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EMMANUEL LEVINAS' PHILOSOPHY OF OTHERNESS. THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL APPROACH TO THE "OTHER"

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ABSTRACT

Levinas' philosophy centres on the manifestation of the other as the ultimate priority of our own being. This gives meaning and significance to the conversation with the self. Levinas emphasises the necessity of self-manifestation, stating that 'we must be' and 'we must act'. This article examines the causal relationship between the theoretical part of the author's research on Muslim minority women residing in Thrace, located on the borders of Greece, Turkey, and Bulgaria, and the various forms of otherness resulting from the population composition of the region. The author aims to provide answers from both a researcher's and a resident's perspective in a region where diversity and interculturalism are integral parts of everyday life. The author's twenty-year scientific research journey on Muslim minority women's integration through ICTs to modern life is motivated by a desire to understand the challenges presented by conflicts with the self when encountering otherness, the concept of entering in relation to Levinas' thoughts on the other, and the process of listening to one's inner voice and overcoming stereotypes.

Keywords: Levinas, other, Muslim minority, women, Thrace

INTRODUCTION

Alterity is derived from the Greek word 'eteros', meaning 'other'. According to the glossary of the Institute for Rights, Equality and Diversity, it is the Greek rendering of the term 'alterity' where the root comes from the Latin 'alter', meaning the other of two people. It describes the social construction of 'us' and 'others'. The term alterity refers to the distinct characteristics among individuals and is often linked to various factors, including diversity based on gender, language, age, sexual orientation, cultural identity, ethnicity, race, religion, and disabilities. Diversity, as a concept, has likely existed since the creation of the first human societies. In other words, from the moment individuals began shaping their subjectivity through communication with others, diversity was present (Hatzisavvidis, 2000).

Emmanuel Levinas provided one of the most radical descriptions of the encounters with the other (human beings) of all philosophers. According to Papacharalambous (2013), Levinas (1906-1995) a philosopher who defended an ethical humanism of respect for the otherness of the other, whose philosophy is described as the philosophy of the other, argues that "the best way to know someone else is to not even notice the colour of his/her eyes. Levinas believes that revealing the other is one's responsibility towards them and that seeing the other means that one is already obliged towards them. Direct seeing, without the mediation of any idea, is only realized as ethics" (Rosanis, 2014). In Benaroyo (2016) it is presented that Levinas argues that this approach to otherness can interrupt the egoism of

consciousness and prevent reason from turning into violence. He defines violence as the impossibility of creating space for the other. In summary, when encountering another person, the subject is compelled to confront their own consciousness and vulnerability. This creates a space for the other to be received within oneself. This quote from Levinas, found in his work "Humanisme de l'autre home", highlights this concept. "The other, which is manifested in the person, somehow penetrates its own plastic essence, like a being that opens the window where its form was already painted. The presence of the other consists of stripping itself of the form that was already declaring it. The manifestation of the other is a surplus to the inevitable paralysis of manifestation. This is described with the formula: the person speaks. The manifestation of the person is the first speech. The speech is primarily concerned with what lies beyond its surface, beyond the form of an introduction within the introduction" (Levinas, 1972 in Benaroyo 2016). Emmanuel Levinas presents a radical view of the experience with other human beings, making responsibility the source of all social duties. He critiques a philosophy that accepts the ego as the exclusive source of meaning. Levinas provokes thought and response when he speaks of the manifestation of the other, which must be revealed and kept in view as the ultimate priority of our own being, so that the question of the other gives meaning and significance to the conversation with the self. And self-manifestation constitutes the necessary conditions that Levinas sets from the outset: "we must be" and "we must act". Empathy and reflection on our notions of normality help to combat stereotypes of the 'other'. As we read in Ernst and Rendtorff (2024) Levinas proposes a strong concept of inclusivity since it is the encounter with the other human being that is the basis for becoming oneself (Levinas, 1969). In this encounter, there is an ethical demand of infinity and responsibility. The relation between the self and the other is asymmetrical. The other implies a devotion of the self and the self receives responsibility for the other. Levinas can in this sense distinguish between the real and authentic inclusiveness of the other as opposed to a formal and apparent inclusion with no deep significance. Authentic inclusive leadership implies the ability to transcend oneself and reach the infinity of the other that is expressed in inclusion of the world of the other in the community of the organization. This means that inclusive leadership in organizations implies a continuous effort to integrate the perspective of the other and others in reflexive humanistic management (Ernst and Rendtorff, 2024)

The question that will be illustrated in the article is what one encounters on a journey to listen to what one's self is saying and to be able to overcome stereotypes. In this article, the author tries to find the cause of the theoretical part of her research on the lives of Muslim minority women that reside in the area of Thrace. Thrace is the author's native land in North-Eastern part of Greece bordering to Turkey and Bulgaria. According to the U.S. State Department it is estimated today that the only explicitly recognized minority in Greece is the Muslim minority of Thrace and is said to number as many as 125.000 people, where they make up 28.88% of the population of the region of Thrace. (The National Herald, 2018). In her research she acknowledges the rich multicultural and multireligious nature of the region, where Christians, Muslims of Turkish origin, Armenians, Roma, Pomaks, all of them of Greek nationality, live alltogether in the area for more than seven centuries. Jews were living in the area but were exterminated through the WWII by Bulgarians who occupied the Greek part of Thrace. In an attempt to understand the theoretical component of the research on the many forms of otherness, the article refers to the muslim

minority population segment in the area of Thrace, specifically to minority women. The author tries to answer not only from the point of view of the researcher, but also from the point of view of the inhabitant of a region where diversity and interculturalism are the canvas of everyday life. She searches for the motivation that led her to embark on a twenty-year scientific journey, which constantly challenges her to reach new ports of call searching on matters that concern muslim minority women and their integration in the area they live. She examines how ICTs can provide the ability to these individuals to fully engage in society and shape their own futures—while accounting for a range of aspects including financial resources, work, health, education, housing, leisure, culture, and civic involvement and thus to achieve their social inclusion (Warschauer & Tate, 2017). The author provides descriptions of minority women in the context of the city's history. In the urban centres of Thrace, namely Komotini and Xanthi (as in the Alexandroupolis area there is only a Roma community), women were largely excluded from community life due to the fact that very few of them worked. Women living in rural areas, particularly in mountain villages, faced even greater challenges and limitations. Discrimination based on factors such as geographical location, marital status, ethnicity (Turkish, Pomak, Romani), employment status, cultural background, living conditions inside big families, life supervised by the elders was the focus of the author's researches.

For the author conflicts with her own self loom large when she comes into contact with otherness, but also the empathy in the place of the other, more challenging to follow the path in Levinas' thoughts on the other. The author also recognizes the difficulty in developing one's own self-awareness and comprehension of otherness which is an intriguing and hard procedure that follows Levinas's ideas. Using Levinas's ideas of the other, the author investigates how diversity impacts minority women's lives in a heterogeneous community and how their otherness influences their expectations and experiences.

History of the area concerning the minority

As we read in the Athenian newspaper "Efimerida sintakton" (2023) and the local "Paratiritis" (2017), in 1957, the Ministry of Greek Foreign Affairs decided that "the only correct name of the minority in Thrace is Muslim", with members being "Turkophones, Pomaks, Circassians, Atyghans, etc.". According to the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 the minority populations in Greece were recognized as Muslim communities residents of Greece and the minority of Orthodox citizens in Istanbul were recognized as Greeks residents Turkey. In fact, the Greek state used the infamous "Danger from the North" (Thrace's bordered with communist Bulgaria during the Cold War) as a pretext to impose political discrimination on the minority. This resulted in the well-known reactionary measures, such as the military outposts and barriers dividing Muslim and Christian villages, and further insane measures that not only made Muslims second-class citizens but also denied them the ability to carry out basic daily tasks like obtaining permits for home repairs, hunting licenses, and even bicycle licenses. As a result of this polarizing atmosphere, minority member of Greek parliament Ahmet Sadik was convicted to 18 months in jail without the possibility of parole by the Komotini Plenary Court in January 1990, as he had referred to the minority as "Turkish" in a manifesto for the elections. The next day, after a fight which broke out between two middle-aged hospital patients in the city hospital—a Muslim and a Christian—the Muslim struck the Christian in the head, killing him. After being taken into custody, the

offender was discovered deceased in his cell. Suicide was the official cause of death in this case. The incident triggered an unprecedented pogrom against Muslims known the "September Riots of Thrace" (resembling to a small extent to the massive one that happened against Greeks in Istanbul, in September 1955, where thousands of shops of Greeks were destroyed, thirty Greeks were killed, many Greek women were raped and Orthodox priests were murdered. All these were the precursor of the deportations of thousands of Greeks in 1964). This pogrom in 1990 in Komotini upset the Greek political leaders of the time and caused the meeting of the then political leaders on January 31 where they decided to alleviate the cause of the aggravation-organized discrimination against the minority. In fact, this decision is the first official document that acknowledges, even with the elegant expression "administrative harassment", the existence of discrimination against the minority and was the beginning of its gradual abolition that was achieved in the following decades". The government claimed that with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the creation of new states following the breakup of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, the restrictive, ill-thought-out, unjust, and unconstitutional policies implemented against the minority could not be maintained in a world that was changing quickly. (Newspaper "Efimerida sintakton", 2023; Paratiritis, 2017)

In 1990, the Greek government implemented several changes and measures in favour of the minority members. These changes had a significant impact on the daily lives of both the minority and majority communities in Thrace, as well as Greece's image in the E.U.. The Greek government reacted to all the above, and a series of measures were taken that radically changed living conditions not only for the Muslim minority but also for the rest population living in Thrace and even the image of Greece inside the EU: 1) the minority community, who are Greek citizens, were allowed to purchase real estate, set up companies, obtain driving licenses, repair their houses, and they did not have to tolerate the unformed and discriminatory delay of public services in issuing licenses for the establishment and operation of sanitary establishments; 2) the dividing line splitting the prefecture of Xanthi in two and in isolation was removed; 3) the Article 19 of the Citizenship Code which "vanished people from being", if a policeman or a customs officer suddenly decided to take the identity card or the passport of a minority member, was abolished; 4) the process of recognizing the degrees of Turkish Universities from D.O.A.T.A.P., the Hellenic NARIC, became faster; 5) obstacles have been eliminated for all categories of professionals (pharmacists, lawyers, etc.) to practice their profession; 6) a law on intercultural education was established in 1995, which gave privileged admission to higher education to the high school graduate members of the minority, with additional posts of 0.5 percent of those admitted to Greek universities (the measure had a strong effect on speeding up social mobility as young Muslims could obtain tertiary education and live in other parts of Greece); 7) a five-thousandth (5‰) rate was voted by the Greek parliament for the entrance of minority members to work in the Greek public sector. This means that of 5‰ of the administrative positions in the Greek public sector must be members of the Muslim minority as long as they succeed in the administrative competitions; 8) an educational program (1997–2013) for children of the Muslim minority in Thrace was implemented by the University of Athens with multiple results, such as new books for minority primary schools, seminars for Christian and Muslim teachers on new methods of teaching, conferences on intercultural education, and articles on educational subjects in

local newspapers; 9) the pilot introduction of the teaching of the Turkish language and the teaching of Islam by minority instructors in the public schools of Thrace in 2007 by law; 10) the function of summer camps for the students of the minority; 11) the implementation of the degree assimilation programs for upgrading the bachelor's degrees of the Special Pedagogical Academy; 12) the foundation of the Support Center of the Project "Educating the Muslim Students" (KESPEM) an institution for the support of the education of minority students (Education of the Muslim Minority Children in Thrace, n.d.); 13) the conferences that took place in Thrace on minority issues which were the platform for discussions on minority problems; 14) researchers and PhD students, (many of them were locals), became more active in the field of multicultural education and more sensitive on issues such as minority education and students' and women's issues.

The women of the Muslim minority in Thrace

In Thrace, Muslim minority women can be identified by their distinctive dress, such as the 'feretze' (long black dresses) worn by the older generation or breeches, while younger mothers wear plain or colourful scarves and trench coats over modern Western-style clothing. Younger women may not cover themselves or dress in a way that distinguishes them from the majority of women. Minority women faced significant barriers to attending social events in the city, and even venturing beyond the districts where minority members are concentrated was difficult. Additionally, minority families were often hesitant to send their daughters to school, resulting in a very low number of minority women attending all levels of education, despite the fact that nine years of education is compulsory in Greece (Askouni, 2002). Askouni (2006) reports that primary education was not received

by one in five minority women, and only 1.6% of minority women had entered secondary education. Furthermore, Tsioumis (1994) notes that Greece, lacking the logic of assimilation of minorities, failed to develop an educational policy that would have facilitated the social integration of the Muslim minority through its organizational structure and institutions, and protected it from external intervention by Turkey. The author, who was born and permanently resides in the city, provides descriptions of minority women in the context of the city's history. In the urban centres of Thrace, namely Komotini and Xanthi (as in the Alexandroupolis area there is only a Roma community), Roma women were largely excluded from community life due to the fact that very few of them worked. Women living in rural areas, particularly in mountain villages, faced even greater challenges and limitations. Discrimination based on factors such as geographical location, marital status, ethnicity (Turkish, Pomak, Romani), employment status, cultural background, living conditions inside big families, life supervised by the elders was the focus of the author's researches

Most women used to work in farms or just in domestic roles without social security. Minority women were only seen as customers in shops, not in cafes or restaurants in town. They could be seen in their neighbourhoods dressed in black veils and white headscarves, gathered outside courtyard gates in large groups or swimming in the sea while wearing a veil, out of sight of other bathers. Most of the minority women in Thrace lived their lives hidden from the local community, as if there was a curtain separating the two communities into two parallel worlds. Sharia law, an anachronistic law that came into force in 1920 during a period of political and social unrest, also affected their situation. This law was discriminatory towards minority women and deprived them of their rights.

Underage girls as young as 14 were forced to marry against their will, and family and inheritance disputes were not regulated by legal rules but by religious ones. These disputes were not heard by a judge but by a religious leader. This deviated from the constitutional right of equality between men and women and the basic principle of equality of all citizens before the law. Another important issue faced by minority women at high rates is the use of psychotropic drugs. Mental health problems often arise due to the closed nature and structure of their society, as well as the isolation resulting from the internal or external migration of their husbands in search of work. Arvaniti's article 'Otherness and Education' highlights this issue as in intercultural education according to Banks (2008) "many ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups display weak identifications with their nation-states due to their marginalized position. They also do not see their hopes, dreams, visions, and dynamics replaced in the dominant state, educational system, schools, universities, and society overall. This is especially true because of the lack of representation and inclusion".

The Research

A gap in previous studies on the lives of women from the Muslim minority in Thrace was exposed in 2004 while the author was writing her master's thesis on gender and ICTs, after the literature review she made on the topic she was searching for "Gender and ICTs". As changes via technology were errapting during the decade of 90s and the first decade of the millennium for the lives of all people the author aimed to address issues of integration of Muslim minority women into modern life through new technologies by conducting a research of small scale among women of the Muslim minority in Thrace. The author in order to investigate this issue used case studies in 2004 and later both qualitative and quantitative methods in 2010. In the second research, participants were carefully selected and divided into three groups: 137 participants for the quantitative section, and an additional 28 women and 30 key informants for the qualitative section (Georgiadou, 2017) It has to be mentioned that researchers working in Thrace face the challenge of a lack of statistical data, which minority in general poses a major obstacle to data collection. It is worth noting that the shortage of information on this topic is often artificial, as the Greek statistical service or local branches of the Greek Ministry of Education typically store this information. Aditionally the author during this period explored also the potential benefits of ICTs for Roma women and for immigrant women from Ex Soviet Union, women's participation in the digital world and for improving the living conditions of the Muslim minority in general (Georgiadou, 2007a ; 2007b ; 2007c; 2007d ; 2008; 2009). The study examined how familiarity with computer technology can promote social inclusion and increase community participation in administrative positions. The women interviewed expressed their intention to be or become computer literate, to improve their knowledge of the Greek language, to continue their studies and become qualified in order to be able to find a job. The future, as we live it now in 2024, has showed that their intentions and choices for their own good and perspectives were mindfull.

One of the most characteristic influence of ICTS on the empowerment of minority women, was what Hatice, a minority woman, described: "I learned computer at home on my own. I attended online lessons on computer use through the Internet. In the afternoons, I attend lessons at the 2nd Chance School and at the technical school following the programs provided for the adult education." It can therefore be stated that among the psychological benefits derived from ICT

skills were: increased self-confidence, knowledge and a sense of modernity. Interviewees, being cognisant of the empowerment computer literacy offers, mentioned some reasons behind their attendance at computer seminars as being knowledge, interaction with others, skills, financial considerations and feeling modern. During their interviews most of the women stated that the chief reason for their interest in computer literacy was for themselves and in order to stay in touch with their children when they were abroad. This was a notable finding demonstrating that women were behaving as individuals and not as a collective, with personal improvement their personal goal. There has been additionally evidence of economic benefit as some interviewees (36%) were able to find work – a development which enhanced further their self-confidence. Women interviewees connected the term ICT to computers, mobile phones and web cameras since these are the gadgets they commonly use. In general, their view on ICTs was positive as they have had the above experiences; they have described ICT as something new, something that provided quick communication, something that helped in their learning procedure, something that made their life easier. This was brought out by Vildan's, Alev's, and Bikek's comments respectively in the order quoted below: "It is something that scares me, but on the other hand it is something necessary."(Vildan) "It makes my life easier, helps me a lot to make things much easier, provides me with knowledge, and it changes my life."(Alev) "ICT is something good, a development for the human kind. I used to write with a pen, now I write with a computer."(Bikek)

Communalism plays an important role in the inclusion of marginalized communities, which has been verified in many countries where many projects were funded and implemented aiming to increase voluntarism, to inform on the use of ICTs, to raise awareness on issues of common concern, such as sexual and reproductive health and drug abuse, to raise awareness on the importance of women's participation in political life, and to motivate for networks with counterparts at every level (Wheeler 2006; Sreekumar 2007).

Adult education can become the vehicle to support the redefinition of the role that Muslim minority women were forced to adopt through internal social conflicts their community had to go through. Continuous education and training enhances the chances for learners to participate in the processes of socioeconomic development and upgrades their qualifications for the expansion of their employment opportunities. In the case of communication through computers what Bikek (pseudonym) and Nur (pseudonym) explained respectively is an example: "Knowledge, communication, information, amusement; old friends of mine got in contact with me through the Facebook. I became a member of a theatre group, I found a new world. I can search for historical dates and learn new things, I watch a lot of films on the internet, and it is like having a movie at home. I watch all the Turkish films online on the computer"(Bikek).

"I communicate with friends that I have not seen for a long time. Computer is the medium for widening your mind. I speak through Skype with friends, and my son can find very easily information" (Nur).

Many of the answers the interviewees gave, come to support the expectations a woman has for herself through computer education. The answers show that they understand the problems they face in order to adjust and integrate in the society in which they live. Their answers are very genuine and characterize the changes that occur in minority: "If a woman knows the Greek language, she can work; she doesn't depend on her husband. When they cannot speak Greek they are afraid, they ask. They ask their neighbor to pay the electricity bill, the telephone bill. Even at

the hospital they cannot reply to the doctor or to the nurses. For this reason they search for doctors from the minority or they go to shops where there are people who speak the Turkish language" (Ceyda).

This structure has been sculpted through all the changes described in the first part of the study, through economical variances and the crisis in Greek society; through the use of new technologies, which brought into family life a vast amount of information that acts as an activator for changes; through education; through mobility and immigration in recent years; and through the lack of money for the annual family income. Minority members consider lack of education to be one of the big problems they had to face and still to fight for (Demesticha 2004). Tradition is still being kept inside the families of the minority, but old values are changing with the intention of being replaced with new ones. Zaimakis and Kaprani (2005) explain that the status of woman inside the minority is affected by the social development of the minority and the changes that also happen in Greek society. During the past years, the Greek language was not properly provided in minority schools, thus a big part of the minority population cannot properly use the Greek language (Georgiadou, 2017). After all the progressive changes outlined above, the new generation of the minority considers the Greek language as a necessity and an advantage in order to integrate in society and in the paid work force and in order to further their studies and communicate in both the Turkish and Greek language. Many of the women who participated in the interviews had aspirations to enter or progress within the labor market, although often these had been frustrated in the past. Muslim minority women strongly emphasized the importance of Greek language skills and of understanding local employment practices, but had often found access to training courses, advice, and guidance difficult. Computer literacy also was recognized as one of the key skills to further their aspirations. Confidence was reported as being frequently sapped by setbacks and difficulties, which included experiences of racism and discrimination, social isolation, and difficulties in coping with or accessing the local infrastructure of service provision.

In 2019, a new research under the title "Mapping the Socio-professional Integration of Muslim Minority Women in Thrace" took place (Georgiadou, 2019). At the end, it became obvious, from the information collected on Muslim minority women's participation in the paid job force, that these women still face discrimination, obstacles, and barriers, especially entering the public sector and highly paid jobs. By giving the women opportunities to speak out and define for themselves new conditions that could bring the changes required to them, or just to speak out about the problems they face, could lead to personal empowerment and new social outcomes. In general, this study discerned a more positive attitude from the women who participated, something that seemed out of the question in the past, regarding the intention of minority women to work and contribute to their family's income. Possibly this has become unavoidable due to the economic crisis and due to the financial problems the minority family faces. Finally, and most pressing, particular attention should be paid by the Greek state to removing unjustified and disproportionate barriers for some highly regulated professions (e.g., notaries, property registry agents, court officers, and university staff). This would demonstrate a more sensitive attitude by the Greek state to minority members, giving them in this way the sense of protection of their human rights.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Regarding the different types of diversity in the region of Thrace, the

author of the article appears to be investigating the causal side of the theoretical component of her research. She acknowledges the rich multicultural and multireligious nature of the region, where Christians live together with Muslims. Her desire to comprehend how diversity impacts the lives of minority women in this multicultural community appears to be the driving force behind her interest in this subject.

In the article of Buddeber (2018), according to Levinas' philosophy, 'human beings experience themselves as being addressed and called by the other, and therefore, all their acting and even their existence is a response by which they address–at least in an indirect way–the other. Thus, the other is not facing the subject in a neutral way, but as the one to whom the subject's acting and life have to be proven as a response. As a response to the other, the subject's behaviour is also recorded, understood and potentially put into question in its entitlement by the other. Consequently, to encounter the face of the other signifies in Levinas' view being called by the other to respond to him and, hence, being responsible". Thereby, Levinas describes the other, as in the quotation above, not only as the one to whom we are exposed but also as the one who depends on our care and consideration and therefore determines and obliges us by his dependency (Buddeber, 2018). Consequently, the previously outlined events of 1990 can be understood as the catalyst for the author's research on the "other". The author recalls feeling fear, anxiety, and agony on the day of the incidents and damages described above. Her family responded differently to the violence exposed in the streets of Komotini in January 1990. Her father assisted his Muslim friends in arriving safely at their homes and protecting their shops' valuables, without considering the danger to his own life or the risk to his own shop's integrity. That moment, as Levinas describes, "her father knew the "other"

with not even noticing the colour of his/her eyes". From that moment the author, also, knew the way she had to live inside this different society. Her father's father lived and left the legacy on how his family should co-exist peacefully with the Muslim minority in the West Thrace region where their family settled in 1922, being forced to flee East Thrace as war and new borders were changing the world after the collapse of the Ottoman empire. His legacy was no hatred for the other and being equitable to him/her. The author explains that "This was the way I was brough up, as my family never took advantage of the suppression and underestimation of the lives of minority people all the past years on the contrary my family had developed friendship and good relations".

Levinas, in Buddeber (2018), explains that also "the subject is subjected to the other because, even if he/she cannot totally conceive the other, he/she is nonetheless always determined by him/her. It is the responsibility for the other that gives meaning to our own existence and gives legitimacy to such existence. From this, we identify to whom the subject has to account: to the other human being" (Buddeber, 2018). This is precisely the crux of the matter: the coexistence of communities with disparate religious, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, as exemplified by those who reside in Thrace. To experience this on a daily basis, one must reckon with the neighbour with whom one may not even converse, yet whose very presence imbues one with a sense of legitimacy and belonging. The author demonstrated a capacity for empathy and a willingness to comprehend the perspectives, sentiments and motivations of those deemed "other". She demonstrated pragmatism and the ability to simplify complex issues by balancing opposing viewpoints. She aimed to foster understanding between women from different backgrounds by demonstrating care and consideration. This approach was

intended to foster a sense of shared responsibility and commitment to the common goal of peaceful coexistence and unhindered development in their shared homeland. By gaining an understanding of the experiences, challenges, and perspectives of Muslims, those who are perceived as "others" by Christians bridges of compassion and respect might be built, thereby promoting peaceful coexistence and dialogue.

There are various reasons why an individual might be motivated to research the life of someone who lives nearby but belongs to a different religion and speaks a different language. These could be: a)including cultural understanding by appreciating the diversity within their community and gaining insights into different customs, traditions, and ways of life b) interfaith dialogue and tolerance by understanding their beliefs, practices, and experiences, which enables individuals to build bridges across religious divides and promote mutual respect and cooperation c) personal growth and development by challenging stereotypes and biases, encouraging open-mindedness, and broadening perspectives. Open-mindedness is encouraged when one engages with diversity because it shows that one is willing to consider novel concepts, viewpoints, and behaviors d) promoting community cohesion by encouraging interaction and collaboration among community members, regardless of their differences e)the study of individuals from diverse backgrounds can provide valuable insights into sociocultural dynamics, intercultural patterns, language acquisition, and intergroup relations thus broadening perspectives. Having conversations with individuals from various backgrounds offers the chance to learn about and acquire understanding of other perspectives on living, thinking, and experiencing the world. It broadens someone's perspective beyond his/her own constrained experiences and helps him/her to appreciate the richness and variety of human experiences developing thus a more complex understanding of the world.

The author's interest in the concept of 'otherness' began in 1992, after completing her bachelor studies. At that time, she decided to learn Turkish, the maternal language of members of the Muslim minority in the region. However, being a Christian woman learning Turkish during that time was met with suspicion and concern from people she knew and worked with and they were members of the majority population. The task was challenging due to the scarcity of books, dictionaries, and teachers something that today is totally different as a plethora of language learning opportunities is available. Govaris (2002) argues that learning a foreign language is a prerequisite for experiencing and becoming aware of categories of perception that are not translatable. This leads to recognition of the existence of other cultures and the limits of our own culture. The Turkish lessons continued at Bogazici University in Istanbul during the summer of 1997 and 1998. Some years later in 2002 the author worked for two years in the political office of a minority member of the Greek Parliament due to her knowledge of the Turkish language. During this time, she cooperated with members of the minority from various social strata and origins, including both women and men. This unique experience is described as social coexistence, which Govaris (2002) "likens to a musical composition of different rhythms and melodies that complement each other. Each rhythm is inherently incomplete. This incompleteness creates an awareness of the need to compensate for the deficit. Relationships are then developed".

In 2010, the author presented her four-years research on the social empowerment of Muslim minority women through the use of ICTs. The research of 2010 was significant as it focused on Muslim minority women, which was a relatively

unexplored area. Kanakidou (1996) in her PhD thesis described the personality of the Muslim woman and her contribution to the traditional structures of Muslim education in Thrace. Hadjikosta's (2008) study was titled 'Recording of the use of participatory pedagogies and attitudes towards these pedagogies by Muslim women trainees of Greek language learning classes of the KEE of Rodopi' was one of the few existing studies on this topic. Also the research Demesticha (2004) did was referring to minority women as she was there to mention that the new media (the Internet, the satellite television, etc.) had permitted the spread of forms of global culture and had facilitated communication to different parts of earth (Demesticha, 2004). "Yes, I agree that finally women tore apart the curtain. I believe that the Greek state has to support all the people of the minority who are interested and in this way to give a push to the general situation of the whole minority." Development, trust, respect, equality before the law, equality of rights, affirmative action can be the solution to the minority problem in Greece (Demesticha, 2004).

The research was featured in the local Greek language newspaper 'Paratiritis', the nationally circulated journal 'Kathimerini', and local radio stations. The fact that it was designed and developed by a local Christian woman had it's own significance. The author designed and created it with the intention of giving space to minority women users of computer technology to include their voices in a wider range and to expose their problems in a more comprehensive way. The author believed that ICTs could be a medium for change and increase public awareness of the problems minority women experience. This may have helped these women to realize that they have the right to speak and be heard. It also demonstrates that women are capable of working and contributing to society on equal terms with men. Although news media audiences are not simply passive

recipients of information, who or what is selected to appear in the news and how those individuals and events are portrayed can have a profound influence on people's attitudes, beliefs and behaviours (Flood & Pease, 2009).

The author's aim was to act as a mediator between Christian and Muslim women, to identify shared issues and collaborate on solutions. The women from the Muslim minority who participated in the author's research and were interviewed demonstrated self-empowerment and a commitment to social change by courageously speaking out about their experiences and expressing their ideas and demands. Giving women the freedom to express their ideas and set new standards for advancement will encourage improvements in how they operate Minority women's self-empowerment or belief in their efficacy might encourage greater participation in the development process of the community they belong. Empowered individuals might wish to take a more active role in directing development within their communities. "Unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act. Efficacy belief, therefore, is a major basis of action" (Bandura, 1997:2). After presenting the research in the media there was some light shed on this part of the minority following the darkness that was covering this issue, as local newspapers published narratives of minority women that emphasized their accomplishments, difficulties, and experiences. These stories provided a human face to the problems minority women confronted, making them accessible to a larger audience and encouraging compassion and understanding. This made it possible for minority women to influence public opinion and tell stories about their communities. After that, new surveys on Muslim minority women's lives were conceived and carried out (Kavaliotis 2010; Tsaousi 2012; Grigoroudi and

Batzak , 2017; Katsiani 2020). This could be explained by the fact that little by little the curtain, separating these two communities and keeping the taboos for approaching each other, began to tear apart. This might aid in highlighting their accomplishments and hardships as well as encouraging empathy and understanding among the broader public. Raising awareness of the issues these women experienced could also help to strengthen support for programs like lobbying for legislative changes, resource access, and empowerment opportunities. All things considered, minority women's equality and social justice might be greatly aided by media portrayal.

When the research was concluded, it became obvious that Muslim minority women contrary to their past behaviours, were further interested in obtaining knowledge and in managing their social improvement. A new face for the "woman of the Muslim minority in Greek Thrace" revealed. This way of living is a combination of influences from internal social conflicts that the Muslim community went through, during the past years, and external social factors. This new face of the minority women as the author had the chance to figure out could be very helpful for the state, for the local authorities, for social services, in order to prioritise the needs of both communities who live together and consider all as human beings with their own needs. But mainly for the local Christians when engaging with individuals from diverse backgrounds this might help them dispel any preconceived beliefs or stereotypes they may have about them. Meeting people from those backgrounds can help dispel negative stereotypes about particular religions or cultures. Social interactions give people a human face, which undermines the validity of unfavorable stereotypes. A few women in the interviews gave frank answers that went against the norm of their group dynamics. They described how members of minority groups who hold administrative positions tend to show little concern for the issues minority women face. As a result of this response, minority women expressed a new identity characterised by self-confidence, independence and a strong yet nuanced critique, combined with a need to live.

Finally, as time heals all wounds, it is important to note that several women stated in 2019 study interviews about health, environment, family and society that they would rather not be categorized as a "minority" but should be attended as subjects in a European society. Instead, they aspire to be recognized simply as individuals who seek to lead fulfilling lives like anyone else. These women are claiming their right to be acknowledged for their unique identities goals, and contributions by emphasising their desire to be recognised as individuals in their own right rather than just as members of a minority group. They want to be recognized for the entirety of their complexity as individuals and to be seen beyond the limited perspective of their minority status. It asserts their equal standing in society and their right to pursue their goals and aspirations without discrimination or prejudice. This stance empowers them to assert their rights, advocate for their needs, and shape their own destinies.

Maybe this could be a new modern addressing of the situation minority people have to deal their lives in the area of Thrace. Maybe this might be the solution in communities where people of multicultural background happens to live together. No majorities no minorities. Just to exist together as humans with no labels, getting to know the "other" with not even noticing the colour of his/her eyes, seeing the others by being already obliged towards them, interrupting the egoism of consciousness and preventing reasons from turning into violence.

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