

The narratives of the ‘sense of belonging’ by returnee students of Albanian origin: transitions and identity ascriptions

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Abstract

The present study focuses on adolescents of Albanian origin, who go back to their parental homeland after a long stay in Greece. The research was based on pre-adolescent and adolescent students (10-18 year old), who experienced moving and integrating into Albanian society after having lived in Greece for many years. In particular, the present paper aims at highlighting the way in which they narrate their “belonging” while being in their country of origin and the way in which their socialization experiences in the country of immigration influence this. Research data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 31 returnee students from one of the Greek minority schools in Albania. The analysis of research data revealed that the pupils see their integration in their country of origin as a dynamic procedure of not only reaction and resistance at established social norms, but also an active presence in social life and a formation of synthetic identities of their bicultural and bilingual impressions. Even though the way that the students’ perception of their ethnocultural identity differs from one another, for subjectivity reasons, all views even the most undimensional ones, highlight the internal processes of positive “fermentation” of experience of participants from both their sociocultural contexts of reference.

Keywords: return migration, identity, the sense of belonging, acculturation, students

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I. INTRODUCTION

In recent times international migratory flows have changed in nature and demonstrate a dynamic quality (Kunuroglu, van de Vijver & Yagmur, 2016), as transitions from one social space to the other are more frequent and recurrent, while the return of migrants to their country of origin is no longer considered the end of the migration cycle; rather, it constitutes one stage in the migration process (Cassarino 2004; King 2000; Labrianidis & Lyberaki 2004).

Based on these considerations the current paper, as part of a more extensive study, focuses on return migration and more specifically of that of Albanian origin adolescents. The reason of the present study is the rising rate of immigrants and their families that have decided to go back to their country of origin after a long stay in Greece due to Greece’s financial crisis starting from the year 2010 and on (INSTANT & IOM, 2014). According to official statistics, from the Greek Ministry of Education, in the school year 2013-2014 the number of students leaving Greece to go to Albania was higher than the incoming (<http://www.minedu.gov.gr>).

The present paper aims to showcase how children and teenagers themselves narrate the way that their socialization experiences in the country of immigration (Greece) influence their integration in the parental homeland (Albania); how they reflect on their ethnocultural identity on a synchronous level and what processes they undergo in order to understand and decode their new society, form their identity and ‘sense of belonging’ in it.

II. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

First of all, it should be mentioned that return migration, from the point of view of children and teenagers, is a research field that has not been investigated in depth (Christou 2006; King 2000; King & Christou 2010; Vathi & King 2013), as it is usually analyzed within an "adult-centric" approach, rendering children of returnee families "invisible" in the processes taking place (Hatfield, 2010:244).

These latter approaches tend to treat children simply as "baggage", while at the same time the parents' narrative accounts regarding the reasons for return migration focuses on the prospects and the future of their children (Orellana et al., 2001:588). Because of their young age, children do not take part in the family's decision-making process regarding this moving and neither are in a position to evaluate the reasons upon which this decision rests, even though sometimes this decision is taken precisely for their benefit (Pavlopoulos et al., 2015; Ni Laoire, 2011).

In any case, child and teenage return migration is a rather complex process, since the question that arises is whether this is about a transition to a familiar place, a return to the "parental place" or about the experience of their own first immigration (King & Christou 2014:86). Defining the transition of children to their parental country of origin as a "return" is a simplistic notion. It is so even for adult repatriates who return to a place that has changed with the passage of time while at the same time they have formed novel, diverse experiences from their life in the country of residence. Existing studies have shown that return migration may be the most traumatic experience of the migration process (Chiang et al., 2018).

It is, however, especially true that the children and adolescents' relationship to the country of origin revolves around a symbolic level, as they either left when they were very young, or they have never lived in that country (Damanakis, 2007). As a result, any current or diachronic elements of their ethnocultural identity that relate to the country of origin were acquired primarily in an indirect manner through their family culture, through the narratives and the worldview of their parents as they socialized in the immigration country. To a lesser degree, the identity was acquired directly through visiting the country of origin themselves (Levitt, 2009). Therefore, the transition of those children to their parents' country of origin could not be labelled as a "return" bearing a factual content but rather a symbolic one.

During their transition to their parents' country of origin, the process of adaptation begins, that is the process of re-negotiation of oneself and the shaping of his ethnocultural identity in relation to the local population. According to Festinger (1954 in Chrisochou, 2011:69) when people enter a new social environment, they subconsciously go through comparisons of opinions, beliefs, behaviours in order to find people that they can relate to, to construct their social reality, to form social groups and to find their place within these that is to define their sense of belonging in the particular setting. The processes that occur when people from different sociocultural systems meet and come into contact is described by Berry (2001:616-621) as *acculturation*. It is a process during which both the individuals who enter a society as well as the dominant society itself need to take a stance regarding two basic questions: a) to what extent do individuals wish to come into contact with other individuals outside their group and b) to what extent do they wish to maintain their ethnocultural identity. In essence, both the recent arrivals in a society as well as the local population of this society need to assume a position regarding two dimensions; that of *intercultural contact* and that of *ethnocultural maintenance*.

Resulting from the correlation of these two variables, that of contact and maintenance, Berry (2001) defined four adaptation strategies that individuals, whether they belong to dominant groups or not, are likely to exhibit when they meet within the framework of a society. In two of these strategies intercultural contact and ethnocultural maintenance cannot be met at the same time, leading individuals to choose monocultural living systems. More specifically, the strategy of *assimilation* is characterized by low ethnocultural preservation and high intercultural contact, as individuals select becoming members of the dominant group. At the same time, individuals adopting the strategy of *separation* exhibit high ethnocultural maintenance and low intercultural contact, as they limit themselves within their group and avoid interaction with any other group.

The strategy of *integration* stands in stark contrast to these one-dimensional choices. According to this strategy, individuals wish to, on the one hand, maintain their ethnocultural identity, but on the other, they also wish to engage in interaction with the different ethnocultural groups with whom they coexist. They wish to become active members of this society. In this case, what is required of the new arrivals, is to adhere to the basic principles of the host society while the host society is required to adapt to the needs of the *ethnocultural others*, as members of the same multicultural society.

The fourth strategy, that of *marginalization*, does not fall under any of the previous two cases, as the individual shows low levels of contact with individuals of their group, as well as with people outside their group.

However, in order for the individuals who enter a society to have freedom of choice regarding the way in which they wish to manage their relationships with ethnocultural others as well as their ethnocultural identity, the society itself plays a major role. The latter needs to function in a way that allows for unrestricted choices on the part of the individuals and does not lead to the imposition of certain patterns of relating. For example, if individuals are to be in a position to successfully integrate, the host society needs to be open to cultural diversity

and to create opportunities for expressing this diversity. If some individuals choose assimilation, on the other hand, the dominant group has an obligation to be open to tolerate them and not to treat them with prejudice, discrimination or rejection. In other words, what becomes apparent here is the importance of the role of the dominant society when members of migrant groups are to choose their mode of acculturation (Berry, 2001).

The dominant society needs to support individuals in whatever need for change they might have, making available to them all necessary prerequisites (in institutions, structures etc.), just as the individuals themselves must be ready to accept change, so that they can become active members in the new society and contribute to its development. The pace and extent of this change differs from one person to the other according to Cassarino (2004: 271-275) and depends upon how well this individual has prepared for his moving. The degree to which each person is prepared for migration rests upon the following two factors:

-Resource mobilisation: the financial and social capital that each individual brings with him (life experience and experiences from the former country of residence).

-Migration Readiness: this includes the desire as well as the preparation of the moving. This is a process that goes beyond spontaneous free will and that is furthermore characterized by a conscious and organized preparation to migrate, which requires time and accumulation of various resources on several levels (Cassarino, 2004:271).

What needs to be stressed is that the patterns for mobilizing resources and readiness differ from one person to the other and from one migration to the other depending on the status of the moving person. Other factors include the conditions in both the host country as well as in the destination country, and the personal migration experience of each individual.

Each individual when moving from one place to another, he undergoes a personal and thus subjective negotiation of his sociocultural contexts of reference. That happens as a means to reform and redefine his ethnocultural identity and this process may entail some form of conflict between the dominant group and the individual and as a result the formation of “*resistance identities*” (Castells, 2010) which are based “*on principles that are different or contrary to those that pervade social institutions*”(Castells, 2010:8).

People who move between two different cultures form a unique individual third culture, a “culture between culture” that goes beyond one dimensional cultural teams (Vathi & King, 2020:4) according to the theory of the third space (Bhabha, 1994). Teerling (2011) draws the same conclusion in her research on British born Cypriots who moved back to Cyprus. Similarly, in King and Killinc (2014:132) people of Turkish origin who are born and bred in Germany, when they go back to Turkey they form a kind of “fourth socio-cultural space”, meaning that in their process of integration, despite their self evident Turkish orientation they demonstrate elements of their German upbringing and socialization.

In any case, however, those individuals who have a high level of preparation, are bound to be better equipped to respond to the changes required by the acculturation process and to become functional members in the receiving society.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research aim and objectives

The data presented in this paper constitutes part of a greater micro-ethnographic study (Bryman, 2016; Newby, 2014) which focuses on returnee students and how their ethnocultural identity and sense of belonging is experienced.

A study was designed that aimed at highlighting the way in which children and teenagers experience the general process of “returning” to their country of origin. One of the key areas of interest in the broader project was to examine how they internalize and decode the change in their living space as well as how they engage in their new place of residence, i.e. their country of origin.

In particular, the present paper aims at:

- highlighting the way in which pupils narrate their “belonging” in their country of origin, in other words how do they see their new social reality.

Key dimensions of this issue will be:

- a) the ethnocultural impressions of returnee students before they move to their country of origin
- b) the ethnocultural impressions of returnee students after they have moved to their country of origin.

3.2. Research tools

The collection of research data was through semi-structured interviews with children and adolescents (aged 10-18) of Albanian descent as well as their teachers. The specific qualitative tool was chosen as the main purpose of the study was the subjective narrative accounts of the subjects' migratory trajectory, as the subjects themselves experienced it. Interviews are characterized as "conversations with an aim" (Burgess, 1984 in Mason, 2011: 76), which activate various forms of communication such as narration, description, dialogue, argumentation and they provide the respondent with the opportunity to express their own subjective view on aspects of his or her social reality (Tsiolis, 2015).

The qualitative interview of students was constructed on the following lines in accordance with research objectives:

- Pupil profile (age, school grade, family status, place of birth, years of residence in Greece, years of residence in Albania)
- Life in Greece: socio-economic living conditions of the family, lifestyle, social relationships, and students' school life, family relationship to the country of origin
- Life in Albania: reasons for the family return, the pupil's experiences and feelings during the return, lifestyle, social relationships and students' school life, the bond of the family with the previous country of residence
- The pupil's future goals and aspirations.

Recorded transcripts of the students' interviews were constructed based on the research questions and the research areas. The former was analyzed through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The specific analysis form was chosen as it is a flexible approach that combines the inductive as well as the deductive procedure. This means that the thematic categories, as a unit of coding and data analysis, are given shape through the dynamic interconnection of empirical data content with the researcher's theoretical background (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Placing emphasis on the students' narrative accounts, this study aims to highlight the way in which participants experienced the migratory routes of their lives.

3.3. Study's Participants

The study population consists of pupils of Albanian descent who, after attending the Greek school system for some years, moved back to their parents' country of origin, Albania.

The participating students were selected among the pupils of a Greek minority school¹ in South Albania, at which the researchers conducted field research in spring 2015. The participants of the research were a purposive sample, in the sense that they were intentionally chosen with the help of their teachers as they had returned to Albania from 1 to 4 years prior to the research.

The students had either fresh memories of their life back in Greece or they were in the process of integrating in Albania. The recordings of the interviews were conducted in school, after taking permission. The interviewers stressed the principles of informed consent and the interviewer's right to stop the interview or the recording at any time. At the same time 8 semi-structured interviews were taken from teachers of the Greek speaking minority school, the data of which is not presented in this paper.

In total, 31 interviews were selected from pupils of all levels (5 primary school pupils, 9 middle school pupils, 17 high school pupils). As far as their gender was concerned, 15 respondents were boys and 16 were girls; regarding their age, all of them were of preadolescent and adolescent age (10-18 years old). Twenty-one (21) were born in Greece a fact indicating their long-term stay in Greece, while 10 students were born in Albania but migrated with their family to Greece at a very young age.

IV. RESEARCH OUTCOMES

4.1. Participants' ethnocultural ascriptions before moving

As the current study moves in the realm of return migration, it seems important to briefly mention the ethnocultural impressions participants carried while they were still living in Greece. After all, the actual process of return migration as well as the integration of returnees in their society of origin is inextricably related to the experiences these had during their socialization in the country of residence (King & Christou, 2014).

¹ When Albania joined the League of Nations (1921), the Greek speaking Orthodox minority was officially recognised with the right to preserve its citizenship, language, religion and education. In this framework, schools are established for the minority children with a bilingual curriculum of Greek and Albanian (Vouri & Kapsalis, 2003). In these schools returnee students from Greece, who don't speak Albanian well, are given the chance to attend.

Starting with school life, many studies have shown that the Greek state adopts an assimilative educational policy for pupils with an immigration background living in Greece (Damanakis 1997). According to this policy, the Greek language and Greek civilization form the basic poles of their socialization, while their cultures of origin are largely absent (Gkaintartzi, Kiliari & Tsokalidou, 2014), except for isolated cases during the implementation of specific research projects (see Programme for the Integration of Migrant and Repatriate Pupils, www.diapolis.gr). This means that within the context of Greek society the only locus where the language and identity of the immigrant children's country of origin can be preserved and developed, is their family.

Within the family, the participants themselves describe a Greek-centric way of upbringing and education, mentioning that: *"my parents raised me as Greeks raise their children"* (S21)².

However, in most of the participants' families, this way of upbringing is enriched by the addition of linguistic and cultural elements of the country of origin – to different degrees from family to family:

"My parents spoke Albanian; I could understand them but did not speak [it]" (S13)

"At home, we spoke both languages. I spoke Albanian well. We had both Albanian, Muslim celebrations as well as Greek. We have both Albanian and Greek food" (S19).

Long-term identity traits that have to do with ethnic background are preserved and depend on the conceptual content that the parents themselves, within the family context, ascribe to heritage, language and culture of the country of origin (Kontogianni, Michelakaki & Papalexopoulou, 2019). The experiences that children have, on the other hand, are enriched with some pragmatic elements mostly through contact with the extended family during visits and holidays in the parents' country of origin: *"Our parents spoke to us about Albania but for us it was more the place of our holidays"* (S24). This means that the participants' ethnic identity moves on a symbolic level since they were either born and raised in Greece or they emigrated at a young age.

Thus, while living in Greece respondents have integrated and adapted to the conditions in Greece without necessarily being fully assimilated by the dominant society. While the Greek-like elements dominate on a synchronic level, on a diachronic level they are aware of their ethnic background, not as an element of discrimination and differentiation but as a separate component of their ethnocultural identity. Some students tellingly declared: *"I always used to say that I was from Albania. I never had any issues. We were fine. I was not different from the rest; I was the same"* (S15).

As a result, at the time that the participants of this study move to their country of origin, they carry in themselves an ethnocultural identity, which on the one hand, is dominated by the Greek-like elements, but on the other, Albanian components are incorporated on an individually different level depending on the conceptual content that each immigrant family has passed on to their children.

This plurality of aspects that define the ethnocultural points of reference of Albanian students, has been illustrated in other studies too (Vathi, 2015; Vathi & King, 2020), in which the hybrid or symbolic identities are considered a result of integration strategies in the country of residence. In essence, this is about identities that perpetually change and develop.

4.2. Ethnocultural ascriptions after moving to the country of origin

In this framework, as participants move back to their country of origin, the process of acculturation begins so that they can reconstruct the synchronic and diachronic elements of their ethnocultural identity and redefine their place within Albanian society. In other words, they start making a series of comparisons, choices, evaluations while at the same time they develop ways of perceiving and decoding the new social reality that surrounds them. The differentiated aspects of the migratory experience correspond to differentiated ways of expressing their ethnocultural impressions and mark new frameworks of reference in terms of identity on a synchronic level.

4.2.1. Ways of perceiving the value system and the infrastructure in the country of origin

For the overwhelming majority of students, the transition to Albanian reality has meant de-constructing the image they had formed through the descriptions of their parents or through their own scant experience of the country through vacationing.

"I thought it was a European country with good people, like Greece" (S6), *"I used to come for Christmas, Easter, summer and I liked it and wanted to come [here] for the holidays. But when I came and stayed here...well...my big mistake"* (S1).

² "S1-S31" are code names of the participant students.

They harshly criticize the value system of Albanian society, as they note various differentiations compared to the values that underpin their own socialization (Michail & Christou, 2016 :969-970). These differentiations relate to:

- the social skills of locals:
"Here everybody looks at you in a strange way, they are reserved, more conservative, they have a lot of prejudice" (S18)
"Albanians are not cultured, they have no education, no moral values. There are some good ones, of course" (S20).
- their attitudes regarding the relationship between genders:
"When I go out, the boys are acting stupidly... and they use bad language (towards girls). By contrast, boys in Greece stop when they can tell something is annoying [the] girls" (S8).
- attitudes regarding women's place [in society]:
"The girls here stay at home, but I go out and my grandmother says to me you're going out again!!" (S18).
"I used to play basketball in Panathinaikos and here I play basketball with the boys and they call me a tomboy. But I shrug it off" (S1).
- attitudes regarding family relations:
"In Greece, we used to go out more as a family, we used to go to tavernas, while here the family "is being destroyed" a little. That is, here the husband will go out on his own because if he goes out with his wife and his family they are going to say he's running after his wife" (S7).

Respectively, they note shortcomings in terms of infrastructure, which lead to changes in their daily lives:

- "There are no bike lanes"* (S27)
- "There is a gym only for athletics, not for basketball or volleyball and in Patras I used to play volleyball in Panathinaikos and here in my neighborhood we have built a little court so that we can play"* (S6)
- "I go out in nature more because the internet café sucks"* (S13).

As a result of this assessment, the subjects notice a significant cultural distance between their previous (Greece) and current social situation (Albania). This realization leads them to resist compliance with the sociocultural reality of the country of origin and to actively react in various ways, forming their own "locus" of reference and defining their own place within it:

- "the girls here stay at home, **but I go out**"*,
- "they call me a tomboy, **but I shrug it off**"*,
- "there are no basketball courts, **but we built one**"*,
- "the internet cafés suck, **but I go out in nature**"*.

4.2.2. Ways of perceiving intergroup relations

The importance that teenagers ascribe to peer groups has been well-established. Consequently, the participants of this research, especially the adolescents, perceive their integration into the new society in terms of shaping their own in group; they search for friends by activating several mechanisms of evaluation, classification and categorization of their peers (Haslam, 2004).

According to the returnee students' own statements, their local peers do not acknowledge their common heritage and treat them with discrimination and racism:

- "The rest of them here saw us like something different, like foreigners. Especially if I spoke Greek in the street...they saw me as a Greek. It's hard to explain..."* (S11)
- "The other neighborhood kids told me 'you are Greek, and you need to go to Greece and you shouldn't speak Greek here, because this is Albania' and I said to them 'I will speak Greek wherever I want to'"* (S6).

This happens because the permanent residents in Albania use univocal ethnic definitions to check whether returnees include in their identity all those ethnocultural components (language, origin, religion, customs etc.) that define the Albanian ethnic group. The fact that returnee students may diverge in even one of those core elements e.g. insufficient command of the Albanian language, suffices for them not being classified as ethnic Albanians. Hence, upon arrival the participants experience rejection by their peers on account of their cultural heritage and a gap between how they define themselves and how others define them; the latter gives them a feeling of being "in suspension" and of "not belonging" (Kontogianni, Michelakaki & Papalexopoulou, 2019).

A second reason why returnee students differentiate their position from that of their native peers is because upon evaluating the stances, opinions and behaviors of the latter they find important differentiations in areas such as:

- how their peers have been educated:

"The way kids grow up here is very different from the way that kids grow up in Greece. Here they are more reserved, more conservative, more old fashioned than in Greece" (S19).

- social skills:

"My peers who have never left are rude, uneducated, they have no manners, moral values, they speak in a vulgar way, you can't have a serious, sophisticated conversation with them" (S20)

"Kids here do stupid things, they beat each other, they do 'grown-up' things. I'm different; I'm not that way" (S13).

- way of perceiving things:

"In general, we are more open-minded in terms of our ideas and we don't have the complexes they have here. Mentality, character, behavior, everything here is on a lower level. I'm not racist, but at times they are racist" (S16).

In this context, most students in our sample seek friends among those children with whom they share a common biography, mentality and mutual support: *"When I came here, I found a lot of kids from Greece, we have a lot in common, a similar way of thinking"* (S12), *"Here I have found Greeks who have the same mentality as me and I have made new friends"* (S14).

It is worth mentioning that several participants, in their attempt to differentiate themselves from the dominant group of local children and adolescents, which does not have an immigrant background, call each other "Greeks". This element in itself points towards the construction of an identity that surpasses the narrow frames of national narratives.

In any case, though, the fact that the participants choose to hang out only with those individuals with whom they have common bicultural, bilingual background is indicative of a dynamic handling of their inter-group relationship in the country of origin and of a selective, rather conditional adaptation.

4.2.3. Narrative accounts of the 'sense of belonging'

The participants of this study, in their attempt to describe the qualitative elements of their ethnocultural identity, end up giving a descriptive narrative of a dialectic relationship between ethnocultural elements both of the country they lived before migrating, as well as the country they have moved to. They specifically state that:

"An Albanian girl with Greek mentality, that's who I am" (S11), *"Greece is like my younger brother and Albania is like my good friend"* (S5).

What needs to be emphasized is that the participants seem to perceive their identity as a product of a creative blend of experiences which transcends univocal national narratives not only of the place they lived before but also of the place they moved to. However, the qualitative characteristics of this synthesis also highlight its "imperfect boundaries" (Hogg & Terry, 2001:6). As becomes apparent in the present study, the way intercultural impressions and "belonging" is perceived and composed relies on the subjectivity of the individual. That means that each participant continually reflects their ethnocultural identity and finds themselves in a dialectic relationship with its frame of reference (Vandenbroeck, 2004). As a result, various aspects of the ethnocultural identity have emerged, such as:

a) Identity references in the context of which adolescents, through the processes of comparing and evaluating their experiences in the two countries on a synchronous level, focus on their Greek-like characteristics in order to define themselves; it is these traits that are projected as dominant and present behaviors of *separation* according to Berry's model. These Greek-like elements carry an emotional and normative load, while on the other hand they are presented as dominant in their self-defining meaning:

"I feel Greek. Of course, one is influenced by one's surroundings, especially when these change. I cannot deny that I am Greek, because that's how I feel. Just like a regular Greek who has been born, raised, who has formed friendships, everything..."(S9).

However, it is pertinent to mention here that in those cases where we have a focused projection of Greek-like elements, there seems to be a tendency to negate the double identity impressions that arise from the de facto bicultural reality that they experience. This kind of handling cannot occur without contradictions, self-negation and ambivalence. It does, however, reveal deliberation. And this deliberation might be related to an instrumental handling of ethnocultural references; in other words, it might be connected to difficulties and lack of prospects for the achievement of their goals in Albania:

"There are parts of my character that are Greek. One's way of life characterizes oneself. My life here is depressing...but it goes by...I don't like it here. I want to go away and study either in Giannena or in

Thessaloniki. I want to study to become either a psychologist or a speech therapist. My folks agree...Especially my mom says get this done and then leave" (S12).

b) Identity references in the context of which adolescents deal with their double ethnocultural impressions by focusing more on the diachronic components of their identity and, more specifically, by evoking their original roots and presenting a tendency to become assimilated to the contemporary Albanian society:

"I want to live in Albania. I want to study Law in Tirana. I want to restore my country. I feel I belong in Albania. I have always belonged here. As much as I have adopted Greek culture, this doesn't change" (M10), "In Greece I felt that I belonged in Albania. I never hid it. I didn't change my name like the others. I found my roots here. This is where I belong" (S14).

In the case of these adolescents, the Greek-like experience on the synchronic level is being projected to the degree that they don't negate the primary identification of the Self, that is their self-definition as Albanian. In fact, it should be noted that the teenagers in question consider their Greek-like experiences important for their active involvement in the reformation and reconstruction of contemporary Albanian society. As they characteristically put it:

"The country needs to be organized, to be molded, to be fixed, there is a lot of work that needs to be done. But I'm optimistic. It's up to the youth to do something for Albania. And I believe there is potential. There are creative beings that conservative society won't allow to breathe" (S10).

c) Identity references in the context of which adolescents project their double ethnocultural impressions within a framework of balanced synthesis, where their Greek-like and Albanian characteristics enrich the definition of their Selves, indicative of Berry's integration model:

"I like it very much...I have experienced two wonderful peoples...I have not felt loneliness...I never had any difficulty with anything...I've never felt...I have never felt something in-between...I feel like I am split into two parts...my heart...is split into two parts...but I feel whole...from this half-half...I feel whole...one homeland completes the other...I belong to two homelands..." (S21).

These identity aspects are obviously not the only ones; rather there are several nuances, as the identity of those adolescents, as any bicultural identity, constitutes one continuous process of shifts in time and space.

4.2.4. Loci of expression of more complex ethnocultural identities

If one analyzes all the statements made by participants, what emerges is that the ethnocultural identities of the adolescents of the research are primarily a result of dynamic synthesis of their two contexts of reference. In fact, the spaces in which their primary and secondary socialization takes place within the Albanian reality, such as the family, the school and their circle of peers serve to empower and support this tendency as they are loci of bilingual and bicultural expression par excellence³.

In particular, the existence of the minority school contributed -according to the students' statements- to their family's decision to return. The school's bicultural and bilingual curriculum in addition to its student population (Greek minority children as well as returnee Albanians) in many ways helps the newly arrived students in their socialization in their new environment. On the one hand, it provides them with a sense of continuity and preservation of Greek-like characteristics, as the Greek language is used as the medium of instruction, while on the other hand it aims to gradually familiarize them with the language and culture of contemporary Albania:

"My parents chose the school because it was Greek, so that I don't forget the Greek language and for me to learn Albanian" (S30)

"When I came here in high school I found Greeks again with whom I share the same mentality and I made new friends" (S14).

Respectively, the extent to which Greek-like elements are preserved in the everyday life of the family within the context of Albanian society seems to depend on a number of factors: how prepared the family members were to move, to what degree the family had integrated into Greek reality and had been included during their stay there, whether the moving had been planned or not, as well as the future goals of family members: *"I want to return to Greece and my parents want that too, that's why we speak Greek" (S27).* In fact, several students mentioned the possibility of return to Greece or immigration to another country in their personal or family future plans.

³ On the contrary, in the context of Greek society, the subjects had the opportunity to express their bicultural and bilingual ascriptions only through the narrow framework of their family environment.

In any case the family, as an institution, acts by definition as a stabilizing factor, maintaining some constants in everyday life and creating a sense of security for its members. In other words, as long as the family was in Greece, it seems that it tried to preserve the Albanian-like cultural elements of its children, upon return to Albania it strives to preserve the Greek-like cultural elements in an attempt to maintain to a degree linguistic and cultural elements from both contexts of reference of their children: *"I speak both Albanian and Greek with my parents here, we watch Greek TV and I listen to Greek music"* (S19).

V. DISCUSSION

What emerges from students' statements is that return migration is a quite complex process and brings with it a series of internal processes for each individual as they try to integrate or re-integrate into their country of origin; in this process, the individual renegotiates and re-evaluates those elements that make up their identity (Cassarino 2004; Chiang et al., 2018).

The study's participants move to Albanian society having had experiences from a Greek lifestyle, in the context of which they have shaped their personality to a great extent. On the other hand, their experiences of the Albanian lifestyle are scarce and most of the times constitute indirect knowledge through their parents' narrations. Thus, as they come into contact with Albanian reality on a synchronic level they compare their experiences against the new way of life on multiple levels.

As a result of this process they become aware of a cultural distance and a lack of connection to the moral values, the perceptions and behaviors of local society in general but also a lack of connection to the mentality and behavior of their local peers in particular. At the same time, according to the participants' own statements, they often experience racism and discrimination from their local peers because of their immigration history. Vathi and Zajmi (2017) come to similar conclusions regarding the socioemotional difficulties that children of Albanian origin face upon their "return" to the social context of Albania.

Thus, in an attempt to answer the main research question, which is how participants perceive their new social reality, the analysis of students' statements indicates that they react in a dynamic way, presenting *"resistance identities"* (Castells 2010) while mapping a new individual "locus" and manner which is a place of dynamic composition of their bicultural and bilingual experiences and of a generally active presence in social life.

Castells (2010) argues for the dynamic nature of identity construction and mentions that there is the possibility that while identities might start out as resistance identities, can take over and change social institutions thus becoming legitimate identities. Respectively, the returnee students of this study set strict criteria in terms of forming friendship groups as they created their own circle of peers; they criticized established behaviors, principles and values and formed their own "place", perhaps presenting a new paradigm for the local society. Michail & Christou (2016) in their research of returnee young adults of Albanian origin use the notion of resistance and reformation in order to define the process of constructing identity. The experience of moving, in itself, is affected by one's own identity which in its turn is subject to and altered by the specific spatial, time, socio and family living conditions.

Regarding the participants of this research it should be stressed out that they perceive their identity as a product of a synthesis of experiences from their multiple contexts of reference, while their way of dealing with their bicultural and bilingual impressions is subject to individual's subjectivity. For participants, the narrative of the "sense of belonging" is not a linear process, but rather a dynamic process, different for each person, and one which depends on the personal manner of coding and decoding of experiences as well as mobility resources and willingness to move (Cassarino, 2004). The way in which every individual will view their life experiences and past as well as present experiences, creating unity within difference, is a clearly subjective choice.

Hence, some participants presented in their ethnocultural identities clear-cut elements of composition while some presented more unidimensional views, focusing either more on their Greek-like or Albanian-like traits at the time the research was conducted. However, even in those latter cases where unilateral positioning is dominant, there can be discerned internal processes of positive "fermentation" and syntheses of experiences of the students from both their contexts of reference. The cases of participants that define themselves as Albanian yet state that they intend to use their positive experiences from life in Greece to benefit the improvement of contemporary Albanian society are a point in case. Therefore, the reflection of "sense of belonging" of this study's participants is primarily a result of synthesis and in fact of positive synthesis that benefits not only the individual himself but also the broader contexts in which he exists.

These findings need to be correlated to the fact that the sample of the present study was selected among a specific group of returnee students of Albanian descent: those who at their return to their country of origin chose to attend a minority school with a bilingual and bicultural curriculum which is one constraint of the research. The research focused on the students of a specific school, on a specific time and tried to shed light on some aspects of return immigration. A follow up research to investigate the perceptions of immigration, the participants' developing identity and their educational experience in the particular school and how this has

affected them could be of research interest. Additionally, investigating on the reflections of the 'sense of belonging' of students who upon return to Albania chose to attend Albanian schools would have research value.

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