Unpacking young people's national identities: The role of ethno-cultural and religious allegiances, history and 'Others'

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Abstract

The paper examines the intricacies implicated in the narration of young people's national identities, by shedding light on intersecting allegiances and on the role that perceived 'others' play in their accounts of nationhood. Based upon a qualitative study of youth narratives of identity in the context of Greek society, the paper unpacks how participants make sense and narrate their nationhood via utilizing discursive resources, whilst dialogically conversing with the gaze of 'other'. The narrative-discursive analysis of the in-depth interview material illustrates the interweavement of ethnicity with religion, along with the use of historical imagery and cultural signals of alleged similarity and difference. What becomes evident is the salience of ethno-cultural and religious identifications, operating as potent resources for self-making but also as vehicles for categorization and the potential exclusion of 'others'. The paper concludes by underlining the importance of empirically substantiating and theorizing the configurations of young people's collective identities.

Keywords: national identity, young people, 'other', narrative, Greece

Introduction

In the context of globalization and the attendant cultural hybridity and creolisation a parallel revitalization of identities nestling around the ontological comfort afforded by ethnic and national communities can also be evident (Eriksen, 2002; Castles, 1997). In undertaking the study upon which the current paper is based I was particularly interested in tracing the ways through which young people narrate their social identities and 'locate an experience of belonging in a world of global flows and fears' (Calhoun, 2007:1). More specifically, the present paper enquires into the intricacies implicated in young people's national identities utilizing in-depth interview material collected in the context of the increasingly diverse and austerity-stricken Greek society. Relatively few studies have empirically examined how national identity is conceptualized by social actors (McCrone et *al*, 1998; Bechhofer *et al*, 1999;Bozatzis,1999; Condor, 2000; Condor, 2006; Condor, Gibson and Abell, 2006;Kiely *et al*, 2005; Sapountzis *et al*, 2006; Skey,2011) and even more limited have explored in qualitative detail the construction of young people's nationhood (for notable exceptions see Anthias, 2002; Jukarainen,2003; Hopkins,2007; Fenton,2007; Miller-Idriss,2009; Stevenson and

Moldoon, 2010; Thomas and Saunders,2011). The present paper contributes to this area of literature by shedding empirical light on the nexus of cross-cutting ethnic, religious and cultural identifications and on the role perceived 'others' play in the shaping of national identities of Greek youth.

The following section briefly addresses some of the theoretical issues surrounding nationhood, underlining its dialogical and interactional dimensions. Before proceeding to the analysis of selected young people's accounts, the study's methodology is briefly discussed. The paper then concludes by highlighting the significance that ethnocultural identifications and allegiances continue to hold for young people and the need for empirically substantiating and elucidating the contemporary configurations of youth collective identities. The following section focuses on the national dimension of the collective identity question.

The question of national identity

While the analysis of theories of nationalism and nations' origins lies beyond the scope of this paper, a brief outline of the key conceptualizations of nationhood is useful here. According to a modernist approach (Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1992), nations are historical products of modernization processes, involving the emergence of capitalism, industrialization, state apparatuses and the expansion of education. A generative role in the rise of nations is attributed to nationalism defined by Gellner (1983:56) as the 'political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent'. As maintained by ethnosymbolists (Smith, 1986; Connor, 1978; 1993) nations are political entities founded on 'ethnic cores', and cultural funds that provide its essential symbolic material. This approach (Smith, 2002) pays attention to the ethnic ties, myths and symbols utilized and mobilized as resources in the enterprise of nation-building and national identity formation.

Arguably, the primary focus of this scholarship can be identified in the discussion about the origins of nations and the role of nationalism, rather in how social actors themselves make sense of, relate to and identify with the 'imagined' national community (Anderson, 1991; for a critique see also Bechhoffer *et al* 1999). From a different angle, Billig in his seminal (1995) *Banal Nationalism* advanced the key thesis that nations and nationhood are instantiated, reproduced and naturalized in everyday life via banal practices that go largely unnoticed. Arguing against the essentialism and reification of 'identity', he maintained that 'to have a national identity is to possess ways of talking about nationhood' (Billig, 1995:8). Seen in this light the important questions to be asked about nationhood are 'how the national 'we' is constructed and what is meant by such constructions' (Billig, 1995:70). In the same paradigm, a significant strand of work in social discursive psychology has empirically explored constructions of nationhood by

putting under scrutiny social actors' vernacular accounting practices (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Condor, 2000; Condor, 2006; Condor, Gibson, and Abell, 2006; Stevenson and Moldoon, 2010). These studies, focusing on the content and form of nationhood talk, have revealed its complexity and variability across groups, national contexts and historical circumstances. Notwithstanding the myriad rhetorical manifestations that nationhood can take, Condor (2006:676) underlined the tendency to be represented as a hybrid collectivity of people, places and institutions, with temporal and historical imagery significantly saturating national accounting.

The present theoretical framework also draws upon approaches that accord primacy to the inter-subjective, situated and transactional dimensions of ethnonational identities and more specifically on boundary demarcation and maintenance mechanisms (Barth, 1969; Jenkins, 2004). Emphasizing the interactionist and inter-relational nature of national identity, Triantafyllidou (1998:608) conceptualized it as a 'double-edged relationship' of interaction among groups along the lines of belonging to the same political unit. The *inward-looking* dimension of national identity addresses the degree of similarity shared by the members of the in-group- the 'internal others- and the *outward-looking* dimension pertains to the difference and distinctiveness from other groups- the 'external others'. The interaction between a national group's significant 'internal' and 'external others'- itself a 'Janus-faced process', can arguably be seen as a driving force for national identity construction, re-definition and re-affirmation (Triantafyllidou, 2006: 286).

National Identity in the Greek context

In the Greek case the historical pattern of nation building, and consequently of national identity formation, has been discursively constructed as an amalgamation of the collective myth of common ancestry, shared culture and historic experiences, along with religious faith. More specifically, the glorified past- the classic, Hellenistic and Byzantine legacies- are fused together with the durable linguistic bonds and the Christian-Orthodox faith, and the locally diversified traditions, mores and rituals (Lipovac, 1993). This lasting incorporation of the past in the present is also symbolically captured in Greek semantics (Triantafyllidou *et al*, 1997), with the concept of 'ethnos' denoting both an ethnically and culturally homogenous community along with the notion of the nation as a civic and political community (Karakasidou, 1993). Indeed, a sense of continuity has been cultivated by an intelligentsia that crucially saw in Hellenism not only the potent cultural legacy but also the umbilical bond that could bind the gloried past, with the present and the future, and steer ethnic awareness and solidarity within the Hellenic community. The sense of continuity, although interrupted by Ottoman imperial rule, was strategically founded on the attachment with a historic territory, interweaved tightly with Christian-Orthodox religion, and localized traditions

(Lipovac, 1993; Karakasidou, 1993). In this context-specific and historic-bound formation, the modern Greek 'identity project' has been constructed mobilizing as fundamental building blocks of the struggles against Ottoman rule and the fight for the liberation of Greek ethnos. Religion enjoys a prominent position in the Hellenic narrative, attributable *inter alia* to its fastening to the project of independence and the formation of the Greek state (Triantafyllidou *et al*, 1997; Roudometof, 1996). Nonetheless, the emphasis on ethnic ties, continuity and religion is not peculiar to the Greek case; rather it is one of the characteristics of nation-building in Balkans which, as Roudometof (1996:255) argued, involved 'ethnicity and religion rather than citizenship as the major criteria for establishing a person's membership in the national 'imagined community''. Further, Greece has been argued to constitute a nation-state whose 'historical (self) representations position it at the symbolic margins between the West and the Rest, between the Occident and the Orient or between European modernity and 'third-world' underdevelopment' (Bozantzis, 2009:434).

At the level of microanalysis, a small number of empirical studies in the Greek context has shed valuable empirical light into social actors' representations of national and cultural identity (Bozantzis, 1999; Figgou and Condor, 2006; Sapountzis *et al*. 2006; Figgou and Condor, 2007; Bozantzis, 2009). More specifically, a study of national accounting practices (Bozatzis, 1999) of Greek citizens residing in other EU countries has shown the participants to skilfully manage their talk between being positioned as 'xenophobic' and 'xenomaniac'. Bozatzis (2014) in his most recent work on *Banal Occidentalism* argued about how the national ideological imagery is reproduced via the practice of leveling and disavowal of charges of xenomania. Other studies conducted within the discursive analytic tradition examined the rhetorical aspects and occidental renderings in Greek majority talk in relation to the country's 'significant others', namely Europeans, migrants and refugees (Figgou and Condor, 2006; Sapountzis *et al*, 2006; Figgou and Condor, 2007), and the minority population in Western Trace (Bozantzis, 2009).

The present paper shares with the afore-mentioned studies the analytic emphasis on social actors' representations, yet it specifically focuses on young people, an under-researched group in the Greek context, seeking to unpack how nationhood is constructed in their narratives. Having examined some aspects of the theoretical and empirical debates around nationhood, I will now outline the methodological frame of the study upon which the present paper is based.

Narrating Identities: The study

The project upon which the present article is based sought to qualitatively explore young people's narratives of 'self' in the context of Greek society. The study aimed at examining the felt relationships of young members of dominant and non-dominant groups, in this case Greek and migrant youth, 'to a wider (and distinct) national identity' (Kaufmann and Haklai, 2008, p.746). Over one hundred young people of diverse ethnic backgrounds, and more specifically of self-identified Greek, Albanian, Georgian, Armenian and Palestinian ethnicities, participated in the study, all of them aged between 16 and 19. The fieldwork included observations, three focus groups and forty-six in-depth interviews carried out in two post-secondary educational institutions in Thessaloniki, the second biggest city of Greece. The present paper focuses on young people who were born in Greece and of Greek parentage, with the view to detail their narratives of nationhood (see Katartzi, 2017 for an analysis of migrant young people's narrative accounts of ethnic and national identities). Given the article's focus, and due to space limitations, the material presented here is based upon twenty-two in-depth interviews conducted with Greek young people on two occasions, lasting from one to two hours. The interviews were conducted in Greek, they were audio-recorded with the participants' consent, fully transcribed and analyzed with the assistance of NVivo software. Pseudonyms were given to participants to protect their confidentiality and anonymity.

The research process was developed according to ethical frameworks for working with children and young people (Heath *et al*, 2009; Brooks and Te Riele, 2013) and with a view to create a positive relationship with the participants in an interactional context conducive to the production of narratives. The study of narratives has been argued to have three key benefits (Phoenix, 2008:65); first, of enabling the examination of local practices through which identities are produced; second, of paying attention to the stories told but also to the material that may be incoherent and fragmented and not necessarily storied in a neat and ordered sequence of beginning, middle and end; and third, of emphasizing the contexts, both local and wider socio-cultural, within which narrative production takes place. In this study, the focus was on how young people draw upon socio-cultural understandings to build their narratives.

The analytic method followed was further informed by a narrative-discursive approach (Reynolds, Wetherell and Taylor, 2007; Taylor and Littleton, 2006). This approach is useful for facilitating the exploration of both the shared aspects in participants' talk and the implications of pre-existing and widely available discursive resources in the identity work of individual social actors (Taylor, Littleton, 2006). In more detail, the analytic method involved reading and re-reading the interview transcripts as a corpus of data

until key themes emerged. The analysis of key themes is one of the fundamental elements in narrative research (Phoenix, 2008). These key themes tend to cluster around recurrent content, with the identification of the latter being an essential step towards identifying the former (Phoenix, 2008). The analysis then focused on identifying the discursive resources, and more specifically the 'interpretative repertoires', that the study's young participants were drawing upon. The analytic tool of 'interpretative repertoire' is defined by Wetherell (1998:409) as 'a culturally familiar and habitual line of argument', in other words the social actors' methods of making sense, involving the relatively coherent ways of talk that tend to be grouped along established associations (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Wetherell, 1998). Further, this narrative-discursive approach enabled the emphasis to be placed on young people's sense-making processes and the identity claims they made (Taylor and Litteleton, 2006; Phoenix, 2008). It is also worth noting that the analysis sought to uncover the shared elements and socio-cultural understandings evident in young people's accounts, with an effort made to select narrative extracts that are typical of the corpus of data. The emerged narrative texts have been jointly produced by the researcher and the research participants through a socio-culturally situated research process in which interpretation and reinterpretation are inevitable (Lawler, 2002).

Although precluding generalizations, the material reported here nevertheless offers valuable insights into the subtleties implicated in the narration and discursive construction of young people's national identities. The following sections illustrate how the Greek participants construct and narrate their national identities along the lines of the four key themes of ethnic and religious boundaries; history, temporality and emotionality; cultural emblems of similarity and difference; and dialogical engagement with the perceived 'others'.

Narrating national identities

Hellenism and Orthodox Christianity as ethnic and religious boundary-markers

Virtually all Greek young people participating in this study referred to a web of identifications and allegiances concerned with claims of common origin and belonging to the 'imagined' community of Hellenism. More specifically, the identification with the Hellenic ethnic community was amply evident in Greek young people's accounts and narrated across the lines of its entanglement with Christian-Orthodox religion, perceived the latter as a *sine qua non* part of Hellenism's legacy. In the following extract, the young woman narrates her ethnic- Hellenic in this case identifications, while articulating the semantic legacy of Hellenism:

> There are many things that make me who I am; that I am Greek [pause]. It is all the history, the civilization, the religion, the language, the ideals [pause] Hellenism [pause] Hellenism is not the state; it is all the people who feel Greek and usually hold Greek citizenship, they live within and out of the borders of Greek state, meaning that Greek migrants of diaspora are Greek. Hellenism calls to mind also history, namely whatever Hellenism literally achieved. Usually Hellenism goes hand with hand with [Christian] Orthodoxy, meaning that religion comes in the middle (Helen)

Central to this young woman's narrative is the identification not with the nation-state of Greece but with Hellenism, as this is viewed to encompass the four symbolic pillars of history, culture, language and religion. Notably, Hellenism is narrated as the archetypical 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1991), transcending the territorial confines of the Greek state and including the members of Hellenic diaspora. A prominent place in Helen's account is granted to the historic legacy of Hellenism and its close-knit linkage to Orthodox-Christianity, with the latter being constructed as a constituent part of the former.

It is worth noting that across participants' self-narratives Christian-Orthodox religion emerges crucially intertwined with Hellenism. However, when unpacking how this interconnection is felt and discursively constructed, it becomes evident that it is not the *faith in* the Christian-Orthodox religion *per se* that seems to be proclaimed. Indeed, the Greek young people who participated in this study were quick to underline the marginal place religion had in their everydayness. Nathan's narrative quoted below illustrates this point:

> I am Greek; the language and history are important; also important is the way of life, our everyday life; that we will go out, drink and enjoy ourselves; that we will talk about politics. The religion, that I am Christian Orthodox, is important although it does not affect my everyday life. Yet, by any means, I would never change my religion (Nathan)

The young man in this extract narrates his Greekness with respect to the all-important language and history, alongside the shared way of life. Here the speaker-inclusive 'we' emphasizes the shared element of mundane practices- going out, drinking and enjoying life, talking about politics- that are perceived to instantiate nationhood. Religion, for all its importance, is not claimed to have a practical relevance to his everyday life. It can be argued that Orthodox Christianity, rather than being a corollary of faith-based identifications (see also, Storm, 2011), operates as a significant boundary-marker (Barth, 1969). Thus, religion signals belonging to the Greek ethnic group, pointing, as Mitchell (2006) has argued, to the religious content of ethnic boundaries. Arguably, the

term 'ethnic religion' coined by Hervieu-Léger (2000: 157) can be aptly utilised in the Greek case where Christian Orthodox identity becomes symbol of ethnic legacy and national belonging, a fact that can be linked back to its historical positioning and fastening to the modern Greek nation-building (Lipovac, 1993; Roudemetof,1996).

Additionally, religion is narrated as a cultural and moral frame of reference rooted in the wider socio-cultural milieu, the specific localities, but also in the familial units these young people belong to. This is strongly echoed in Stephanie's narrative:

> I was raised here and I love very much Greece; I cannot think of myself living in a different country. Religion is surely a significant part of this. To who I am the Christian religion does not play such an important role, as to the things that my family taught me to believe in, such as trusting in and not harming other people. The fact that I was born here, in this specific place also made me who I am. It is the culture, the history, the language and to some degree the way of thinking that we share with other Greeks (Stephanie)

This young woman's self-narrative unfolds across ethnic, cultural and religious identifications, shaped through tight familial bonds and mediated by spatial affinities. Motherland and the locale she is born and raised and where her family is rooted are all central to who she narrates herself to be. We can see in this extract how nationhood is represented as a hybrid entity of places and people (see also Condor, 2006), but also of emotions and convictions. It is worth highlighting that positioning as a member of a specific familial unit is perceived to mediate religious identification, rendering the latter synonymous with a system of value orientations and beliefs. This echoes the argument that religion, in this case Orthodox Christianity, functions in articulation with culture as a form of 'cultural religion' (Demerath, 2000). Overall, religion, intertwined with ethnic and cultural legacy- shared language, culture and history- makes up the content of ethnocultural boundaries perceived to delineate and symbolize belonging to Greek community.

In attempting to further unpack the ways in which nationhood is constructed in young people's self-narratives it is particularly worth exploring in greater depth the role of historic, temporal and emotional considerations that will be the focus of the next section.

History, temporality and emotionality

It has been argued that historic imagery along with temporality tend to permeate national accounting (Condor, 2006). This form of saturation was particularly evident in this study as all participants' nationhood constructions, to greater or lesser extent,

contained references to history couched in an emotive lexicon, with love and pride being the most widely and frequently invoked. The two narrative extracts quoted in this section capture the process of temporal comparison, during which the present status of a national group is judged against its own past (Condor, 2006: 660). This is well illustrated in Alexandra's narrative:

> I sometimes think that I am proud of being Greek; this is very fundamental to me and I feel it quite intensely sometimes. I love my country, I am proud of its history and I honour all those who fought for us to be able to live freely now. Nowadays Greeks do things that are not right. Of course, these sorts of things happen in other countries too but strict measures are taken there, whereas here things are more lax. How the mentality of Greeks has turned out to be is related I believe to this fact; that there are laws but no one abides by them in our country (Alexandra)

In this young woman's account, national identifications play a salient part in her self-narrative, with history emerging prominently and taking the graphic representation of a shared past, of historic battles for freedom. However, when the past-looking axis of Hellenic identifications are punctuated by the synchronic vector, pertaining to the contemporary manifestations of 'Greek mentality' and reality, the vividly-felt pride and love for her country give way to resentment and frustration for the lack of law-abidingness and the generalized anomie. Through temporal comparison, this account offers a negative evaluation of the national in-group and a rather bleak picture of the national present.

Strong national sentiments articulated in a powerfully emotive language that speaks of the love and shame for one's country are simultaneously echoed in these young participants' accounts (see also Koronaiou *et al*, 2015). The following passage is indicative of these contradictory sentiments uttered in the frame of temporal comparison:

> Every person has for his motherland a special love. I am proud of being Greek, of the ancient Hellenic civilization, that we had philosophers and orators that are universally known. The new era though with the scandals and all this decline and poverty, makes me feel ashamed. I reckon ancient Hellenic civilization is what makes us proud and the fact that we have endured four hundred years of occupation, the two World Wars and the more recent dictatorship, Junta (Stephen)

In this young man's account, ancient Hellenic civilization is entwined with the historic hardships that Hellenism endured, with both exerting a significant bonding and pride-

inducing power. This points to the historic and past-looking vector of Greek identifications, with the glorified past notably constituting the 'chief locus of mainstream Greek nationalism' (Koronaiou *et al*, 2015: 241). Further, the shared historic achievements and hardships, especially the collective memories linked with 'national struggles against "invaders" or "enemies", real or imagined' (Triantafyllidou, 1998:606), constitute one of the cardinal elements of Greek national identity. Love, pride and shame for one's country are invoked in the rhetorical context of temporal comparison, as the claims to the heritage of classic antiquity and historic hardships are juxtaposed to the frustrations of the present epoch, marred by political scandals, poverty and perceived decay. Arguably, these two narrations of nationhood along diachronic, synchronic and comparative axes also resonate with a conceptualization of national identity not as a linear and crystallized entity but as a nexus of identifications that can potentially 'fade away' (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000:30) out of emotive and cognitive de-investment.

When exploring further the contours of narrated national identity, one of the themes recurring in young peoples' accounts is the claim to a shared cultural legacy that will be examined in the following section.

Cultural emblems of similarity and difference

The young participants of this study, alongside their ethnic and religious identifications, also invariably laid a claim to a shared cultural legacy, perceived to serve the dual functioning of uniting them with their co-ethnics and differentiating them from those who do not belong to the in-group. The extracts quoted in this part serve to illustrate this aspect of cultural legacy. Starting with the bonding function, this is manifest in the following young man's account:

> It is this homogeny [homogeneia] we have as Hellenic ethnos, our civilization and religion -others though have as well- our history, our language and values, such as the institution of family, which I consider important, such as friendship. In Greece, we have the family above all. We regard it as very important. Look at the Greeks who have migrated abroad to find jobs, they support Greece and we support them. We take respective provision so they can enjoy as Greeks the Greek spirit of education. As Greeks, we have a bond across the world, wherever we are (Panos)

It is noteworthy that cultural legacy is narrated as an amalgamation of history, civilization and religion, interlinked with cultural values. Further, two repertoires of 'heritage' and 'tradition' (Condor, 2006) can be identified in this form of national

accounting; first, the 'heritage' repertoire, denoting a national possession shared by all those belonging to 'Hellenic ethnos', and the 'tradition' repertoire denoting coherence and continuity over time. For example, the premium that Greeks place upon family and friendship (see also Anthias, 2002) is perceived by this study's participants as one of their 'emblems of difference' (Barth, 1969). In this account, the use of the speaker-inclusive and homogenous '*we*' serves to accentuate not only the Greeks' shared legacy, but also their distinctiveness from the imaginary '*them*'. More than that, cultural legacy is narrated as uniting Greeks within and beyond the state's territorial confines with bonds of solidarity and support. The latter constitute the affective ties that Greek young people tend to perceive as uniting them with their co-ethnics, the members of the 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1991) to which they belong. These bonds can be analogously characterized as 'imagined' to the extent that they are symbolically constructed and constituted in young peoples' minds. Nevertheless, this is not to diminish their significance for constituting national identity and for placing this narration in a special location among others.

Virtually all Greek participants' narratives teemed with references to perceived bonds of 'common descent', 'common history', 'common civilization', 'common language and religion' and 'common ideals'. In addition to alleged common ancestry and historic past young participants also made frequent references to 'shared mentality' and 'common ways of thinking'. The following Greek young woman's account is indicative of this narrative line:

> As Greeks, we have common descent, a shared way of life because we live in the same area, and we have common characteristics in the way we speak, we behave, we live. The Greek style of life cannot be compared, let's say with the Indian or the American; they are as different as we are, we have different mentalities (Ariadne)

In this young participant's narrative two repertoires can be underlined, the repertoire of 'cultural similarity' and 'cultural uniqueness'. The repertoire of 'cultural similarity' is attributed to the common characteristics Greeks share in virtue of common origin and living in the same country. The 'cultural similarity' of the in-group is constructed along patterns of speech, behaviour, life, with the use of speaker-inclusive '*we*' further emphasizing the shared element of everyday mundane practices. Second, the repertoire of 'cultural uniqueness' is used to signal the distinctiveness of Greek mentality and way of life, but also to draw the differentiating lines between the in-group and the 'others'. It can be argued that in this extract *difference*, highlighted with the '*we*' and '*they*' schema, is being absolutized.

To shed more light on how *difference* is constructed in young people's accounts of nationhood, it is worth quoting another participant's narrative as it elaborates on the 'cultural uniqueness' repertoire:

> In general, I regard all people as equal; I don't have racist convictions [pause], however, there are differences; I do think we differ, not in merit though- because all people are of equal merit and worth- we differ in terms of mentality and style of life and speech. In general, every nation has its own characteristics. I don't know how I would have been thinking if I were born elsewhere. Possibly it is the mentality and the way we behave, but also the way they accept you- not accept, to put it better- the way they react towards you; how the other looks at you, gives you a characteristic image of yourself that renders you different in relation to the other, and the difference of other cultures. Well, I don't know whether if I was born in a different country, I would have the same views I have now [pause] maybe not (Helen)

This account offers a good example in which there is an evident attempt to distance and inoculate oneself against the charge of racism (Wetherell and Potter, 1992; see also Condor *et al*, 2006; Figgou and Condor, 2006; Sapountzis *et al*, 2006). The young woman deflects the racist accusation by proclaiming her belief in equality, arguing for the existence of differences between nations that are relative and context-dependent. These taken-for- granted differences between 'us' and 'them', the 'self' and 'others' point to a form of cultural essentialism that is at the same time invoked and problematized. She then continues by making an elaborate reference to the interactional and situated facets of the processes implicated in the making and narrating ones' self through difference. Identifications are formed in relation to and via the construction and internalization of difference on individual and collective levels, with these formations being specific to the socio-cultural milieu in which their dispositions, affinities and worldviews are being fashioned. As it has been argued, identity is 'only conceivable in and through difference' (Sarup, 1998:47; Jenkins, 2004). The 'other' forcefully enters the centre-stage of self-definition processes, challenging the notion of the sole authoring of one's national narrative and indicating its inescapably inter-subjective formation. We can also see Hall's (1991:21) conceptualization of 'identity' as a 'structured representation' that 'has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself' being particularly pertinent here. Defining oneself against perceived 'other' is cardinal to self-definition. The following section focuses on the role that the 'other' plays in the 'writing' of Greek young people's national narratives.

Greeks and the 'others'

Making sense of national identity impinges upon and is inseparable from making sense of difference and similarity, perceived homogeneity and diversity. Defining what the national 'we' are not in relation to perceived 'others' is central to defining who the national 'we' are. In this section, I seek to illustrate some of the ways in which Greek young people narrate the self in relation to 'others'. In the terms of national self-definition, the two external poles of differentiation against which the young participants of this study discursively construct and define themselves are the 'other Europeans' and the 'migrants'. This finding is in alignment with other studies that have similarly identified Greek nationhood to be constructed in comparison with these two groups, the European and the migrant 'others' (Sapountzis *et al*.2006; Figgou and Condor, 2006). The narrative extracts quoted below are typical of the corpus of data in terms of how the categories 'Europeans' and 'migrants' are constructed and represented. More specifically, Stephen's account sheds light on the perceived 'otherness' of these groups:

> Europeans are more developed when it comes to technology and economy, due to the decline of our state compared with the other European states that continue to flourish. They take better measures in the economy and they have fewer scandals, which hold us back as a culture. On the other side, people from poorer countries migrate to Greece believing that they will find a better future here, because their countries are less powerful economically and politically compared to Greece and they come here to find jobs that cannot find there. As a result, they do jobs that Greeks wouldn't do and are not treated well. On the contrary, the French are treated differently than the Albanians, because the Albanians come from a very poor country and we regard them inferior even from us, whereas the French come from a country of highbrow civilization (Stephen)

It is worth highlighting the alleged superiority of Europeans, the factual status it acquires and how the latter is sustained by the equivalence between superiority and economic, technological and cultural development (see also Figgou and Condor, 2006; Sapountzis *et al*, 2006). In the extract above a country and its nationals are viewed and 'measured' against their respective state's level of development and its perceived positioning in the 'imagined' socio-economic, political and cultural pecking order of status. In this constructed hierarchy made up of Europeans, Greeks and Albanians, it is the latter who are 'granted the lowest position', since they 'remain outside both the category us/we and of the category European' (Figgou and Condor, 2006:232).

Arguably both Europeans and migrants represent the 'significant others' informing the narration of national identity (see also Triantafyllidou, 1998; Sapountzis *et al*, 2006). In a similar vein, another young male participant Kostas characteristically argues:

> We have a tendency all Greeks to consider other people as inferior. Indeed, we view as inferiors the Turks and Albanians; the European people are different, they are treated otherwise. We treat Albanians as slaves (Kostas)

The young man's account is permeated with the discourses of power and hierarchy, ascription and inferiorization, as reflecting and recapitulating national and supra-national positions on the global map of unequally distributed resources and status. History is prevalent too, as the case of the case of Greek-Turkish historic conflict indicates, in consolidating the 'otherness' of the Turkish 'other' in young people's narratives. Lastly, reference is made to Albanian migrants, who are viewed as subjected to racist and exploitative treatment (see also Katartzi,2017) and whose inferiorized status is likened to the one of 'slaves', thus strongly echoing Lazaridis's (1999) argument that migrants from Albania are ascribed as 'the helots of the new millennium'. This concurs with the findings of other studies reporting the rise of intolerant and xenophobic attitudes towards migrants (GSY,2005) and the alarming appeal of neo-fascist ideologies among Greek youth (Koronaiou *et al*, 2015).

Concluding remarks

The paper sought to shed empirical light on nationhood through unpacking the ways in which it is constructed in young people's narratives. In line with Billig's thesis (1995:70), the paper examined how a group of young people belonging to the Greek ethnic majority discursively construct their national 'we'. Drawing upon in-depth interview material and adopting a narrative-discursive analytic approach the paper detailed the narration of participants' national identities. Arguably, the primal threads of young people's accounts of Greek nationhood were weaved together under the ideological canopy of Hellenism, and the tight interweaving of ethnic, religious and cultural identifications. More specifically, 'ethnos' (Smith, 1986) featured centrally in young people's narratives, taking the 'imagined' yet concrete form of a historic 'motherland' and exerting an emotive, almost quasi-familial power. The participants of this study laid a claim to the historic and cultural legacy of Hellenism and its perceived close-knit relation with Christian-Orthodox religion, jointly signalling belonging to the Hellenic national community and operating as markers of its ethno-cultural boundaries (Barth, 1969). Notably, the Christian-Orthodox religion, functioning in articulation both with ethnicity (Hervieu-Léger, 2000) and culture (Demerath, 2000) as a form of ethnocultural religion, makes up the religious content of the Greek ethnic group's boundaries (see also Mitchell, 2006). Further, the speaker-inclusive '*we*' was frequently mobilized in the participants' accounts discursively highlighting the shared-ness of Hellenic legacy and its distinctiveness from the imaginary '*them*'. The young participants repeatedly referred to the diasporic dimensions of Hellenism, anchored not only to the confines of Greek state but embracing the people of Hellenic diaspora.

Hellenism was narrated as a nationally possessed heritage and tradition, characterized by continuity and coherence across time.

The rhetorical force of Hellenism was further accentuated by the stitching together with the power of history (Hall, 1996) and the adversities deemed to threaten diachronically its survival and existence. History, along with the interlinked dimension of temporality, has been argued to play a pivotal role in constructions of nationhood (Condor,2006). Indeed, in these young people's narratives history loomed large through the modalities of hardships and animosities, perceived to unite the members of Hellenic diaspora with potent ethnic solidarity. Shared historical experiences emerged as a dominant bonding element, highly effective in transforming the 'mundanely tangible into emotion-laden phantasma' (Connor, 1993:385). Further, a deep emotionality was evident in these young people's accounts in which the all-important ethnocultural identifications were couched in powerfully emotionally laden lexicon of honour, pride and love. However, after making the prideful link to the classic antiquity, the antithesis with the current socio-political state of affairs afflicted by decay and corruption seems to leave this study's participants with a past-oriented and rhetorical, yet not less real, version of Greek nationhood. More specifically, through temporal comparison (Condor, 2006) that the past-looking and pride-inducing vector of national identification was contrasted with the synchronous negative appraisal of the in-group, giving way to shame and resentment for the national present. This process points to an understanding of national identity not as linear and static entity but as an amalgamation of identifications that shift through historic change and can potentially transform and fade out of emotive and cognitive disinvestment in the 'imagined' national community (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000).

This study's participants narrated the ethnic bonds and allegiances through a web of interlinked claims to shared historic past, but also to common language, customs, mores and a shared way of life. These were constructed as signals of cultural similarity and uniqueness, uniting members of the in-group and differentiating them from perceived 'others'. The preceding analysis illustrated how Greek majority youth narrated their national identities through a dynamic interplay of self-definition and dialogical engagement with 'significant others'. National self-definition, deeply embedded as it is in the historicized fields of power and discourse, involved for Greek young people conversing with the gaze of 'others', playing the latter a constitutive role in national identity. Echoing the findings of other studies (Triantafyllidou, 1998; Figgou and Condor, 2006; Sapountzis *et al*, 2006), Europeans and migrants featured as the 'significant others' informing the participants' accounts of nationhood.

Overall, it can be argued that ethnocultural and religious identifications function as powerful bonds, which this study's participants narrated as uniting them with the members of the 'imagined' Hellenic community. These bonds, albeit 'imagined', since inevitably constituted symbolically in social actors' minds, has 'real' consequences for the construction of national identities. More than that, as Connor (1993:386) argued 'the national bond, because it is based upon belief in common descent, ultimately bifurcates humanity into "us" and "them"'. This bifurcation contributes to the marking out, categorization and othering of those seen as not belonging to the national community, which in turn might have implications for the integration of minority populations, migrants and refugees. Notably, in an era of ever-increasing migration and displacement the rewriting of discourses of nationhood in non-exclusivist terms, so as significant parts of population not to be marginalized and 'othered' takes on a renewed political immediacy. Further, the alarming rise of far-right and neo-fascist parties (Koronaiou *et al* 2015; Miller-Idriss, 2009), calls for more emphasis to be placed upon explaining their appeal and potency to mobilize sections of European youth population against their constructed 'enemies' (Connor, 1993). In this context, the need for counter-narratives and for an 'affirmation of a renegotiated and inclusive national identity', as Meer and Modood argue (2012, p.190; see also Modood, 2007), is rendered even more urgent.

To conclude, it is against the backdrop of an increasingly intricate geopolitical canvas with processes of globalization and hybridization being undercut by the insurgence of fundamentalism and the revival of ultra-nationalism that young people form their identities and engage in forms of social action. Social research and scholarship can offer valuable analytical insights into the politics of youth identities and the articulation with diversity and localized manifestations of boundary-making mechanisms. Rather than dismissing ethnonational and religious affiliations as some primordial relic of the pre-modern past, further research can empirically document and contribute to understanding social actors' shifting identifications, loyalties and solidarities. The paper contributes to the microanalysis of collective identities by qualitatively exploring Greek young people's national identities as these are made sense of and narrated, in all their multifaceted and situated nuance, by social actors themselves. In doing so, it illustrates how ethnic, cultural and religious identifications and bonds operate as potent cognitive and emotional resources for narrating the national 'we', but also as vehicles for potential categorization and stigmatization and exclusion of perceived 'others'. Future research can unpack the contemporary configurations of young people's ethno-cultural and religious identifications, as these intersect with other social divisions, such as social class, gender and sexuality, and play out in different contexts.

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