things will be again, if I can't live there, I will go to a different country'. Her imaginary relocation to Spain, because 'when she was little, she liked Spain and Spanish', which she states using the relational verb 'I like', is measured against a realistic situation represented through her discourse which refers to living conditions in Georgia, 'you can't live there now. They have no jobs, they have no food to eat, they can't laugh, because they have no work'. Philippa refers to real survival difficulties, like unemployment and lack of food supplies, which constitute her reasoning for the lack of happiness in people's lives in Georgia. The student refers to these difficulties using the 2nd person singular, generalizing, 'you can't live there', but also the 3rd person plural, 'they have no jobs, they have no food to eat, they can't laugh', which is a signifier of the subject's detachment from the syntagma she articulates. We can also observe the lack of conjunctions, by which her statements seem to climax. The third option to which she refers is staying in Greece: 'But I like it here, I can't leave here, now. I have friends, I can't change countries every year'.

In Aleka's discourse (one and a half years in Greece), we can identify similar wording to that of both Marianna's and Philippa's. Aleka's discourse is ambivalent at first, just like Marianna's, regarding the place where she would rather live, and reluctantly says:

I don't know. I want both here and there. I can't decide. It's better here, because over there we didn't have electricity, lights, electricity in the house, we don't always have water, it doesn't run. People don't have money to buy food.

Her discourse is constructed between 'here' and 'there'. As she is negotiating the place of residence, she refers to the hard living conditions in Georgia. Her wording is constructed through comparison, using the comparative adverb 'better'. In this comparison, the first item of comparison, 'here', is rated as positive, while the second item, 'there', is negative, along all the signifieds that accompany it with the use of the negative sentences, where the verb forms 'we didn't have/don't have/they don't have', denote the lack of property and ownership of, nonetheless, material goods.

Morris (three years in Greece), while developing a confident discourse on his Georgian identity in earlier syntagmas, is reluctant and ambivalent in his articulation when it comes to the issue of permanently returning to Georgia. Like the rest of the Georgian students, he refers to living conditions in Georgia, albeit in an implicit way: 'If it will be as it still is, I want to be there, but not live there, er go and see there for two, three months, go back to where I used to live'.

By introducing the negative conjunction 'but', Morris sets the conditions on which he would return, defining the length of his stay to 'two, three months'. It is interesting to note in his discourse the emphatic reference to his country as the place of his birth 'I told you, I was born there', but also to his grandparents, on whom he produces an emotional discourse when referring to his grandfather's death and his own obligation to tend to his grave:

My grandfather died there. And my grandmother can't make it, she is also old, she's seventy four and who's going to see if, how do you call it, what you put dirt on. Who's going to see if there are no weeds on it, if it's nice.

The obligation to take care of his grandfather's grave is expressed with a rhetorical question, which implies the answer. Tending to a grave is an almost ritual practice and, like all rituals, it preserves and reproduces identities and social relations (Hobsbawm, 2004, p. 297).

In the analysis of the thematic axis above, most students in this sample group talk about a temporary future move to their respective countries of origin, and a permanent residence in Greece. Even the students who develop an ethnocentric discourse wish to return for only a limited time period, or provided that the living conditions in the country change. Most students seem to understand, and accept, the prospect of permanent residence in Greece. Students with many years of residence in Greece develop their discourse with certainty, without negotiating their return, as opposed to students with only a few years in the country, and who might not expect to return, yet express their views with uncertainty, and sometimes even ambivalence.

Discussion

The research aimed at the study of the discourse produced by a group of male and female immigrant students, in order to understand the ways in which the students create a national identity. The study focused on the form and the content of the discourse, and complements existing studies on identity, since the latter lack a focus on the analysis of the discourse of immigrant students. What is more, the students' narratives, which they produced willingly, and so their life stories, became known. Furthermore, the linguistic repertoire which students mobilize when talking about their identity, along with the content of their discourse, through which they construct their subjectivity, were studied.

The ongoing transformations of their discourse show this negotiation and the uncertainty in defining their identity in their quest to choose between the available words and subject positions provided by the different logic systems in different institutions and different social interactions.

The study of immigrant student's discourse shows the multiple dimensions of national identity. National identity isn't just a cultural dimensioned category but it includes an imagined identification with a nation or an ethnic group and an issue of political legislation as

well. Students form a polysemy identity, as they combine multiple and often contradictory discourses derived from their everyday life. In students' discourse coming from multicultural and multilingual environments, language is not a factor of national or ethnic differentiation. The identification of ethnic and linguistic communities, usually pursued through public education, does not arise from studying the discourse of students, particularly repatriated. But it is a criterion of national identity, especially in the case of students coming from monolingual environments, as well as Georgian students- mainly boys - who develop an ethnocentric speech with more ethnic identities, as they emblem emphatically issues of language, family ties, place. The construction of specific names for students' identities, such as the identity of 'Georgianopontiou', 'Hellenopontius' or 'Rossopontios' is very interesting. Pontian identity appears to be mobilized in students' speech as another identity that is not related to Greek. It is constructed as an ethnic identity in the students' discourse of pontian origin. The national identity of students who do not belong to the repatriate group does not mean that it is static. What is being constructed is a relative certainty of the declaration of their national identity, which is, however, represented as polysemous, when the elements of the new cultural environment are also involved.

In the case of survey subjects, the ways in which they build their identity show a volatility, which seems to be due to both to the reasons and practices they have experienced in the country of origin and to those with whom either conflict or are called upon to agree in the host country and in their new cultural environment.

Most of the students shape their identity as if it is inherited, as an essential characteristic unchangeable during time. This identity is being inherited 'through blood'. Blood, therefore, acts as a national symbol, common in the nationalistic discourse. Only a few of the students constructed an identity of citizenship while talking about national identity. Those students shaped their subjectivity firstly as potential citizens and secondly as 'national subjects' giving materialistic features and social and political origins.

For students that took part in this survey, national identity is shaped when they are asked to speak about their personal and family stories and about their expectations related to whether they'll stay in Greece or not. Their identity is formed when talking about themselves or the community. Their subjectivity is constructed as they recall their experiences in the different environments –such as family, school and social environments– of the countries they come from. They describe the places they live, their origin and negotiate their identity. Members of immigrant communities, as they move from one place to another, are cut off of their national space and their imagined bonds with it. This disconnection is expressed by using the opposite adverbs 'here' and 'there', which construct the spatial and imagined boundaries between the past and the present. The spatial attributes that students use, as they talk about their identity, express national or ethnic symbols and separate the familiar from the unfamiliar, 'us' from 'others'. Diaspora's imagined communities' identity is formed every day through different and even contradictory discourses of their social environment (Brah, 1996, p. 183). Material and cultural dimensions of space communicate.

Additionally, the relationships between immigrants and places are likely to change as well. Some changes may be positive and meaningful and lead to acceptance and better integration of immigrants, while others may be characterized by prejudice, alienation, and insecurity. Above all, the well-being of immigrant sending and receiving places depends on the immigrant experiences in both locales (Kaplan & Chacko, 2015, p. 136).

Students' identity is polysemous – both imagined and determined by materialistic factors – and for many have ethnic characteristics. But in their discourse we could see their belief or certainty that they would remain in Greece. Whether they construct their multiple identities or produce an ethnocentric discourse they understand that they won't return to their homeland. This assumption contributes to factors relevant with the future and therefore to a renegotiation of their identity and their place in the Greek reality.

The discourse on identity is formulated as they speak «about themselves and the community». Their subjectivity is constructed as they recall experiences in the various environments, such as family, school, and social environment, of the countries where they come from. They describe the places where they lived, they talk about their ancestry through interweaving various, and at times conflicting, discourses, and they negotiate their identity. Male and female students of the sample construct a polysemous identity, both imaginary and defined in material terms, and with strong ethnic elements for many of them. Nonetheless, the belief –and at times the certainty– of permanent residence in Greece was present in all of the students' discourses. Even when students present their multiple identities, or produce a discourse on their countries of origin, focusing on one national identity, they do realize they will not return to those countries and that constitutes an admittance that produces discourses relevant to the future and, therefore, to a renegotiation of their identity and the place they occupy in the Greek reality. Qualitative research approaches as Discourse Analysis through immigrant students' narratives give a potentially helpful framework and methodology in the classroom, in professional learning for teachers and for educational research – especially in working with immigrant students, their peers, and their teachers. Those voices need to be heard by the Institutes of Educational Policy – and not only in Greece – in order to organize and construct educational programs and curricula that give emphasis to educational inclusion and social justice.

Notes

1. These are repatriated Greek immigrants from the countries of former Soviet Union, their number calculated at 350.000. They constitute the vast majority of all immigrants arriving from the countries of former Soviet Union. By clarifying the terms, the term repatriated can only be attributed to the first generation, since the members of the next generations were born outside of Greece and belong to the diaspora (Sapountzis et al., 2006; Christopoulos & Tsitselikis, 2003).
2. All proper names used in this article are pseudonyms.
3. Gunther Kress participated in the study as «colleague from an institute abroad». The Thesis was submitted under the program for the enhancement of new research staff (PENED 2003). Under this program collaboration with Gunther Kress, and his scientific guidance, proved invaluable especially for the selection of the method for discourse analysis.
4. The word Pontios in the Greek language stands for an ethnic group that comes from the region of Pontos (Asia Minor) in Asia, in present Turkey. Repatriated students from the countries of the former Soviet Union come from multilingual environments. They speak the Russian language, the language of the republics they inhabited, and – those from Turkish-speaking parents – understand a Turkish dialect. However, they emphatically mobilize their Pontic origin as opposed to Greek, speaking of the Pontian dialect and the Turkish language with which the larger members of their family communicate. This Turkish dialect was used by Turkish-speaking Pontic populations who had been forbidden to use the mother tongue on the Ottoman Empire, mainly from the populations living in the mountain Tsalka of Georgia and moved to Russia (Agtzidis, 1991, p. 16; Kesidis, 1995, p. 97–98). The mobilization of Pontian origin is evident in the students' discourse with a few years of residence in Greece.

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