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“Europeaness” and “Otherness”: Identity and Diversity within EU and its Education

GEORGIADIS FOKION, Primary school teacher, MA in Comparative Education (Intercultural Education), Institute of Education, University of London, Doctoral student, IOE, University of London

Affiliation: Institute of Education, University of London

ZISIMOS APOSTOLOS, Primary school teacher, MA in Primary Education, London Brunel University

Affiliation: London Brunel University

EFSTATHIOU IOANNIS, Secondary education teacher of Economics, MA in Economics, Athens School of Economics, Doctoral student, IOE, University of London

Affiliation: Institute of Education, University of London

Postal address: 4, Kimis street - 104 46 Athens – GREECE

E-mail address: azfg2005@yahoo.gr

Abstract

The aim of this presentation is to explore questions of identity and diversity, ideas of “Europeaness” and “Otherness” within the European Union and how these ideas affects pupils with a diverse “national”/ “ethnic” background. The presentation falls in three parts: Initially, the presentation engages with the idea of “Europe” as a context and analyses the notion of “Europeaness” as it is promoted by the European Union. It deals with “Europe” as a context and attempts to analyse the ideas of “Europeaness” and “Eurocentrism”, and their influences on social and educational European discourse. The following part of the presentation attempts to find the relationship between the concepts of “Europeaness” and “cultural diversity” within the European arena. It deals with the marginalisation of large groups of people in the EU that undermines the concept of “diversity” within “unity” of the EU.

Europe, “Europeaness” and “Eurocentrism”

Pieterse (1994) cites that references are made to present European civilisation as unique and homogeneous and at the same time full of diverse non-European influences. But, Europe is more of a cultural product than a historical entity (Jones S. *et al.*, 1996). Europe is being constructed with a non-linear continuous history, which also points out that “*European identity*” is rather a construction than a “*reality*” (Jones, S. 1996).

Shennan (1991) mentions it is difficult to define where the eastern boundary of the continent Europe lies. Thus, it is difficult to define Europe in geographical terms (Spiering, 1996). Europe was viewed, especially after the World War II, as a “*living duality*” (Janik and Zawadska, 1996), Eastern and western Europe. “*Europe has always been more of a mental construct than a geographical or social entity*”. (Lowenthal, 2000, p.314).

As Coulby and Jones C. (1995) note, the version of history which invented the notion of a “*Great European Tradition*” stressed a clear and unquestioned “*heritage*” from Ancient Greece, through the Roman Republic and Empire to the Renaissance and thence to the Western European countries of the Enlightenment. This tradition did not acknowledge or respect cultures and traditions beyond Europe. “*Whilst pan-Europeanism might have modified the nationalism, this only paved the way for the emergence of a wider European nationalism*” (Op cit., p.31). The fabrication of Europe as a “*closed space*” and as a meaningful and distinct historical and cultural concept is related to the idealisation of Europe. Heffernan (1998) rightly notes the contradictions embedded in the selective European memory which are revealed in formulations like “*the same Mediterranean peninsula gives us European Renaissance but Italian fascism*” (p.3). Jones C. (1994) writes:

Many living, learning and teaching within the EU, define themselves, their Europe and their “Europeanness” through the claimed inferiority and more certain fear of “Others” defined as non-European and living outside of Europe (p.2).

This superiority was asserted by 19th century historians, who saw the origins of Europe as almost exclusively “white” (Coulby and Jones C., 1995; Gundara, 1997). Even so, some of its origins were accepted as “non-white” (e.g. Egyptian civilisation). The notion of European cultural supremacy offers the basis of racist

knowledge and it does not contribute to a strategy for overcoming the nationalist basis on which the European concept of citizenship is constructed (Habermas, 1994a). Europe faces a “Eurocentric” tradition in many dominions of knowledge. European imperialism has urged these hegemonic conceptions:

Without significant exceptions, the universal speeches of modern Europe assume silence about the “non-European” world. There is incorporation, inclusion; there is direct rule, there is coercion; but, rarely, there is recognition (Said, 1993, p.58).

The formation and promotion of a “*European identity*” based on notions of “*Europeanness*” (Hansen, 1998), may tile the way of a new racism, a “*Euroracism*” (Sultana, 1995), which “*exclude and render inferior people from the non-European Union countries*” (Frangoudaki and Dragonas, 2000, p.167) with severe implications for the European societies.

Is there more than one Europe? The reply to this question, when it comes to democracy and human rights, is a straightforward “*No*”. There is only one Europe in all its diversity - national, regional, linguistic, cultural, religious. This diversity is the precious common heritage, and we must defend and protect it, so that citizens may continue to feel at home in their town, their region, their nation, in the larger European entity.

“*Europeanness*” and cultural diversity

No country of the world remains unaffected by international migration flows. Minorities all over Europe are a reflection of the mobility of late modernity. They are all either countries of origin, transit or destination for migrants, or all three simultaneously (International Organization for Migration, IOM, 2003). European societies are rapidly becoming more multicultural, culturally diverse. In other words,

they are engaged in processes of social change, which affects their social structures, beliefs and attitudes (Reid and Reich, 1992). National governments and the EU ought to be more explicit about their acceptance of these population, because

the fading of frontiers is giving birth to an entity where the cultures in contact with one another refer to values that are largely shared, where "other people" are no longer completely different (Galissou, R. (1997).

The existence of several different cultures in the EU and the differences in the way that each country views itself undermine the notion of "homogeneity". European societies are historically diverse and continue to be so. However,

they tend to camouflage their dichotomies and diversities, and are represented by their governments as being monocultural and monolingual (Gundara, 1988, p.5).

Attempts to identify a European identity are increasing rapidly and have now reached a critical stage if this identity is to be inclusive and allow for the multitude of cultures present in Europe. In cultural and linguistic terms, Europe is marked more by its diversity than by its coherence (Fossum, 1999). The fact that all Member states are multicultural societies is not satisfactorily taken into consideration or it is turned a blind eye to this fact. The exclusion of many "third country" nationals¹ (Hansen, 1998; Castles *et al.*, 1984) from the EU policy is a crucial issue.

Yet it would be dangerous to ignore the fact that social change inevitably involves social conflict and "to imagine a rosy future between social, ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious groups" (Reid and Reich, 1992, p.7). Generally, diversity in EU has been understood in a negative way as a situation where differences between countries, cultures or people lead to an unequal social and economic development (Bourdieu, 1977; 1990; 1998).

In Western Europe at the turn of the century it seems that, although national ministries of education and governments are willing at last to accord linguistic and educational

rights to “*autochthonous minorities*”, population seen as properly “*European*”, they are trying to hold the line against the “*Other*”, in the form of “*allochthonous minorities*” (Reid, 1999, p.164). Diversity is acknowledged, but only at a national level, only partially.

The second generation of immigrants in Europe has not been fully integrated in the host societies. There is a striking contradiction between their positive demographic contribution (they have a corrective effect on the ageing process, by replenishing the youngest age groups) and their low status and marginal place in the economic life of their host countries (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD, 1983). There is no upward social mobility: 90% of young foreigners throughout Europe are still employed as manual workers, whereas an important number of them remain outside even elementary, compulsory education (ibid).

In addition, “*illegal*” foreigners in the EU are “*modern pariahs*”. They cannot claim any rights. They are not eligible for any welfare schemes, due to the impossibility of presenting any official documents (identification, residence or work permit). There are serious reasons for a change in this situation, regarding at least the recognition of two rights, the right to health and the right to education (for their children). Apart from “*practical*” implications, e.g., lack of health care could be a possible source of contagion and exclusion from education creates what they call in France a “*classe dangereuse*” (Brochman, 1995, p.147), the deprivation of basic health care and education represents a general degradation of human dignity. One of the greatest dilemmas that Europe currently faces, is how to build an Union based on national identities and to exclude, at the same time, millions of “*third countries nationals*” (Eurobarometer²) (Banton, 1999; European Union, xxxx) that already conform a

conspicuous part of Europe's human landscape (Sengen Agreement) (European Union, xxxx).

Racialisation of the so-called "*Others*" and xenophobia, are therefore central features of the ethnic fundamentalisms of the European right. However, such constructions are not only found on the right these days. Political discourse, even in states where the power of the extreme right is tiny, such as in the UK, has focused on immigration control on the one hand and national and social integration and cohesion on the other hand. This is partly due to a populist courting of votes, and partly because it is easier these days for governments to police human migration than international flows of finance and goods (Yuval-Davis, 2002).

Post-modernity drives people into a situation of an identity that changes rapidly and continuously, "*an identity that is not taken for granted*" (Mellucci, 2002, p.21). Scholarly work on national identity contains a great deal of discussion, of the extent to which self identifying as a particular national necessarily involves chauvinistic tendencies of celebrating "*own nation*" and denigrating and excluding foreigners. In particular, it means scrutinising the wide spread and often unexamined assumption that the process of identifying the self with a particular group necessarily involves generating some form of antagonism towards those who are not in the group and that building a sense of self identity will necessarily involve designating some people as "*Others*" who are not only distanced from the self but negative stereotyped:

*"Otherness" rests largely on the mutuality of the exchange between the "familiar self" and the "alien other"*³(Roth, xxxx).

Some theorists have taken the assumption of this sort of principle much further. Bauman (1990; 1992; 1995; 1998), for example, talks of a basic human need to divide "*strangers*" into friends and enemies and explains the holocaust as an extreme result

of the difficulties that large scale and complex societies have with strangers. This is as a position repeated, both by Hall (1996) that “*identities are constructed through, not outside, difference through the relation to the Other*” (pp.4-5) and by Delanty (2000), “*all identities are based on some kind of exclusion, as the identity of the self can be defined only by reference to a non-self*” (p.115). A cultural “*Other*”, the immigrant or a member of another community, a foreign or refugee pupil in school, which do not share the same “*myth*” of common origin, is constructed as an alien and as such as a potential enemy who threatens “*our*” national cultural integrity and uniqueness. Total separation, preferably spatial, is considered to be vital for the common human welfare, in total contradiction to social and economic reality (Stolcke1995). Rattansi (1994) explains:

Identities, relationally and contingently formed, are constituted by power relations, and are always open to “dislocation” and threatened by the “outsider” or “other” which in part defines the positive elements (p.31).

McCrone (1998) comments that:

“Other” is an enemy against which we can measure and develop our identity (p.184).

The presence of an obvious “*Other*”, expressed for example through consolidated racism towards illegal immigrants into the Europe Union, is one set of conditions that would assist in “*European*” becoming a more significant identity to rival national identities. However, this is clearly not the only theoretically possible way of “*feeling European*” or necessarily the set of social conditions most likely to occur (Wallace, and Haerpfer, 2001).

The European identity concept, as far as the “*Otherness*” is concerned, can lead to ethnocentrism or “*Eurocentrism*” (Garcea, 1998). “*Eurocentrism*” is not simply a question of prejudices and errors that intensify xenophobia and chauvinism. In

agreement with Amin (1989), “*Eurocentrism*” has replaced the rational explanations of history with partial pseudo-theories...The “*Eurocentric*” distortion that constructs the dominant capitalistic culture denies the universalistic ambition on which that culture proclaims to be founded.

Thus, European identity should, but, does not, reflect diversity and multiculturalism (Pieterse, 1994). A European identity makes invisible the present and recent contributions of non-European origin to the economic, cultural and social life of Europe, so that “*non-Europeans are viewed as intruders*” (Kofman and Sales, 1992, p.24). This is what Shore (1996) means by writing that the easiest way to promote a sense of European identity is to manipulate fears of Europe being invaded by enemy aliens. Unfortunately, European identity tends to be meaningful only when it is contrasted against anything considered as “*non-European*”.

In contrast, according to the view of Habermas (1992), in a liberal democracy, citizens should be identified with some constitutional principles that fully guarantee their rights and freedoms, “*cultural and ethnic pluralism*”. What is more vigorously contested is a conception of citizenship in which individuals are seen as immediate bearers of EU citizenship, as sharing a common identity, a common responsibility and “*the excitement and anticipation of future common endeavour*” (Pérez-Díaz, 1998, p.235). A viable alternative could be the attribution of the European citizenship not only to the nationals of the Member-States, but also to all residents in the European Union (Stanley, A, and Rowlands, 1994). Until now, European Citizenship inaugurated by the Treaty of the European Union (art. 7)⁴ remains broadly an ideological concept. The above can be clearly seen through Nicoll’s

(1993) words⁵: “*read as a whole, the Treaty is not about a people’s Europe, but about States’ Europe. The Union citizenship is a thin veneer*” (p.21).

Concluding points

It seems that “*identity*” like “*citizenship*” is an elastic and inference rich concept that bundles together complex social processes. Initially, as the concept of citizenship was limited mainly to political rights, it was strictly related to nationality (Grawert, 1984)⁶. Marshall (1965)⁷ wrote that citizenship is “*by definition national*” (p.72). However, today the general acceptance of the universality of human rights tends to dissociate citizenship and nationality, except in the field of political rights (Gordon, 1985).

EU member states need to develop inclusive intercultural policies to ensure that, in legal and legislative terms, all groups who reside in a polity have citizenship rights (Gundara, 2000). Werbner and Yuval-Davis (1999) emphasise an alternative possibility for democratic citizenship to expand notions of rights beyond the narrow territoriality of nation states. The full participation in democratic citizenship sets in turn the conditions for an expanding understanding of citizenship into “*a charter for human rights*”, which envisages in Levi-Strauss’s (1966) words, a “*humanity without frontiers*” (p.166), the ethical, physical and cultural survival of the human species in all its totemic diversity. A European citizenship-identity would then simply be a stepping-stone to a more global identity. However, its fluid character of “*additional citizenship*”, that is “*a bundle of rights conferred by supranational law*” (O’Keefe, 1994, p.102) rather than a proper “*new*” nationality, allows the extension of it to all

long term residents of the Union. This scenario could be the best way for preventing the substitution of the traditional “*ethnocentric*” racism by a new, “*Eurocentric*” one. In recent years many organisations (e.g., NGOs, the Runnymede Trust, the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, the Group “Whose Europe?”) promote the concept of the state’s duty to ensure equal protection to all residents, dissociating completely rights from nationality. This model of citizenship based on residence and not on nationality seems to be the most suitable answer to the new condition, in which double pressure is exerted on the traditional conception of national sovereignty, both by the emergence of transnational entities, like the European Union and by the more general trends of globalisation. Promoting diversity and human rights could form a “*European identity*” of freedom and citizenship. This process, besides the political initiatives, basically passes through education.

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- ¹ According to Hansen, there are 12-13 million “third country” nationals permanently resident in the EU. Almost 40% of the population of migrants in Great Britain, France and Germany come from the “*third world*” (Castles *et al.*, 1984).
- ² When in a Eurobarometer survey of attitudes in 1988, respondents were asked, “When you think about people of another race, whom do you think of?” respondents in all the 12, except France and Britain, cited black people in first place, indicating a perception of the greatest difference. The French cited “*Arabs*” first and the British “*Indians*”. When asked a similar question about people of another nationality, the French indicated a preoccupation with North Africans, the Germans with the Turks, and the British with Asians. A survey nine years later (Eurobarometer 1997) noted a lack of embarrassment on the part of 33 per cent of respondents who said they were “*very racist*” or “*quite racist*”. It concluded that self-reported racism was growing in direct proportion to dissatisfaction with life circumstances, fear of unemployment... Of 15 countries, the eight with the highest percentages of respondents classifying themselves as very racist or quite racist were: Belgium, 55 per cent; France (48); Denmark (43); Austria (42); Germany (34); UK (32); Netherlands (31) and Italy (30).
- ³ Juliana Roth explains further that the “*alien*” or “*other*” and the “*own*” are closely interrelated; it is the very existence of the “*own*” that helps identify the “*other*”. Thus, the distinction between the “*own*” and the “*other*”, between “*inside*” and “*outside*” is fundamental to the problem of *otherness*; and because every reference to the “*other*” always discloses the contours of the familiar “*own*”, it is also an indication of a *bicultural situation*.
- ⁴ European Commission of the Communities *Treaty on European Union*. [Website] 2000 [cited 25-11-2002]. Available at: <http://europa.eu.int/en/record/mt/top.html>.
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- ⁵ Also in: Habermas, J. “Citizenship and national identity”. In van Steenbergen, B. (ed) *The Condition of citizenship*. (London: Sage, 1994b): p.28.
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