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Creating Possibilities in and through National Education: The Case of the Muslim Minority Education Project in Thrace, Greece

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The name Greece summons images of white-washed buildings, the iconic architecture of the Cycladic islands, and archaeological sites such as the Parthenon. Yet it also has an important and contested history that includes such cultural and religious associations as the Byzantine Empire, integration into the Ottoman Empire, and a once-thriving Jewish community later decimated by the Holocaust. Most recently, Greece is the site of an immigration and refugee crisis that reverberates through the region and contributes to the development of religious and cultural pluralism. Yet Greece has only one officially recognized minority: the Muslim minority of Western Thrace. This chapter focuses on the Muslim minority schools of Western Thrace and on the Project for Reform in the Education of Muslim Children (PEM), an intervention that was developed to improve educational and societal outcomes for Muslim children in the region.

The Muslim Minority, PEM, and Possibility Development

The Muslim minority of Thrace consists of three ethnic groups: Ethnic Turks, Pomaks, and Romas. While the minority members are Greek nationals, their lives are largely separate from the Greek-speaking, Christian Orthodox-identified majority. Many of the minority members speak their own ethnic languages or dialects and live in small towns and villages. They often have their first encounter with the Greek and Turkish languages in elementary school.

Adolescence is a time when the sense of personal efficacy and belonging, both socially and academically, are dynamic and formative (Rogoff, 2003). As the students attend the Muslim minority schools, their sense of who they are and how they are situated in comparison to their peers develops. Feelings of belonging can affect whether and where students advance to high school and college. This, in turn, can affect feelings of national, ethnic, and religious identity. In Thrace, the formal structures (such as the school system) as well as the informal ones (such as social and linguistic segregation) support in minorities an ongoing sense of isolation and difference from the majority Greek culture. Huseyinoglu (2012) describes becoming aware of the differences between him and his “Greek” peers while attending a minority school: “Our school was very dilapidated, with crowded classrooms. Thus, I remember numerous instances when I asked my parents: ‘Why do Greeks have a better, bigger, and more modern school than us?’ Their general response was always the same: ‘It is because they are Greeks and we are Turks’” (p. 97). This statement is an expression of the experience that leads some Muslim minority students to leave home and attend high school and college in Turkey, rather than in Greece. Indeed, Huseyinoglu (2012) reports that the head of the Komotini minority high school, Tunalp Mehmet, asserts that while minority school graduates took both Turkish and Greek university exams, almost 80 percent of them chose to continue their higher education in Turkey. This indicates a fundamental lack of trust in the Greek educational system and a possible lack of trust in Greece as a supportive environment for Muslim identity.

In 1998, PEM found that 47 percent of the minority members are engaged in agricultural work, which far exceeds the Greek national average of 19 percent (Dragonas & Frangoudaki, 2006). Additionally, only 80 percent of the minority group had completed primary school, while 2.6 percent of men and 0.2 percent of women had completed a university degree (Askouni, 2006; Dragonas & Frangoudaki, 2006). These statistics demonstrate that Muslim minority schools, which are supposed to support minority ethnic and linguistic identity through a bilingual Greek-Turkish program, are failing. While PEM has had success in promoting

school attendance and graduation, the Muslim minority school system continues to face challenges such as competing tensions among members of the minority group and an intervention (PEM) that has developed resources for the Greek program at the exclusion of the Turkophone. Though PEM has been described by some minority members as assimilationist (Dragonas & Frangoudaki, 2006; Huseyinoglu, 2012), it has supported an increase in secondary school attendance, graduation rates, and university attendance by minority members in Greece.

In attempting to construct a socially and educationally just educational system, PEM must also consider modern conceptualizations of the nation-state, national identity, and linguistic identity. The youth of Thrace face the challenge of developing in a situation in which national, religious, and ethnic identity are presented as fixed and are embedded in basic institutions. “Greek” is a national identifier, while “Christian” and “Muslim” are religious identifiers that do not fully recognize the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity that exists in Thrace. Can a person be both “Greek” and “Muslim?” What does it mean to be a Roma, as compared to a Turkish Muslim in Western Thrace? The responses to these questions are essential, as the answers have a direct bearing on the path of development for the youth of the Muslim minority of Thrace.

A Note on Terms and Spelling

Throughout the intervention description, we use the terms “minority” and “majority” to describe the stakeholders in the intervention. “Majority” refers to the ethnically Greek and Greek-language-speaking groups that constitute the majority of people in Thrace in particular, and in Greece more generally. Because national and religious identity are linked in Greece, a Greek Orthodox religious identity is assumed to be part of what constitutes the “majority.” The term “minority” refers to the members of the Muslim minority of Thrace. This is problematic because it links individuals from distinctive ethnic and linguistic groups, which can have the effect of ignoring, or even of creating, inequities *within* the Muslim minority group. Our decision to use the term “minority” does reproduce the simplifications that are embedded in the pre-existing terminology. However, by pointing out the effects of the words “majority” and “minority,” we hope to invite the reader to an increased awareness of what it means to be considered a member of a majority or minority group in Greece. During the early 20th century, the term “Moslem” was often used to refer to an adherent of Islam, rather than the preferred modern spelling, “Muslim.” When we quote sources, the spelling reflects the practice of the time in which the source was written.

With these notes on terminology and spelling now clarified, in the remainder of this chapter, we will set forth to do the following:

- Provide the socio-historical context for the development of the Muslim minority schools of Western Thrace.
- Discuss outcomes and possibilities for Muslim minority youth.
- Describe and discuss the Project for Reform in the Education of Muslim Children, an intervention that was developed with the intention of improving educational and societal outcomes for the Muslim community of Thrace.
- Explore the short- and long-term implications of the intervention and how it can affect possibility development in the community.

The Greek Educational System

The national education system in Greece is governed by laws and legislative acts under the Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning, and Religious Affairs. It is a system that is predominantly centralized, whereby the school curricula, textbooks (in the form of one textbook per school subject), and weekly timetables are centrally specified and then implemented throughout the country. Compulsory education begins with primary school, or *dimotiko scholeio*, which lasts for six years. Three years in lower secondary education, or *gymnasio*, constitutes the last period of compulsory education and is a prerequisite for enrolling in and attending general or vocational upper secondary schools. The second tier of secondary education in high school, or *lykeio*, also lasts for three years and comprises general secondary education and vocational secondary education.¹

Article 16 of the current constitution, which was drafted in 1975 with the restoration of democracy, or *metapolitefsi*, establishes the objectives of education in Greece, which . . .

[C]onstitutes a basic mission for the State and shall aim at the moral, intellectual, professional and physical training of Greeks, at the development of national and religious consciousness, and at their formation as free and responsible citizens.²

The emphasis that this constitutional provision places on “national and religious consciousness” has attracted a great deal of criticism.³ Two key questions emerge: first, which religion(s) should education develop and, second, do national and religious consciousnesses go, indisputably, together?

The formulation of this particular provision on religion and education is, of course, not coincidental. From the very creation of the Greek state in 1830, two elements were utilized as primary identity markers in the process of national identity formation: language and religion. This close link between religion and ethnicity in Greece's "national awakening" constitutes, in many ways, a remnant of the traditional millet system of the Ottoman Empire, whereby a certain degree of institutional autonomy was granted to its component communities, which were divided and defined on the basis of religion. As such, Article 3 of the current constitution of Greece asserts the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ as the "prevailing" religion of the state, denoting the historical role of the church in national tradition, while also acknowledging its predominance as the religion of the majority of the Greek population. The role of education is particularly pertinent here, since both its structure and content are determined by the national ideology to create the most productive ideological mechanism within the nation-state (Christopoulos & Tsitselikis, 2003).⁴ Understanding this overtly ideological role of education is essential to making sense of the educational system that was developed for the Muslim minority in Thrace and to considering its role in possibility development for the youth of the region.

As suggested throughout Greece's constitution, one of the main state mechanisms that has helped preserve and enhance the intertwining of Christian orthodoxy and national identity has been the Greek national education system. In many ways, the presence of orthodoxy infiltrates the entire education system. For instance, there is a disproportionate emphasis on the study of Christian orthodoxy in religious education classes, continuous references to the links between Greek national identity and orthodoxy in other subjects such as history and literature, the constant presence of orthodox symbols in school classrooms, and the enactment of certain orthodox rituals throughout the school year such as morning prayer and the holy blessing at the start of each academic year. This testifies to the preferential treatment of the state's prevailing religion, which comes at the expense of other religions or beliefs present in the country. The protection and promotion of religious freedoms has long formed Greece's "Achilles' heel,"⁵ as indicated by the repeated convictions in this area made by the European Court of Human Rights of the Council of Europe.⁶

The close interconnection between Christian orthodoxy and national identity becomes further evident through the uneasiness with which Greek authorities have historically confronted the presence of minorities in the country. Nowhere is this tension more obvious than in the case of a Muslim

minority—which is the only minority the Greek state recognizes⁷—who is situated in Western Thrace, at the northeast part of the country close to the border with Turkey. The minority population is estimated to be around 120,000 and is largely composed of people of Turkish origin or descent (in Greek, *Tourkogeni*, which is not the same as Turks, or *Tourkos*). *Tourkogeni* represent about 50 percent of the minority population and include Pomaks, who speak a Slavic dialect and constitute about 35 percent of the population, and Romas (or *Tziganes*), who constitute the remaining 15 percent. There are no exact population numbers available, because census data about religion and native language have not been collected in Greece since 1951. However, it is believed that the Muslim minority makes up approximately one-third of the population of Western Thrace (Huseyinoglu, 2010). The two common denominators of the component communities of this minority are the Muslim religion, on the one hand, and Greek citizenship on the other.

The Treaty of Lausanne, signed at the end of the Greco-Turkish War in 1923, created protections and guarantees for the education of the Muslim minority of Thrace, Greece, and the Christian Orthodox population of Istanbul, Turkey. However, rather than being assured of education and opportunity, the children of the Muslim minority have been caught in an ideological struggle that has resulted in educational failure, high dropout rates, and marginalization from the nation-state in which they live. The minority students who do complete secondary education frequently choose to pursue higher education in Turkey rather than to remain in Greece (Boussiakou, 2007). This is an indicator of high levels of marginalization and the lack of Greek-language preparation for higher education.

In addition to the national approaches to minority education, an obstacle that has been considered to hinder attempts to radically reform the education system of the Muslim minority is the principle of reciprocity set out by the Treaty of Lausanne. Article 45 of the section on the "Protection of Minorities" provides that: "the rights conferred by the provision of the present Section on the non-Moslem minorities of Turkey will be similarly conferred by Greece on the Moslem minority in her territory." In theory, this signifies that any changes in the education of the respective minorities should be mutual and in accordance with the minority's kin state. In practice, however, this principle has largely been used as a pretext for Greece to justify either the lack of political will or the absence of significant reforms in the minority education system. Moreover, it appears that, after the end of the Greco-Turkish war and the forced population exchange, the minority in Western Thrace has become the new line of confrontation between Turkish and national ideologies, representing an

“enemy within.” The education of minority students was thus trapped within the political dimension defined by Greco-Turkish relations, a bedrock of rivalry—accentuated by events such as the 1955 expulsion of Greeks from Istanbul and the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974—leading, eventually, to polarization (Dragona & Frangoudaki, 2007) and an inability to accommodate minority otherness into proper education structures (Tsitselikis, 2007).

Despite the cultural and linguistic diversity within the Muslim minority of Thrace, the languages of instruction in the Muslim minority schools are Greek and Turkish. This assumes that all students in the system speak either Greek or Turkish (or both) fluently. However, in some cases, students do not speak *either* of these languages fluently (or at all) when they begin to attend the minority schools. This places them at a disadvantage in a system that already struggles with efficacy, further reinforcing social and educational inequalities (Androussou et al., 2011).

The Creation of a National Minority

The presence of Muslim communities in Thrace today constitutes a miniature of the once multi-religious and multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire. The gradual decline of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th and early 20th centuries was marked by the rise of competing nationalist narratives, by a series of wars, and by the subsequent formation of nation-states in the Balkan Peninsula, amongst which the newly established kingdom of Greece arose in 1830. In 1919, Greece launched a campaign against the Ottoman Empire as a means to satisfy its irredentist aspirations, or the Megali Idea (Great Idea), to establish a Greek state that would encompass all ethnic Greek-inhabited areas, including the large Greek populations that were still within the Ottoman Empire. This Greco-Turkish War ended officially with the signing of the Peace Treaty of Lausanne on July 23, 1923, as part of a series of international agreements under the auspices of the League of Nations that sought to provide minority protection in the Baltic and central European states (Featherstone, Papadimitriou, Mamarelis, & Niarchos, 2011). Earlier in the same year (January 1923), the Bilateral Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek Populations was concluded which, in considering religion as the sole criterion, provided for the compulsory exchange of all Turkish nationals of the Greek Orthodox religion established in Turkish territory with Greek nationals of the Muslim religion established in Greek territory (Hirschon, 2004). Amongst others, the convention excluded from its provisions the “Moslem inhabitants of Western Thrace” and the “Greek inhabitants of

Constantinople (Istanbul).” The combination of these two agreements, which aimed at the homogenization of Greece and Turkey, brought about the specific status of the Muslim minority in Western Thrace that continues to exist. These groups have since been subjected to special protective measures that were set out by a distinct section of the Treaty of Lausanne on the “Protection of Minorities.”

Today, though estimates place the minority population as high as one-third of Western Thrace, the Christian majority and the Muslim minority populations remain rather isolated from each other. Outside of the major cities, the towns and villages of Western Thrace are generally linguistically and religiously homogeneous, rarely having contact with each other. Most of the minority members work in agriculture, especially in tobacco and cotton production. High rates of illiteracy and school dropout have resulted in limited possibilities for youth in the region (Huseyinoglu, 2012).

Minority Education in Thrace

Given the particularities of the specific minority groups, the vital issue that emerges has to do with the ways in which the national education system of Greece, with its traditional treatment of orthodoxy as synonymous with national identity, manages to adapt to the context and distinct needs of these communities. Minority education in Western Thrace is governed today by Articles 40 and 41 of the Treaty of Lausanne, which sets out the establishment of a bilingual system of minority education by the Cultural Protocol of 1968, which provides for the principle of “non-interference” with the ethnic identity and religious faith of Muslim students. More recently, minority education in Western Thrace is also governed by the Cultural Cooperation Agreement between Greece and Turkey, which was signed in 2001. The result of these legal frameworks and bilateral agreements has been the creation of an education system that is, to a great extent, an amalgam of the country’s mainstream educational arrangements together with certain exceptional measures taken to adapt to the supposedly unique and fixed identity of the minority. For instance, the minority education system is bilingual, with the subjects of Greek, history, and geography being taught in Greek and other subjects, such as mathematics, physics, and religion, being taught in Turkish. In contrast to the content and objectives of religious education in the Greek public schools, which center on Christian orthodoxy, Article 39 of the Treaty of Lausanne dictates that religious classes in the minority schools include the teaching and interpretation of the *Qur’an*, aiming at the “development of a religious identity” amongst Muslim students.⁸

Until the 1990s, the education system in Western Thrace was marked by an overall low level of education compared to that of the majority population in the country. Most students in the minority schools did not complete high school; over 65 percent of children enrolled did not complete the nationally required nine years of school, as compared to 7 percent of students who dropped out of the Greek educational system early (Dragonas and Frangoudaki, 2006). The minority schools' principal flaws could be narrowed down to (1) the absence of an efficient school curriculum, exacerbated by the use of outdated and inappropriate textbooks (for instance, while a large number of minority children do not speak Greek when they start school, textbooks provided by the Ministry of Education are addressed to children who know Greek as their mother tongue); (2) a poorly educated staff; (3) forced homogenization of the minority under the hegemony of its dominant, Turkish-speaking component⁹; (4) the schools' exclusion and isolation from the rest of Greek society; and, finally, (5) the violation of human rights principles that have to do as much with religion as with language and education.

By the 2011–2012 school year, the Greek state had established 174 primary schools in Thrace with 6,199 students (Askouni, 2006) and two minority high schools—the Celal Bayar High School in Komotini and Muzaffer in Xanthi.¹⁰ These two high schools¹¹ together offer places for 400 students, despite the fact around 8,500 students attend minority primary schools. Other than shortage of space, the main challenges these minority schools face is the tendency of male students to emigrate to Turkey for secondary and higher education¹² and a high dropout rate (indicatively, around 50% of *gymnasio* students dropped out between 2002 and 2004, with even higher percentages for girls, while the average dropout rate from Greece's nine-year compulsory education was 7%).¹³ Turkey provides textbooks for the minority program in both *dimotiko* and *gymanasio*, whereas those for the Greek program are provided by Greece. As far as higher education is concerned, the previous system of entrance into universities, which entailed examinations in the Greek language, has greatly improved, particularly through Law No. 2341 in 1995, by which the Ministry of Education gives special consideration to Muslim students for admission to universities and technical institutions.

Divisions between children at minority schools and children at mainstream Greek schools are further accentuated through the distinction between “Greek teachers” and “Muslim teachers.” Indeed, not only are their training and university degrees different (and unequal, to the detriment of the Muslim graduates); the two groups of educators also do not seem to cooperate or even cross paths in the context of the minority

school. Additionally, the Greek teachers are paid by the Greek state, while the Muslim teachers are paid by the families of the minority group. This distancing between the two components is reflected through the skepticism with which Muslim minority members perceive education regulations, which they see as a way for the Greek state to interfere with their internal affairs without providing the necessary means of support (Bousiakou, 2007).

It appears, therefore, that the dominant principle of “one religion equals one nation equals one language” determines Greek political approach not only towards matters of majority national education, but also towards the education system of the minority groups in Western Thrace, leading to profoundly inflexible linguistic standards at the expense of other languages (Christides, 1999; Baltsiotis & Tsitselikis, 2008). At the same time, the tendency to differentiate citizens on the basis of religion (“Muslim students,” “Christian students,” “Muslim teachers,” and “Christian teachers”) constitutes a violation of human rights and leads to the eventual “ghettoization” of the members of the minority community (Baltsiotis & Tsitselikis, 2008). The Muslim Minority Education Project, described below, has initiated reforms and programs to address the inequities that are built into the minority schools.

“Addition, not Subtraction; Multiplication, not Division”¹⁴

In spite of Greece's adherence to the European Economic Community in 1981 (now the European Union), the Treaty of Lausanne and Greco-Turkish relations seemed to prevail over international conventions on minority protection and educational rights (such as the European Convention on Human Rights of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities.)¹⁵ Indeed, as Greece was undergoing its own process of Europeanization throughout the 1990s, certain measures of positive or affirmative actions implemented by Greek governments were suggestive of a wider change in the overall treatment of the Muslim minority.¹⁶ Specifically, three new measures adopted in 1995 and 1996 concerned education: the law of June 1996 on multicultural education, which instituted a special secretary at the Ministry of Education in charge of minority education; the establishment of a five-year service for the teachers appointed to teach at minority schools in Thrace (which is no longer valid); and, lastly, affirmative action by the Greek state, which imposed on higher education institutions a quota of 0.5 percent students from minority schools, to facilitate attendance of minority students at universities and technical schools.¹⁷ The quota guarantees that 0.5 percent of spots

in universities will be available for members of the Thracian minority. The quota also guarantees that Thracian Muslim students will compete against each other, rather than against ethnically “Greek” students, in the entrance exams. It was hoped that this quota would support the entrance of more Muslim Thracian students into Greek universities. While not all spots have been filled, there has been a positive increase in minority attendance in institutions of higher education. These students’ improved educational opportunities in Greece may also indicate increased opportunities for full participation in Greek society.

In 1997, a collective and interdisciplinary effort was initiated in Greece as a means to address the core challenges of the provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne, as well as to address implementation of national laws and practices in minority education in Western Thrace. According to its two directors, Thalia Dragonas and Anna Frangoudaki, the Project for Reform in the Education of Muslim Children (hereinafter PEM, as is the abbreviation in Greek), reflects a wider, radical shift in the policies of the Greek state vis-à-vis the minority in Thrace.

PEM represented a focused attempt to address the inequities that were developed and sustained by the Muslim minority school system and has introduced reforms that have influenced the community. Over 100 Greek researchers were affiliated with PEM (Androussou et al., 2011). It was in such a considerably favorable context that the project was organized and, after receiving funding from the European Social Fund—Europe’s main instrument for supporting jobs, helping people get better jobs, and ensuring fairer jobs for all EU citizens—it sought to reform the education of the minority children in Thrace. The involvement of the European Social Fund also demonstrates the European commitment to increasing employment and educational possibilities for the youth of the region. PEM is organized around the principles of intercultural/multicultural education, which emphasize the development of meaningful cross-group understanding, equity, and social justice (Georgiadis, Koutsouri, & Zisimos, 2011). This focus informs the methods and activities of all elements of the program.

Phases of the Muslim Minority Education Project

Phase 1: 1997–2000. The goal of the first phase of the program was to improve the Greek-language program in the minority primary schools. PEM created new educational materials for the minority schools, which was supplemented by teacher training, community activities, and research.

Phase 2: 2002–2004. Phase 2 focused on dropout prevention in secondary schools. It introduced increased teacher training and resources for Greek-language learners, such as language classes after school. These activities were supported by community centers in the cities of Komotini and Xanthi.

Phase 3: 2005–2008. PEM designed digital resources for teachers and an optional training program for elementary school teachers in minority and national public schools. Secondary teachers also received training on intergroup communication. New textbooks were created for the Greek-language courses of mathematics, history, literature, and Greek language in the secondary program. KESPES (community centers) were opened outside of the major cities; mobile KESPES were launched and KESPES activities were expanded.

Phase 4: 2010–2013. In 2010, the project received a new title: The Program for the Education of Minority Children in Thrace 2010–2013. In Phase 4, the project hosted a conference, “The Lausanne Treaty 90 Years Later: The Regulations Regarding Minorities,” which was co-hosted in Komotini by the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP). The conference included five sessions and tackled these major topics of discussion: Minority or Public School?, Sharia Law: Preserve or Abolish?, Positive Discrimination: For or Against?, Ninety Years from the Treaty of Lausanne, and The Minority of Thrace in a European Context.

Description of the Intervention Elements

(1) **Classroom-based intervention.** Such intervention included the development of updated classroom materials that emphasized inclusion and the value of the Muslim minority. According to the Education of the Muslim Children of Thrace website (2016), “. . . this material was shaped by the view that, for the integration of minority pupils into the educational system and for their good performance at school, the basic precondition is *respect* for the language and the identity of the Minority.” New Greek language textbooks and instructional materials were developed for primary and secondary schools. Teacher manuals and curriculum guides were developed for teachers in order to promote equitable teaching methods and content.

Dragonas and Frangoudaki (2006) indicate that a weakness in the textbook revisions is that they focus on the Greek-language textbooks and subjects, resulting in a “one-sided” approach to the curricular intervention. This was a source of tension among some members of the minority, who

perceived the focus on Greek-language resources as a forced assimilation of minority members (Huseyinoglu, 2012).

A Turkish-language book has been produced as supplementary material for the Turkish-language classes. It was written by members of the Muslim minority of Thrace and includes the work of over 40 minority Thracian authors. The production of Turkish-language teaching materials by the Thracian minority is an important step in the development of culturally relevant resources in the minority schools. However, because the text is supplementary, it cannot be regarded as a core part of the curricular intervention.

The Turkish texts continue the troubling trend of highlighting the Turkish ethno-linguistic nature of the Muslim minority, while sublimating the linguistic identity of the Pomak and Roma minority members. Part of the reason for the production of only one Turkophone text may be internal conflicts among members of the minority. Dragonas and Frangoudaki (2006) recount that minority members of parliament lodged a protest to the minister of education when three Slavic and two Roma words were included in one of the new textbooks designed by PEM. As a result, the words had to be removed. This situation demonstrates how textbook reform has become a contested issue in ideological battles, ultimately failing to serve minority students and, instead, trapping them in a cycle of poor educational outcomes in failing schools. It also indicates a crucial limitation in PEM's reform program; while the development of culturally relevant teaching materials demonstrates acknowledgement of the Muslim minority identity, it does not explore ethnic and cultural diversity within the group. This may leave some students marginalized.

(2) Teacher training. PEM's research indicates that many of the majority teachers at intervention sites had low expectations of the students and lacked respect for the community prior to participating in professional development activities (Magos, 2006). By integrating teacher education into the intervention, PEM sought to provide professional development that would result in more respectful classroom atmospheres and increased expectations for students. Mandatory training was designed for the primary-school teachers of Greek-language subjects. KESPEMs hosted the training sessions, which included examples of how to integrate the new textbooks into classrooms, information about differentiated instruction, and discussions of the role of identity in education. However, not all teacher education was mandatory. This may explain why Dragonas and Frangoudaki (2006) describe teacher training as one of the least successful elements of the intervention.

The weakness of the teacher-focused element of PEM is troubling. Teacher support is essential to the success of any reform. In the case of the minority schools, in which identity, language, and course content are contested, it is crucial that teachers understand the tensions that surround the students, their families, and the teachers' own identities. If PEM is to successfully support new possibilities for minority youth, all parties must understand the process and the ultimate goals of the program. The issues at stake are significant: literacy, school attendance, job possibilities, and ultimately, full membership in Greek society.

(3) Community centers (KESPEMs). The community centers are described by PEM directors as being among the most successful elements of the Muslim Minority Education Project. There were ten locally based KESPEMs and four mobile units that took resources to more remote areas. They host a variety of activities, such as Greek classes and workshops that "familiarize" Greek teachers with Turkish. The KESPEM staff was composed equally of Greek and Turkish-speaking adults.

KESPEMs also hosted Creative Workshops for Youngsters (DENS), which promoted the integration of children from the Greek-speaking majority within the Muslim minority. Related youth projects, such as the Creative Youth Workshop (CYW) of Komotini, were directed by the youth and reflected their interests. The following interview quote reflects the goals and outcomes of the CYW: ". . . the CYWs were among the few spaces, for example, where Turks and Pomaks and Greeks had a specific role. . . . They weren't simply recipients . . . they regulated" (Vassiliou & Ligdopoulou, 2005, p. 159).

The Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth (2002) states that culturally and developmentally appropriate community programs can be instrumental in supporting adolescent growth in a variety of ways, including in cultural competency, academic success, and retention. The KESPEMs, which include a representative staff of members from the Muslim and Christian communities and emphasize creative, student-led projects that bring together students from these communities, provide just such an opportunity. Even the adult-oriented activities can support a sense of inclusion and group identity that is relevant for the development of a "mutual insider" sentiment among adolescents, indirectly supporting feelings of relevance and membership.

(4) Parent and community involvement in the project. The community-focused elements of PEM have been particularly impactful and have potential for long-term change. For instance, a two-day workshop titled All Together, We are the City took place in a public park of Komotini, a city in Thrace. The leaders attempted to develop and support

community narratives by having people share their memories in Greek and Turkish. The intervention ultimately extended into both the minority and Greek schools; after the workshop, eight schools organized projects that focused on learning about other populations in the community (Magos, 2007).

(5) Research and practice. In addition to developing school- and community-based interventions, the PEM educators conducted self-studies. This research had two goals: to broaden knowledge about the Muslim minority of Thrace and to disseminate information about the outcomes of the intervention. The research studies, which were published in both Greek and English, include a variety of methods, such as qualitative, quantitative, and journalistic approaches.¹⁸ PEM has not been extensively studied by researchers outside the project. Without fieldwork from outside researchers, it is difficult to validate the program's claims. Additionally, a lack of Greek census data, desegregated by religion and mother tongue, makes it challenging to access statistics that could support PEM's findings.

Outcomes. A significant outcome of the Project for Reform in the Education of Muslim Children is a reduction of dropout rates, including lower dropout rates for girls, who traditionally have a higher dropout rate than boys in Thrace. There has been an increase of minority attendance in minority schools, Greek schools, and religious schools in the region.

The program's textbooks and teacher support materials have been adopted as an integral element of the minority school system. PEM researchers report increased teacher understanding of the marginalization that minority students encounter and a heightened respect for minority community members. Magos (2006) reports that teachers who participated in an optional intervention introduced more inclusive classroom practices, such as allowing minority students to speak their mother tongue in class. Androussou and colleagues (2011) describe deepened teacher self-reflectiveness and increased cultural relevance in course materials. Finally, the KESPESMs have begun a process of cultural shift, as majority and minority youth are meeting socially and collaborating on creative projects through the DENs. These elements can contribute to the development of student feelings of support, belonging, and respect. In turn, the increase in teacher awareness and cultural responsiveness can contribute to students' desire to remain in school, graduate, and attend university.

Implications for Possibility Development

It is not clear how minority students will develop a new range of possibilities while Thrace's educational system continues to be shaped by an

international treaty that is nearly 100 years old and that reflects early 20th century national ideologies. While articles 40 and 41 of the Treaty of Lausanne were intended to guarantee the security and education of minority populations in Thrace, they have resulted in stagnation and inequality. By seeking to preserve ethnic, religious, and linguistic identity through education, without providing culturally or linguistically appropriate curricula, a segregated school system was created in which minority children did not receive sufficient education in either Greek or Turkish, and the linguistic needs of Pomak and Roma students were ignored. Minority students who chose to attend the Greek school system faced censure from the minority community and were immersed in an educational system that associated Greek national identity with Christian orthodoxy. This lack of recognition contributed to tensions in the community.

Until PEM, attempted educational and cultural interventions in Thrace were limited to national and international agreements that focused on the status of the Muslim minority. However, what is most needed is the development of trust and recognition between the Christian Orthodox majority and the Muslim minority of Thrace, and perhaps on a larger scale, between the Greek and Turkish people. The challenge of determining how to describe the "majority" and the "minority" demonstrates, on a micro-level, the challenges of reconciliation and possibility development in the region. By initiating a dialogue in Thracian communities, creating culturally and linguistically relevant course material, and providing teacher training, PEM has created inroads towards reconciliation and educational opportunities. However, the program must have guaranteed funding, state involvement, and a long-term presence in the region if it is continue to provide support.

PEM seeks to facilitate holistic cultural change, as demonstrated by its presence in schools, community centers, and community activities. But in order to be fully effective, it must be more balanced, as its curricular reforms are focused on the Greek-language portion of the minority school system. This imbalance, while perhaps beyond the control of the researchers, does not meaningfully address the Turkish curriculum of the minority schools and has left some minority members concerned that their linguistic and ethnic heritage is being subsumed to Greek interests (Huseyinoglou, 2012).

Additional curricular reform, structural change, and mutual recognition are necessary to guarantee a more promising future for the minority youth of Thrace. As Vassiliou and Ligdopoulou (2005) write,

The target group of this Project may be the Muslim minority of Thrace, and especially youth and the educational system, but that's only what is

obvious. In my experience and view, the Project—in all its respects—deals with coexistence. And with the whole population of Thrace. Even where the goal is to develop more suitable educational materials and methodology so that minority youth are ensured equal opportunities within the educational system, the people involved identify with being part of the majority. So, in my experience in Thrace, I've always been swimming in the notion of coexistence, of synergy—whether this facilitated things or made them more difficult. (p. 159)

This quote identifies one of the key questions facing the youth of Thrace: How will coexistence define the sense of development and opportunity that can develop in the region? While the long-term outcomes of the intervention remain to be seen, there is much to be optimistic about. It seems that PEM has made positive contributions to Muslim minority youth's opportunities to understand themselves as insiders who can be both Muslim and Greek and who can, through a healthier education system, graduate, proceed to university studies, and build a future for themselves in the nation of their birth.

Notes

1. For an overview of the national education system in Greece, see European Commission, EURYDICE (Information on Education Systems and Policies in Europe) <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Greece:Overview>.

2. <http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/f3c70a23-7696-49db-9148-f24dce6a27c8/001-156%20aggliko.pdf>.

3. See, for instance, the Greek Helsinki Monitor (2002): Report on religious freedoms in Greece, where religious education in Greek public schools is described as a form of "tolerated state proselytism" (<http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/bhr/english/organizations/ghm/greece.html>).

4. Greece is among several other European Union (EU) countries that do not collect data on ethnic, religious, or linguistic aspects of their populations, because such a declaration would contravene the law on personal data protection. According to the World Factbook of the Central Intelligence Agency, however, 98 percent of the Greek population is Christian Orthodox: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gr.html>.

5. See Filos, Atlanta (2004) "Greece: Religious Freedom, the Achilles' Heel," Forum 18 News Service, Oslo, Norway; see also Pollis, Adamantia (1992), "Greek National Identity: Religious Minorities, Rights and European Norms." *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 171–191.

6. The European Court of Human Rights is an international court that was set up in 1959. It rules on individual or state applications alleging violations of

the civil and political rights set out by the European Convention of Human Rights of the Council of Europe. The judgments of the court are binding on the countries concerned and have led governments to alter their legislation and administrative practices in a wide range of areas, including the guarantee of religious freedoms (Article 9 of the Convention). Greece adopted the right to individual petition to the ECHR in 1985. For an overview of religious-freedom violations in Greece, see the ECHR Overview 1959–2013— Table of Violations by Article and by State: http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Stats_violation_1959_2013_ENG.pdf.

7. For more information about the presence of national minorities (such as Turks, Macedonians, Romanian Vlachs, and others) and minority languages (such as Slav-Macedonian, Vlack, and Pomak) that are not recognized by the Greek state, see Christopoulos & Tsitselikis (2003).

8. Article 2, Ministerial Decision No. 14251 of 1951.

9. As we have seen, minority education in Greece is provided for a Muslim minority group comprising several ethnic and linguistic (sub)groups (Turks, Pomaks, Romas), but uses the elements of the predominant identity of a national (Turkish) minority.

10. Two religious schools, or *medrese*—one in Komotini and another in Xanthi—have also been established.

11. According to a decree created in 1977, which is still in force, while children of the Muslim minority have the option to register in mainstream, Greek-speaking public schools, especially in urban areas, Greek students do not have that option, as it is forbidden for them to attend minority schools.

12. As Huseyinoglu (2012) explains, minority families are used to sending their children to Turkey for secondary and higher education primarily to "save the future" of the children, who would have been otherwise "trapped" in the minority areas of Greece, with a predetermined future ("The Development of Minority Education at the Southeasternmost Corner of the EU: The Case of Muslim Turks in Western Thrace, Greece," PhD Thesis, University of Sussex).

13. See Dragonas & Frangoudaki, 2007, p. 27.

14. This motto summarizes the general approach of the project (PEM), which is aimed at providing a better education for minority children.

15. According to a decision by the Greek Supreme Court in 2005, the Treaty of Lausanne is a *lex specialis* and, as such, has not been superseded by a newer treaty. In essence, this ruling signifies that Greece remains bound only by the Treaty of Lausanne provisions as far as the Muslim minority is concerned. (See "Greece: Status of Minorities." The Law Library of Congress, Global Research Center, October 2012, p. 5).

16. For instance, on September 22, 1997, and many decades after the Treaty of Sevres of 1920 and the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, Greece signed the Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Similarly, Article 19 of the 1955 Code of Nationality, which stated that "a person [Greek citizen] of non-Greek descent who leaves Greece without the intention of returning may be

declared as having lost Greek citizenship" was abolished in 1998. According to the Ministry of the Interior, about 46,600 Muslims were deprived of their Greek citizenship between 1955 and 1998 (see Answer no. 10097 by the Minister of the Interior to a question in parliament by the deputy of the minority, İlhan Ahmet, on April 20, 2005, in Tsitselikis, 8).

17. As seen through Huseyinoglu's fieldwork, the head of the Komotini-minority high school, Tunalp Mehmet, asserts that, while their graduates took both Turkish and Greek university exams, almost 80 percent of them chose to continue their higher education in Turkey (Huseyinoglu, 2012: 241).

18. For examples of studies that reflect these approaches, see Vassilou, Ligopolou, & Magos, 2006.

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