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“Sociolinguistic views of the Muslim minority in Western Thrace”

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Patras, Greece, January 2025

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Sociolinguistic views of the Muslim minority in Western Thrace

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*«I dedicate this thesis to my family and those who supported me and were by my side on this
great journey»*

Abstract

The main interest of this current paper is to examine the sociolinguistic and cultural attributes of residents who belong to Turkish-speaking Muslim minority of Western Thrace and their possible incorporation in the Greek society, according to their beliefs and suggestions. During the development of it, the significance in fostering common aspects of Muslim and Christian habits and customs will be outlined, in order to prove and demonstrate the emphasis of this endeavor. Respectively, it is more than crucial to underline the peaceful coexistence of minorities in the studied area, which is well-founded through the centuries, where it is maintained by the people.

Some subjects that the introductory part will offer to the reader are some key information about the description of the Muslim community, the impact of cultural understanding between its habitants and the configuration of social identity and cohesion through the usage of language. Continuing, literature review will provide necessary sources from relevant academic researches which focused on the territory of Western Thrace and sociocultural characteristics of the dimension of Islam. More specifically, various material of Muslim people who inhabited the area will be brought up, in order to facilitate the accurate knowledge about the researched area.

Concerning the inquiry itself, it will be a qualitative one in order to extract the desired results from the participants and in the same time to let them express themselves analytically through the targeted questions that will be asked about the society in which they live in and the sociolinguistic and cultural features of their identity. Willing to elicit results from different age groups the researcher chose five participants who belong to Muslim minority. This effort brought up findings that significantly aid to the discussion section where it was compared with existing relevant literature which was selected carefully.

In the last section of this paper, it will be attempted to conclude the main parts of the paper, the possible next questions that could be asked to

other participants in order to enforce the research around the examined matter. The initiative behind this inquiry is based on the better understanding of a society which is coexisting for many years and it could be a tailored example for the upcoming multicultural societies that would be constructed in Greece. Moreover, it could be a crucial answer upon the individuals who are convinced that the existence between locals and minorities is controversial. Finally, government itself and pertinent authorities could rely on similar researches with the intention of building societies that incorporate multicultural values and attributes

Keywords

Islam, identity, intercultural education, minority language education, multiculturalism

“Κοινωνιογλωσσικές απόψεις της μουσουλμανικής μειονότητας στη Δυτική Θράκη”

Θεμιστοκλής Χαϊτίδης

Περίληψη

Το κύριο ενδιαφέρον της παρούσας εργασίας είναι να εξετάσει τα κοινωνιογλωσσικά και πολιτισμικά χαρακτηριστικά των κατοίκων που ανήκουν στην τουρκόφωνη μουσουλμανική μειονότητα της Δυτικής Θράκης και την πιθανή ένταξή τους στην ελληνική κοινωνία, σύμφωνα με τις πεποιθήσεις και τα πιστεύω τους. Κατά την διάρκεια θα αναλυθεί η σημασία της καλλιέργειας κοινών πτυχών των μουσουλμανικών και χριστιανικών συνηθειών και εθίμων, προκειμένου να αποδειχθεί και να καταδειχθεί η έμφαση αυτής της προσπάθειας. Αντίστοιχα, είναι κάτι παραπάνω από κρίσιμο να υπογραμμιστεί η ειρηνική συνύπαρξη των μειονοτήτων στην υπό μελέτη περιοχή, η οποία είναι θεμελιωμένη στο πέρασμα των αιώνων, όπου διατηρείται από τον λαό.

Ορισμένα θέματα που θα προσφέρει στον αναγνώστη το εισαγωγικό μέρος είναι μερικές βασικές πληροφορίες σχετικά με την περιγραφή της μουσουλμανικής κοινότητας, τον αντίκτυπο της πολιτισμικής κατανόησης μεταξύ των κατοίκων της και τη διαμόρφωση της κοινωνικής ταυτότητας και συνοχής μέσω της χρήσης της γλώσσας. Συνεχίζοντας, η βιβλιογραφική ανασκόπηση θα παρέχει απαραίτητες πηγές από σχετικές ακαδημαϊκές έρευνες που επικεντρώθηκαν στην επικράτεια της Δυτικής Θράκης και στα κοινωνικοπολιτισμικά χαρακτηριστικά της διάστασης του Ισλάμ. Πιο συγκεκριμένα, θα δοθεί ποικίλο υλικό μουσουλμάνων που κατοικούσαν στην περιοχή, προκειμένου να διευκολυνθεί η ακριβής γνώση για την περιοχή που ερευνήθηκε.

Όσον αφορά την ίδια την έρευνα, θα είναι ποιοτική προκειμένου να εξαχθούν τα επιθυμητά αποτελέσματα από τους συμμετέχοντες και ταυτόχρονα να τους αφήσουμε να εκφραστούν αναλυτικά μέσα από τις στοχευμένες ερωτήσεις που θα τεθούν για την κοινωνία στην οποία ζουν και για τα κοινωνιογλωσσικά και πολιτισμικά χαρακτηριστικά της ταυτότητάς τους. Πρόθυμος να αποσπάσει αποτελέσματα από διαφορετικές ηλικιακές ομάδες, ο ερευνητής επέλεξε πέντε συμμετέχοντες που ανήκουν στη μουσουλμανική μειονότητα. Αυτή η προσπάθεια έφερε ευρήματα που βοηθούν σημαντικά στην ενότητα συζήτησης όπου συγκρίθηκε με την υπάρχουσα σχετική βιβλιογραφία η οποία επιλέχθηκε προσεκτικά.

Στην τελευταία ενότητα αυτής της εργασίας, θα επιχειρηθεί να συγκεντρωθούν τα κύρια μέρη της εργασίας, οι πιθανές επόμενες ερωτήσεις που θα μπορούσαν να τεθούν σε άλλους συμμετέχοντες προκειμένου να επιβληθεί η έρευνα γύρω από το εξεταζόμενο θέμα. Η πρωτοβουλία πίσω από αυτήν την έρευνα βασίζεται στην καλύτερη κατανόηση μιας κοινωνίας που συνυπάρχει εδώ και πολλά χρόνια και θα μπορούσε να αποτελέσει προσαρμοσμένο παράδειγμα για τις επερχόμενες πολυπολιτισμικές κοινωνίες που θα δημιουργηθούν στην Ελλάδα. Επιπλέον, θα μπορούσε να είναι μια κρίσιμη απάντηση για τα άτομα που είναι πεπεισμένα ότι η ύπαρξη μεταξύ ντόπιων και μειονοτήτων είναι αμφιλεγόμενη. Τέλος, η ίδια η κυβέρνηση και οι αρμόδιες αρχές θα μπορούσαν να βασιστούν σε παρόμοιες έρευνες με σκοπό την οικοδόμηση κοινωνιών που ενσωματώνουν πολυπολιτισμικές αξίες και ιδιότητες

Λέξεις – Κλειδιά

Ισλάμ, ταυτότητα, διαπολιτισμική εκπαίδευση, γλωσσική διδασκαλία μειονοτικής γλώσσας, πολυπολιτισμικότητα

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	6
Περίληψη.....	8
Table of Contents.....	10
1. Introduction.....	11
1.1 Historical and political analysis of treaty of Lausanne and minorities in Greece and Turkey.....	11
1.2 The unique environment of Western Thrace; multiculturalism, education and social core.....	12
1.3 The concept of multiculturalism and Islamic law among Muslim minorities in Europe.....	13
1.4 The concept of Islam in a multicultural environment.....	14
2. Literature review.....	16
2.1 The term of identity.....	16
2.2 Islam.....	18
2.3 The culture and the characteristics of Islam.....	20
2.4 Intercultural communication.....	22
2.5 Fostering minority language education.....	25
3. Methodology.....	27
3.1 Research Method.....	28
3.2 Research Tool.....	29
3.3 Sample.....	31
3.4 Validity-Credibility.....	31
3.5 Restrictions.....	32
3.6 Data analysis.....	33
4. Findings.....	34
5. Discussion.....	40
6. Conclusion.....	47
7. References.....	50
8. Appendix A: Interview Guide.....	64
9. Appendix B Interview Consent form.....	65

Introduction

Historical and Political Analysis of Treaty of Lausanne and Minorities in Greece and Turkey

The Treaty of Lausanne, which was signed in 1923, constituted a fundamental role into the current border formation of Greece and Turkey and to the mutual population exchange of both of the given countries. After the unsuccessful campaign of Greece to Minor Asia, the Greek government was obliged to sign the aforementioned Treaty, in which it resigned from any territorial right that it could possibly be had and received a massive refugee wave of Greek Orthodox Christians from Turkey (Vardağlı, 2024). As it is logical, the Greek society had to deal with two big concerns, the consequences of the military defeat firstly and the proper management of this population in order to incorporate it to its society.

Despite the fact that the population exchange was mandatory for both countries, it has to be mentioned that Turkey didn't receive the same amount of people to its territory, as a certain number of Muslims remained in Greece (Sfetas, 2015). Greek society itself, faced a shocking situation as they would be in an uncomfortable position of accepting people with different culture and attributes to their daily life. Concerning the Greek government and Press, although they expressed their disappointment towards the Swiss Council and international authorities initially but they considered that the upcoming population will enforce the Greek homogeneity and the individuals will contribute to social reconstruction (Michailidis, 2024).

With the passage of time, Greece partly managed to handle this harsh reality and turned its gaze towards the West principals and tried to join the international organizations potentially. Since the moment that they managed to join the European Union, it accepted constant pressure from it in order to construct a proper social environment and enact legislations that will embrace the minorities in the Greek social core (Grigoriadis, 2008). Thus, Greece was obliged to follow the guidelines of Europe and to solidify social equality among the natives and the recognized minorities.

Taking into consideration the above, something that has to be mentioned is the direct relationship of the Treaty of Lausanne and Western Thrace territory. This territory is a home to minorities that coexist with the local population and interacts with them for many years and it is an object for a further investigation (Anagnostou, 2001). Besides that, multiple international analyses have been implemented in order to demonstrate that both of countries must preserve mutual respect and understanding so that this unique environment could be conserved.

The unique environment of Western Thrace; multiculturalism, education and social core

Having already properly analyzed the Treaty of Lausanne, at this part, the territory of Western Thrace will come into inspection, in order to give a total view about its synthesis and the minorities that are a part of it. Even though Greece and Turkey rapidly exchange populations, some territories in both countries were excluded from this Treaty; Imbros, Tenedos and Constantinople from Turkey and Western Thrace from Greece (Hirschon, 2003). Referring to the minorities that are located in Western Thrace are Turkish-speaking Muslims, Pomaks and Romani (Yiakoumaki, 2006). Continuing, it has to be said that through the passage of years many governmental officials stated that this examined area can survive and coexist only with the promotion of multiculturalism and the principles of it. Thus, many efforts have been implemented such as culinary events and

cultural encouragement so that the understanding and acceptance could spread among the locals and the minorities. Nevertheless, in the case of Turkish-speaking Muslims, through the passage of time regimes tried to exploit their identity in order to instrumentalize them and gain privileges in the area (Borou, 2009).

Taking the latter quote as a motive, it has to be clarified that Greece itself has followed this kind of tactic. To begin with, during the military regime and the Turkish invasion to Cyprus many unethical measures have been taken to their detriment. Initially, the authorities at that time discriminated them, reduced their public speech about their needs and they forced them to sale their lands or making them not able to approach the bank system of the country (Dragonas & Frangoudaki, 2006). As far as the education of them is concerned, as long as the authorities named them as the manpower of this area (Borou, 2009), Greece and Turkey cooperated and left their rivalry aside in order to accommodate their needs and to assist them so as to be absorbed by the society. Greece itself, gave a significant amount of funds for the evolution of their quality of life, inaugurated numerous educational institutions concentrating to the promotion of teaching of Greek language and constructed tailored curriculums in order to aid them to embrace the taught language (Anagnostou & Triantafillidou, 2007). This pattern of initiatives brought the Turkish-speaking Muslims closer to the society that they inhabit and led them to actively interact with the native people. Even though there are still some obstacles -which will be mentioned later- that was a significant step towards coexistence.

The concept of multiculturalism and Islamic law among Muslim minorities in Europe

Even though the term of multiculturalism is characterized as multifaceted (Gale & Staerklé, 2019), such as many scholars found it as something that hides the individualism and the responsibility of actions, the minorities of default societies when they confronted predicaments found a shelter on it.

In literature, the term of multiculturalism among societies tends to significantly support the rights of minorities by helping them to express their culture and aid them in cases of oppression by authorities or society itself (Verkuyten, 2009). Additionally, there is a grown body of literature that claims that many times the positive attitudes towards minority acceptance is related with the recognition of the state (Uzelac et al., 2022). Hence, something that it is urgent to be quoted is that the attitude that each government adopts towards the treatment of minorities play a decisive role in the behavior shown by the locals towards them.

Regarding the Muslim minorities that inhabit Western societies, a great interest is hidden upon the handling of their repertoire and the problems that occur. It is claimed that the one third of Muslims around the world are inhabitants to states that are non-Muslim (Mohiuddin & Bin Borham, 2022), fact that sets an important burden to the assimilation of them and the acceptance of their attitude. Many countries in Europe, America and Asia are not keen on to some customs of Islam that are contrary to their social norms and in the majority of cases reject the traditions of them either they are trying to strictly restrict them (Khir, 2007). This situation awoke many Muslim jurists and scholars around the world as they attempted to retain their culture and their beliefs, even though they are not accepted in the non-Muslim societies that they live. More specifically, they mentioned that Islam has many common sights with Judaism and Christianity, as the three of them are monotheistic religions and they share many common principles (Siddiqi, 2014). Furthermore, in the same published paper it was cited that in the paradigm of America, some Islamic laws are permitted by the state to be implemented but others that are characteristic features to Islamic states are strictly forbidden.

The concept of Islam in a multicultural environment

It has been observed that minorities who interact in societies that tolerate and actively support diversity, can feel more comfortable and maintain their culture and identity. More accurately, there is a specific paper which extensively dedicated on it and proved it through studies that when a default government is not oppressive through minorities which are part of

its society can spread their sociocultural profile and coexist harmoniously with the locals (Dasopang et al., 2022). As it was also stated, the protection of human rights in the dimension of religion, culture and language is mandatory for the contemporary countries and verifies the legitimacy of them towards people who seek acceptance (Hafner-Burton et al., 2008).

The concept of Islam and its attributes in terms of its integration into a society has always been a certain concern and a challenge for contemporary states. Something that has to be addressed is the incorporation of Islam differs in relation to each country that is constituted by Muslim minorities. Several studies that have been conducted in the past shown that in Western societies Muslim minorities tend to choose countries that could be easily assimilated rather than India, where the government there perpetuates the maintenance of its cultural identity and keeps the minority culture in margin (Alam, 2007). Additionally, the same paper proposes a holistic education to Muslim minorities giving emphasis to the mutual understanding of local culture and the hosted one. A relevant paper which stuck at the treatment that Muslim minorities receive around the world, quoted something very important; in the American context, various youngsters while they were trying to interact with their local peers felt a harsh oppressive behavior towards them, especially women when they were recipients of racism and xenophobic attitudes (van Doorn-Harder, 2014).

The aforementioned facts led the representatives of Islam and Muslim culture to take measures for the proper protection of Muslim minorities around the world and find ways of claiming the rights that every minority deserves. The highlight of this initiative was the establishment of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) targeting the support of the Muslim needs. More precisely, this organization functions as a connecting bridge between Muslim minorities and the countries that are hosting them. Its main concern is to highlight the struggles that the minorities face daily and invent ways of social integration, cultural acceptance and reduce of oppression towards them (Khan, 2002).

Literature review

The term of identity

Identity itself is multidimensional and quite complex about its definition. Through the years, many scholars dedicated with the context of it in order to examine it and decided that the main features of it concentrate to personal, social and ethnic factors. In 1999, author Fearon James conducted a salient paper in which a flourish amount of definitions concerning the term of identity was provided and mainly stated that the identity is ““people’s concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others” (Fearon, 1999). Additionally, something that the aforementioned paper included to its content was the ways that the individuals of each social group used to define themselves among others.

Similarly, one profound element about the individual perception of identity and its correlation with the social one is that each personality can identify its attitudes with its peers and to categorize itself into a social group (Tajfel, 2010). Continually, when an individual manages to self-define its personality and to categorize it into a social group according to its attributes, social comparison comes to surface, a procedure where the individual can relate its characteristics among other social groups and to find common or opposite attributes (Spears, 2011). More analytically, a respective research that examined the cross-cultural contact pointed out that children can observe the cultural differences and similarities of their peers with different background since their first interactions in kindergarten (Kranz & Goedderz, 2020). This procedure allows to an individual to deeply comprehend its profile and to be able to properly adjust in a society according to the worldview that has been formed.

Even though it is widely accepted that family itself is the means of identity construction for every individual, it has been agreed that identity is not static and can possibly alternate accordingly with the environment that

someone interacts. An individual can radically change some attributes of his identity in agreement with the stimuli that he receives and the various cultures that he has a contact with (Darkwah & Ampah, 2023). Concerning this, it is understandable that the identity is not a steady structure, but it keeps changing with the passage of time. Despite these, in terms of identity adoption, everyone who is in the aforementioned process must understand the culture and the consistency of a default identity (Hopkins & Reicher, 2011). In this dimension, each state that hosts various identities must apply policies that protect the rights of the people. What has to be mentioned is the mutual respect of the boundaries that people with diverse identity set and build a concrete cross-cultural environment (Eriksen, 2010). The balance between justice and injustice is very delicate to loosen, thus every state must pay the proper cultural respect.

Having already made an introduction to the term identity, the meaning of it towards the self-identification and its role to the social group comparison, it is quite important the reference of national identity, as every social group belongs to a nationality. By drawing on the concept of national identity, Parekh (2010) referred to four terms that mold a national identity and one of them dealt with the recognition of ideals, beliefs, principals and targets by an individual for its nationality. In the same motive, a relevant paper claimed that the formation of national identity is strongly due to the common territory, culture and history of the individuals who comprise it (Triandafyllidou, 1998). The latter literature review mentioned that the term of national identity and nationality initially upraised on Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth century where every member of a default society could distinguish himself among other according the language, dress code and other features.

Islam

Islam is the one of the three monotheistic religions of the world between Christianity and Judaism. Every one of them believes towards a supreme existence which is the beginning and the end of the world and guides the believers towards heaven and immortality. According to academic sources

that were dedicated with the exact number of Islam population around the world, it was estimated that the number reaches up to 2 billion people who actively follow the doctrines and the beliefs of Islam (Grim & Hsu, 2011).

Before starting the analysis of the compounds of Islam, something that has to be done is the proper reference to the word itself and its significance. More precisely, Islam is the total dedication towards the one and single God Allah and the constant worship of Him through the Quran which is the Holy Book and the speech of Him (Schielke et al., 2018). A similar resource which extensively inspected the significance of Quran among Islam, pointed out that it is a worldview which establishes the believer in various dimensions such as the personal, social and cosmic fabric based on the path that he followed (Tabatabai, 1981).

The first one who delivered the doctrines and the laws that the Quran includes about Islam, is the chosen messenger of Allah towards the people, Muhammad (Esposito, 2000). This holy figure of Islam announced that if somebody desires the salvation of afterlife must devote his life to the worship of omnipotent God and to maintain a religious and humble life until the end of his days. Through his speeches, not only did he deliver the true and the one message of God but he also took a leading role upon it. The instructions and the paradigms that mentioned were named Hadith and they serve the highest importance in terms of Quran understanding (An introduction to Islam, 2002). Nevertheless, Muslims managed to distinguish the difference between Quran and Hadith, such they say “God says” when they refer to Quran and “Prophet says” when they refer to Hadith.

Having already completed a brief introduction around Islam, its definition and some of its characteristics, at this point the basic religious attributes of

Islam will be investigated. More specifically, there are five pillars that Islam concentrates on; believing to Allah and Muhammad, a prayer schedule of five prayers per day, being generous to poor people which is called Zakat, performing fasting in favor of Allah during the Ramadan period and a travel to Mekka in order to fulfill the promise to Allah for every follower that he can afford it (Mojtahedzadeh & Qureshi, 2023). These holy rules are mandatory for someone who wishes to be closer to God according to his doctrines. Every Muslim during his inspection of Quran is able to discern the difference between the right and wrong, the beauty and ugliness and the good and evil (Nasr et al., 2015). In a nutshell, Quran itself not only is a guide for a proper religious life but a passage that aids the believer to gain a peaceful inner spiritualism.

Concerning the followers of Islam, it has to be stated that there are two main branches which form the core of the religion. Beginning with the first one, Sunni make up the majority of Muslim population around the world where they were the supporters of Abu Bakr for the first Caliph and the successor of the Prophet (Blanchard, 2009). This election was realized under the pretext that Abu Bakr was the closest companion of the Prophet, something that was agreed among the overwhelming majority of Muslims. At the opposite end stood the other Muslim branch, Shiites, that constitute the minority of Muslim followers. They thought that Ali who played a significant role under Prophet's rule was the right beneficiary for the Prophet's legacy (Hanif, 1994). This historical fact formed the two main branches of the current Muslim population.

The culture and the characteristics of Islam

The previous part of literature review devoted with the dominant characteristics that constitute Islam religion, the beliefs and the duties that every believer must complete through his life. Having already stated those, this part of the literature review will deepen more as it will further analyze the culture of Islam, the Islamic law and some other critical attributes of this monotheistic religion. It is now well established from a variety of studies that Islam cannot categorize itself with only one definition about its historical, religious and cultural aspects, rather is more than a dynamic

religion which its complexity constantly evolves within the passage of time (In Ben Amara et al., 2024). It has been observed that Islam was evolved differently in each region according to the social norms and the circumstances that emerged.

Something that it is urgent to be clarified, is the total dedication of Muslim population towards the religion. Every society that was formed, every political power which ruled any Islam country performed it in accordance with the quotes of Quran and the Islamic law. A relevant academic source which its dedication based on the attributes of Islam mentioned that Muslims are more than proud and susceptible for their religion (Najjar, 2005). The same academic source justified the strict core of Islam and its durance through the years to the opposition of the Western way of living such many scholars were convinced that this is not matchable with the values that Islam spread. Moreover, during the constant contacts with the West, Islam was not the one which would accept the incorporation of various new attributes to its core, constructing an Islam nationalism (Stone, 2002). This motive set Islam as a religion different than the others, pushing the political and religious leaders to continue this practice among the years. This fact relied on that Islam is not restricted by social or governmental norms as it is something universal and it cannot be modified or regulated according to someone's will (Hamid, 1989).

While the translation of Islam itself means dedication, commitment and submission to the only omnipotent God (Ahmad & Azzam, 1976), supports its values and its messages to the *Sharia* which according to scholars has been translated as "Islamic Law" in the English language. If someone wanted to answer what actually the Islamic Law contains, he could simply refer to it as a total worldview for every believer in a nutshell. More accurately, *Sharia* includes vast information about the way of living of each believer such as marriage and divorce references, financial contracts, justice, ritual practices but also prohibited nutrient products and ethics (Clarke, 2020). These life discourses that delivered by the Prophet to believers will aid them to seek the virtuous life in the aforementioned dimensions with the gift of afterlife as a major price. Nevertheless, something that has to be stated is that across the years male populations attempted to interpret the quotes of Quran in favor to theirs, with the

result that many women and children rights were overpassed with a view of constructing the ideal Islamic society (Rehman, 2007). This fact led to gender imbalance and the social restriction of women and children and dominated the position of men in the Islamic societies. Except for the previous one, during the passage of time various organizations and states were occupied with the principals and the practices of *Sharia* and they ended that it is not constructed in accordance with the established human rights. While Western civilizations comply with the legislations which protect the human hypostasis and are enacted since 1948 (Tibi, 1994), some Islamic countries which are strongly connected with the principals of Islamic law do not take those legislations into consideration and they practice some religious laws that belong to past centuries. In the same motive, there are some observations which indicate that in many Islamic countries the socioeconomic imbalances are maintained until nowadays. The law schools of Islam are trying to keep the position and the status of the husband in sovereignty, as he is the one that keeps the largest percentage of the family's property in the situation of a divorce (Rehman, 2007). Moreover, if for any reason a wife wants to issue a divorce, the husband's consent is compulsory even if there is an incident of violence.

Continuing with the same motive, it is more than important to provide some critical aspects about the core of a Muslim family, their practices and their beliefs. Muslim family core is characterized as a strong one, with the male of the family being dominant and the one who makes the critical decisions. With other words, the definition of Muslim family stands upon the words traditional and religious (Khurshid, 2015). The latter academic resource referred additionally that the patriarchy is so strong that even families are arrange weddings between them, restraining the woman's will and bringing it into margin. Additionally, the oppressive reality and daily life for women in Islamic states concerned many times Western civilizations, questioning if Islam is against to human rights and violent religion towards the believers of it (Jafar, 2017). Furthermore, what it has to be underlined is the strict bond of Muslim family. A relevant academic literature which is extensively occupied with this cited that harmony between family members and respect among them is crucial (Al-Mateen & Afzal, 2004). Apart from the corresponding respect among them every

Muslim totally respects the elders such they represent wisdom and knowledge.

A basic fundamental pillar of Islam religion is Ramadan fasting, where every believer of Islam religion must proceed to this kind of fasting during the month of Ramadan. More accurately, the duration of Ramadan is 28 days and it is defined for the long-hour abstention from food and water (Das et al., 2019). This kind of tradition obliges the believers to adjust themselves to an extremely difficult daily routine that they should keep, according to the doctrines of Holy Quran. It has been observed with respective measurements that the nutritional routines and sleeping hours alternate, resulting in many of them to confront certain fatigue and nutritional problems as they have lack of important nutrients. This fact leads the believers to not be able to cope with their responsibilities and also to be in a difficult position.

Intercultural Communication

In societies where people from different sociocultural background are interacting with each other daily, there are some principals that everyone must follow in order to cherish the social diversity. While some societies tend to reject diversity and put them into discrimination for ethnic reasons or depending on external characteristics (Terum et al., 2018), others learned to embrace it and build their society core with criterion the peaceful coexistence. Nevertheless, it has to be noted that this procedure is not easy to define at all, rather it is complicated and it is based on a variety of factors. In order to further explain the procedures that a society and its individuals must perform, it is highly important to define it as intercultural communication. A brief definition of it could explained as the communication of people who belong to different sociocultural backgrounds (Croucher et al., 2015). The same academic literature which was mentioned before, cited that intercultural communication varies from country to country such its evolution depends on a variety of parameters as government legislative acts, the identity and the principals of each political frame and the interpersonal interactions. A key factor that highly contributed to the proper adjustment of intercultural communication is

globalization and modernization (Alexander et al., 2014) as people began to have a contact with the other cultures and broad their horizons and explore the difference.

However, as it was underlined in the beginning intercultural communication is something that it is known for its complexity and there are many situations where several barriers are hidden towards to the implementation of it. A critical academic resource which considerable occupied with this kind of matter stated that there are some attributes which define the aforementioned barriers such as ethnocentrism, stereotyping, prejudice and racism and finally anxiety and uncertainty (Zhu, 2020). Those headlines accurately describe societies that are constantly supportive of ethnocentric impressions and denounce anything that is different than the cultural and ethnic standards of them. Something that is also worth to be mentioned is that the cultural distance between individuals builds a significant barrier. In other words, when individuals spot differences in the field of sociocultural and linguistic identity, they restrict themselves in terms of interpersonal communication and prefer to interact with people who have a similar background with them (Kenesei & Stier, 2017). This happens when the government itself could not accurately solve this kind of communicational difficulties with direct legislations which spot to the better understanding of necessities and peculiarities between people or social groups.

The main interest of the first paragraph was to briefly define the term of intercultural communication and the attributes of it, while the second one to number the barriers and the problems that individuals and society are facing towards to the completion of this kind of communication. At this part, the measures that could be taken will be quoted and the actions that individuals and societies could perform in order to confront the aforementioned barriers. To begin with, in order to overcome those obstacles, the cultural acceptance is more than significant. There is an extended research where its findings contributed with it showing that

learning each other's culture, accepting the different ethnicity and embracing the other's language can easily prevail the barriers between social groups (Hill & Collaborators, 2025). Those thematic pillars motivated a certain number of scholars to further investigate them and to seek ways that could help minorities to smoothly integrate into a society. Analysis that was based on the conceptual framework proposed by Grzymala-Kazłowska (2017) promoted the definition of anchoring. In other words, anchoring is not restricted to a basic understanding of the needs of minorities yet attempts to construct powerful social bonds between social core and minorities in order to establish them and to develop them in the future. With a proper usage of it, minorities feel more stabilized and secured towards to the social core and additionally they value that their identity and culture is protected. Insisting in the dimension of language, in terms of minority integration it is more than important to simplify the codification of communication. For instance, during a default communication the interlocutor who speaks the hosted language must use simple vocabulary without specialized terminology so that he could aid the other person to comprehend the content of the discussion (Zhuk, 2022). Concerning the paradigm of Greece, it is more than important to state the country's legislations about cultural acceptance, the perceptions that the Greece's inhabitants have and the application of the intercultural communication itself. Even though Greece it is characterized about its sociocultural identity which is strongly formed with Orthodox Christianity religion (Roussou, 2022) hosts many minorities in its mainland. More specifically, about the Turkish minority of Western Thrace, there are some legislations that have been enacted since Lausanne's Treaty which protect and at the same time restrict some cultural attributes of them. One main restriction is the authority and the power that a mufti has. In 1992 Greek government prohibited the mufti to determine decisions that are derived to the legal system of the country (Akgönül, 2013). This was decided because the Islamic Law in which a mufti judges is opposite to the human rights in many points and dimensions, as it was mentioned before. As far as the perception that Greek people have about the Islamic culture and tradition, it has to be said that there is not common line and the impressions are divided. When the massive refugee wave initiated back in 2015, Islamophobia dominated the people of many cities of Greece, as

they were convinced that the refugees were a selected army that came in their country in order to alternate their identity (Kirtsoglou & Tsimouris, 2018). Many times, people who live in big urban centers do not have a direct and often contact with minority group and that was something that terrified them. This can be justified with the paradigm of Western Thrace, where native people and minority people can understand and accept each one's identity and culture, they can spot differences and similarities in them highlighting intercultural communication (Magos, 2007). When they are able to communicate and accept the diversity only with this way the coexistence can be achieved, something that is usual in multicultural societies.

Fostering minority language education

If someone proceeds to a wide research about the status and the structure of multicultural societies will immediately conclude that the characteristics which unite and aid this kind of societies to sustain are social awareness and the total understanding among the individuals. Nevertheless, besides those it is crucial to add more compounds which will possibly foster the diversity and create an adapted multicultural environment in which every individual will be equal to the other. At this part, it will be explained the importance of fostering the minority language and the measures that could be taken in order to adjust it to school units and more broadly to society itself (Chen et al., 2008).

As it is widely known, governmental authorities and policymakers who deal with the stable integration of minorities in the hosted society tend to construct tailored programs that are keen on with the hosted language (Rozenvalde, 2022), without calculating the cultural background of minority people or the direct bond who have with their language. On the contrary, as the educational programs are constantly evolving, the integration of minority language in the school context is attempted in order to facilitate the language education (Mora, 2000). A specific research that was realized in the field of bilingualism and the importance of it towards minority languages indicated that cooperation between students with different sociolinguistic backgrounds can significantly aid to language acquisition, where every student will be able to come in contact

with native and minority language (Wright & Bougie, 2007). Same as well, the teacher himself will be able to improve the linguistic attitudes of students if he can create activities that support both languages, even if they have nothing to do with language education. Concerning the previous one, the teacher must function as a representative mirror of the classroom which with his actions will be able to highlight the needs of students. Respecting to the latter quote, there is a respective academic resource which numbered the benefits of minority language usage inside the school units (Liu, 2024). First of all, the author underlined that a teacher can freely use the capacity of languages that he has in his disposal because with this initiative he places the foundations of social awareness and multilingual considerations. Afterwards, it was pointed out that minority language students tend to adopt the native language satisfactorily while they have a daily contact with their home language, as the knowledge transfer between both of languages significantly aids them to assimilate the provided curriculum. Nevertheless, it is demanding for the teacher to be accurate towards the usage of those educational tactics. When a struggle occurs, he can convert it into a fertilized situation as with it he can obtain important information about each students' linguistic level, repertoire and ability (Purkathofer & De Korne, 2020). In other words, the teacher himself could follow contemporary educational strategies such as structure instruction, small-group work between the students and create the adequate fertile environment which will then incorporate the participation of local and minority language in the classroom (Decristan et al., 2022).

Proceeding with it, a key fact that has been observed to societies which foster more than one language, is the education and the constant dedication with the minority language plays a significant role (Duarte et al., 2023). More accurately, when students are coming into contact with minority languages, they are improving their proficiency into language learning and in the same time, they highly contribute to the maintenance of it with their efforts. Nonetheless, it has to be cited that the source of the discrimination of minority languages is not only due to the malfunction of the educational system. Many times, students at school units across the world can observe the necessities of each society and with which language they could upgrade themselves into the field of socioeconomic

dimension. Duarte et al. (2023) with their extensive research spoke about linguistic landscapes, where society itself can actively contribute to minority language maintenance using it to signs, posters and indications around urban centers in order to have daily impact for its inhabitants.

Methodology

Reaching to this point, as already provided the respective literature review which will contribute to the correct matching with the findings of the interviews and discussion, at this point the rationale of the methodology of the research will be further explained. Coming into this, the researcher wanting to deeply investigate the relations that the Turkish minority of Western Thrace has with the locals and if an incorporation of sociolinguistic attributes of them could be possible, constructed three thematic pillars where each interview will be relied on. Below, the aforementioned thematic pillars will be numbered;

- The challenges that the minority faces in the field of their identity.
- The possibility of active integration of linguistic and sociocultural attributes of them.
- The perceptions of local people and social authorities regarding the characteristics of their identity and the possible incorporation of these traits into the social fabric.

In accordance with those, the researcher created relevant questions that will strongly aid him to reciprocate to the established thematic pillars of the dissertation.

Research Method

It is acknowledged that before conducting any procedure for the interview, it is mandatory to deepen into published academic sources so that it could be supplied with what is already known by prior researches

which dealt with relevant issues (Knopf, 2006). Concerning the method that the author chose for the implementation of his dissertation was the qualitative one, something that was already mentioned in the abstract section. It is widely accepted that qualitative research focuses on a problem and does not simply count on questions “why” and “how” yet intends to enhance its findings with the enriched data extracted from the content of the interviews (Kuper et al., 2008). It is now well established from a variety of studies that qualitative research is preferable to be chosen when there are issues of personal experience, point of view and generally opinions that are going to flourish the existing literature (Creswell, 2014). Continuing to justify the selection of the qualitative method for the current dissertation, when the researcher gathers the interview sample, he is more than able to convert it into a reliable guide and assistant with which he will find the anticipated results (Mason, 2003). Furthermore, qualitative research is the appropriate one when the researcher wishes to promote the uniqueness of his findings according to what the participants have observed from their social circle and what they have spotted with their experience. Supplying relevant academic resources, it has been cited from previous researches that the world can only be described with the life experiences of the people (Cohen et al., 2008). When the source of a question or a problem is going to be addressed, quantitative research is rigorous and in the majority of times not the appropriate one as it only interprets the results of a wide population and it does not seek the origins (Denny & Weckesser, 2019). In other words, the researcher is the dominant individual who controls the power of the findings and in combination with the existing literature review can construct a paper that will be helpful for future researches.

Research Tool

Every researcher who is going to conduct a qualitative research acknowledges that the main instrument which significantly supports the completion of it is the interview. While a researcher performs a set of questions in the process of qualitative research gathers the stories and the experiences that are up to be told and seeks correlations, relationships

and explanations that wouldn't have been observed in the past (Rossetto, 2014). Willing to continue to the aforementioned pattern, the researcher decided to extensively use the tool of the interview to seek the expected results, conducting private interviews for each participant. Indeed, somebody would discern that this kind of methodology will take a certain amount of time but it has to be noted that this procedure will provide very important data to the research which he will be able to process, interpret and correlate them (Warren, 2002). Ezzy also noted (2010) that through the process of the interview the researcher gains body language feedback where it can help him to conduct some conclusions. Without any doubt, the basic concern of an interview are the questions that the researcher sets and the answers that an interviewee gives but the feedback of emotions is also many times desirable.

Having already explained the rationale behind the tool selection, something that must be noted is that the researcher integrated semi-structured interviews to his methodology. Traditionally, it has been argued that semi-structured interviews include a variety of open-ended questions directed to the interviewee, with the possibility of some extra questions to be emerged during the procedure of each interview (Denny & Weckesser, 2019). A relevant academic research which spoke for the semi-structured interviews mentioned that the researcher himself can modify the questions according to each participant (Cohen et al., 2008). Surely, this comes up from the educational level of the participant, the behavior that he has during the interview and with the way that the researcher could extract the corresponding data from him. In particular, the researcher concluded to divide each interview into four thematic pillars that would actively contribute to the questions that he stated in the beginning of the paper. Initially, he asked each participant some critical demographic data of them such as their age, profession, educational level, social and family status. Continuing, the first interest was to ask questions about their identity, what do they believe about it, if they support it during their daily life and the possible struggles and challenges that they have ever faced due to it. Additionally, the researcher wanting to further investigate the impression that they have about the integration of sociolinguistic attributes of their identity into society created questions for the minority

language education and cultural elements that could be integrated or not. Finally, in order to further explore possible positive or negative attitudes towards them by social and local authorities or generally from people who interacted, the researcher needed to hear their experiences initially and to seek if they feel social discriminated or incidents of social injustice occurred to them.

Before each interview, the researcher provided them with a consent form that they signed which clarified that their personal data, profile and answers will be strictly hidden from public exposure and to strengthen the confidentiality the researcher gave them his telephone number so that they can communicate with him at any time for any possible extra explanations or to ask about the findings of the research. Every interview is transcribed into word document so the analyzation of the findings could be easier, even if is something that consumes a certain amount of time (Kedraka, 2008).

Sample

Even though the selection of research method is very important according to the circumstance of each research and the results that are up to be extracted, something also that must be taken into consideration is the sample of the participants. For this particular research it is known that the target population which contributed to the completion of it is the Turkish minority of Western Thrace. A great deal of previous research into sample participants showed that the selection must be very careful and in a way that it will help it in depth, providing notable and original data (Saunders & Townsend, 2016). It is now well established from a variety of previous studies that the information power in terms of qualitative research plays a pivotal role (Malterud et al., 2016). As long as the researcher controls a strong amount of information to his portfolio, he could be able to compare or contrast his findings with relevant academic researches. Moreover, since the researcher is the stakeholder of a default research, he proceeded to the participant selection according to demographic data that

would add a variety of results from each age or social group. In this case, the interviewer chooses both of genders who belong to the aforementioned diversity and who speak both of Greek and Turkish language.

Validity – Credibility

While proceeding to a qualitative research it is mandatory to set some principals in order to protect the research itself and also the procedure of the interviews. Before conducting any interview, the researcher created a tailored methodology which would help him to correctly extract the data and correlate them with corresponding literature review. It is crucial to match the findings with relevant academic resources so that in the discussion section could justify possible similarities or differences. Every researcher must take into consideration the choice of research method to reflect the thematic pillar that he desires. Respecting this research, qualitative research was the appropriate one to deepen into the questions that were settled which were clear and completely relevant with the studied material. Something important that is worth to be mentioned is the absence of prejudging and the direction of answers from the interview participants (Mantzoukas, 2007). The quality of each research is highlighted by the participants' spontaneous responds because the original answers can actively contribute to the extension of the literature resources and the enrichment of them. Another indication about the validity of the manuscript is the total consistency between each part of it. The researcher is obliged to create a consistent document in which every section of it explains the other without misinterpretations that would confuse the reader.

Restrictions

A significant section that has to be underlined through the process of an interview are the possible restrictions or the obstacles that occurred. The case of Western Thrace is quite complex in terms of each one's point of view, especially from people who belong to the Turkish minority which was instrumentalized many times over the years (Chousein, 2005).

Minority people, especially those of young age, have heard many examples about governmental marginalization by their elders and it is completely normal to form a specific impression about social injustice and discrimination. Likewise, during some interviews it was found that it was possible that some participants could hide the actual answer that they wanted to give due to their body language (evading eye-contact, facial expressions) and this is a concern for the validity of some answers of their answers. Additionally, the target population focused on the urban area of Xanthi, where many minority people have direct contact with the community and local people. Nonetheless, there is an important number of minority people who reside in the rural areas of the city and they do not have a constant contact with the native ones. It is possible that these people could adopt a different impression than the sample participant, as they mainly interact and communicate with each other.

Data analysis

At this methodology section, the analysis of the gathered data from the interviews, will be explained. The researcher chose to extensively analyze the collected data from interviews with thematic analysis procedure so that he could create patterns and categories among them. Initially, the researcher initiated to identify specific patterns from participant's answers in order to create meanings that could assist him to correlate them with the selected literature review (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While the procedure was completed, something that came up was the codification of each category. When this one ended, some sub-themes for each category had emerged, fact that drove the researcher to further analyze the collected data to the discussion section. It has to be said, that the sub-themes for each category were not anticipated but the researcher himself took the initiative to create them because the content of the responds led to further investigation of those (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). The study by Riger et al. (2016) which occupied with the thematic analysis in the context of qualitative method offers a flourish amount of information concerning the steps that a research must take into consideration before proceeds to it. The suggested steps that were proposed from those researchers are the following ones; before applying anything, the transcription of the data is

mandatory in order to create semantic meanings and patterns, listing of codes to help the analyzation of the data, constructing themes to discuss the findings, review to validate them, define and name them and finally beginning to produce the report.

Findings

The primary issue that this thesis wanted to discover was the identity of Turkish minority of Western Thrace, how it is defined, the perception that the minority people have for it and the possible challenges that they confront. As long as the collected data was processed by thematic analysis, two sub-categories were emerged that constitute the first thematic pillar of the analysis. This actually happened due to the pre-planned questions that would contribute to an extensive analysis of the findings, without diverging from the purpose of the thesis. Thus, the two sub-categories aimed at the concept of Turkish minority identity are; I) shifting identity, II) unifying characteristics

I) *Shifting identity*

Reaching at this first sub-category, something that it is very interesting is that despite the fact that some participants defined themselves as Turkish citizens of Greece (*"I define myself as a Turkish citizen who inhabits in Greece. This is something that I respect and I recognize but I have emotional and cultural bonds with Turkey". "Since I believe to Allah, I pray five times per day, I am fasting during Ramadan period and I always travel to Turkey when I have the chance to do it, how can I consider myself as a Greek citizen? This is not happening due to Greece, I have many migrants siblings in Germany, does that mean that they are Germans"*), some others mentioned that their identity perception changes according to the ethnic or national situation that they are in (*"You might think that I am crazy but I will explain to you, when I am here in Greece and I speak with my neighbors and my colleagues I consider myself as a Greek citizen, but when I travel to Turkey to visit my relatives, I mostly think that I am a Turkish*

citizen. Sure, this is something strange but I cannot understand it. Probably this is happening because we are living in a crossroad between Greece and Turkey”). “My friend, I feel like a Greek citizen who believes in Allah. When I go to mosque to pray, I am totally concentrated to this, but how can I forget that Greece is the country that I grew up and the country that sustains me?”). It has to be noted that the emotional feelings during this part of the interview were different. The participants that were supporting their Turkish identity were sure about it without any further expressions, but the others who spoke about the identity mixture were emotional (smiling, facial expressions, laughing). Surely, this can have two separate meanings; the first interpretation is the difficulty of expressing this fact as it is something complex and requires specific study and the possibility of awkwardness because of the uniqueness of the ethnic situation that they are distinguished for.

II) Unifying characteristics

Regarding the ethnic attributes that set the Turkish minority apart from the hosted identity, several examples were given by the totality of the participants; some of them initially mentioned the religion, something that is a main characteristic which distinguishes them from the locals (*“As everybody knows – especially you who you belong to our society – we are Muslims and we believe to Allah. We grew up with this religion and we are following it as you, our Christian friends, do”. “This is something that we cannot give up, since our parents and our grandfathers passed it to us, we are obliged to keep it deep in our hearts and pass it to our children.”*). Continuing, a reference was realized for the dress code of Turkish women, where some of them are wearing the hijab, keen to keep their tradition alive despite the variety of influences that they receive (*“If you make a stroll on Saturday when we are going to the local bazaar, you will spot many women wearing the hijab and the signature dress of Muslim women”*). Nevertheless, it is spotted that this tradition seems to be starting to disappear from younger women of the minority, something that they justify it on the new way of living (*“...but you see, many women tend to stop wearing hijab as they believe that it is not contemporary, they prefer to spend money for new clothes and I believe that it is Facebook’s*

fault”). Finally, participants stated that something that unites and divides them for the locals is their traditions such as Ramazan and Bayram (we have Kurban and Seker Bayram like you have Christmas and Easter and who can forget the Ramazan, when we wake up very early to eat and drink and we do not consume anything until sunset?”).

III) Challenges

With the aim of addressing possible challenges that Turkish minority people could confront, the author asked some critical questions regarding it. Initially, it was mentioned that since they grew up together with locals and were constantly interacting with them, the cultural acceptance and coexistence was established (*“my father in any job that he did, he made many friendships with the locals. I remember them coming with their families at home and playing with their children. Even when my child went to public schools here in Xanthi, I was a bit concerned for a possible incident but it seems that the behavior is still the same and I don’t think that it will change”).* Something that also was stated is that when they traveled abroad and lived in Europe for a certain period of time they faced a variety of incidents which convinced them that there are several differences from Western Thrace and some countries in the field of minority and cultural diversity acceptance (*“It was a time that I migrated to Germany in order to gain a better wage. I cannot admit that the acceptance was the same as it is here in Xanthi. It seems that they accept one minority person better in areas where the minority exists for many years or centuries”. “Probably in Western Europe citizens cannot interact with Muslim people in the same way like Balkan people do. They have a different style of living and Muslim traditions do not have anything in common with their country. Who cares.”)*

The following thematic pillar of the interview was the possibility of sociolinguistic attributes of the Thracian minority in the daily life of local community. In the same motive, two sub-categories were formed; I) traditions and cultural characteristics II) linguistic characteristics.

I) *Traditions and cultural characteristics*

To initiate, even though the interviewees admitted that some characteristics of their culture and the local's culture are slightly common (*"we believe in the same prophet, we call him Muhammad and you call him Jesus". "If you think about it, is the same God. We consider ourselves civilized people and we recognize some things"*) the majority of them mainly expressed their difficulty to find some cultural attributes that could be integrated in the society (*"... but as it is known Christianity and Islam have many things that are different. Even though we have similarities, everything is kept on a thin line and if somebody expresses his will to put something Islamic in public, most of people will be negative and they will not be accepted."* *"Let's be serious. We know that in the past there were obstacles that put locals and minority in a distance. I think that is not wise to perplex the things and we shouldn't do experiments. It would be better to leave it as it is"*). They also mentioned the incapacity of this due to the fast pace of everyday life, where people would not be able to follow the Islamic traditions (*"just think about the Ramazan fasting. How could it be possible to force people to eat once in the sunrise and twice in the sunset? This sounds funny, life has changed from the past and people work many hours per day and this one could exhaust them"*). Moreover, something else that they added concerned the Islamic law which is totally different from the Western standards and it would not be possible to consult it (*"we the Muslim people we settle our affairs according to Sharia. Have you ever read Sharia? If you ever do it, you will see many things in family or economic affairs that are settled different than how you do it. We have the mufti who is the ruler of the law and you have the court, it is not the same at all"*). Nevertheless, in terms of culinary and cultural elements, they commented that there are already many common attributes in the society (*"many songs have the same music and we have many foods that are same"*).

II) *Linguistic characteristics*

Proceeding to the field of language, there are many interesting findings that must be referred. To begin with, it was stated that the Greek

government did not find a formula that could integrate the Turkish language in school units along the years and insisted to margin it to minority schools (*“how is it possible to keep the language that we speak only to minority schools? This is something very strange. Our kids must learn our language in public schools. Most of minority schools are in villages far from the city and our children are students of public schools.”* *“Just like every child in public school learns English, it could learn some features of Turkish language too. We cannot forget that this city has thousands of habitants who speak the Turkish language”*). One other respondent implied that various factors restrict the teaching of Turkish language in public schools and prefer to keep it in margin (*“This is something that makes me sad. There are many things that could be done for this issue but the government doesn’t do anything about it. At the end of the day, I believe that they cannot understand the reality and they don’t understand us too”*). Moreover, something that was mentioned was the issue of coexistence. The participant notified that the usage of Turkish in Greek school units could bring local and minority students closer (*“our children will still speak their language in school and local student will learn some Turkish words, the teacher is responsible for this. I cannot understand what is wrong with this”*). Continuing in the same motive, there was a comparison between the functionality of Greek educational system and the educational systems of Europe where it was cited that it is not as contemporary as it could be (*“my cousin who lives in Stuttgart tells me that in classrooms where there are many Turkish speaking children, they do activities in which they use the Turkish language. How is it possible to not do this here in Greece, as it is a country of Europe?”*).

The third and last thematic pillar which formed part of the section of findings was the impressions and perceptions that local people and social authorities have about the identity of Turkish minority of Western Thrace and if it is possible to incorporate some of these traits to the society. The two sub-categories that constitute this pillar is; I) Impressions of local people II) The position of local and municipal authorities.

I) Impressions of local people

Initially, it was clarified that most of the participants never confronted serious incidents of racism here in the region of Western Thrace. They noted that since they grew up with the locals, the majority of them learnt to understand them (*"I have never faced a behavior that could make me feel uncomfortable. I believe that the locals respect our customs and our traditions, so they never do anything to interrupt our relation that we have with them"*). Something else that was referred was the acceptance that they feel for their customs when they are celebrating or performing them (*"When we have Bayram we use to dance to our traditional songs and sing loudly in our neighborhood until dawn, we really understand that this might disturb other people but none of them had a bad mood for them, however they sometimes visit our houses to wish us Happy Bayram". "Even when I was going to school, I very well remember our teacher mentioning our celebration in the classroom and urged all the classroom to shout Happy Bayram. Afterwards, we usually treat them with sweets and we thank them for their wishes"*). One participant underlined the mutual respect that they pay during the religion festivals of the local people and considered that this fact prompts them to show the reciprocal respect to their customs (*"Can I say something? Why they wouldn't respect our traditions and the things that we believe since we respect them? When they celebrate Christmas and the Easter, we happily join them and they share their happiness with us. Only with this way we can maintain this good atmosphere between us"*).

II) *The position of local and municipal authorities*

A great interest is hidden upon the findings of the participants regarding the position of the stakeholders and the officials of the municipality about the incorporation of their sociolinguistic attributes. It was cited that no one from the local authority who is responsible for the cultural sector of the city took an initiative to organize an event which will be dedicated to their identity and their culture (*"Ever since I remember myself, there wasn't a public event which would be devoted to us"*.) Additionally, another one stated that if someone from the minority wishes to join an

event especially in periods of religion occasions must visit a rural village which the majority of their inhabitants belong to the Turkish minority (*"I have siblings who live in villages here in Xanthi. Many times, when we want to celebrate, we usually visit them because those villages organize events especially for us"*). In the dimension of language support, it was mentioned that the appearance of the Turkish language is mostly restricted and it can be found only in districts that are mainly inhabited by minority people (*"you can make a stroll around the city and you can understand that the Turkish language is located only in places that you can count on the fingers of one hand"*). It doesn't make sense to have our language neglected. It annoys me that they don't devote anything about us in a public level"). Moreover, a participant underlined that through the years many attempts have been made in order to change this situation with several conversations with the local authorities (*"In the past we had a meeting with the mayor of the city and we discussed about this issue. We told him that he must do something so that we can see that our profile is supported. As it is known nothing happened. Just because we live in a city that their inhabitants speak Greek, it doesn't mean that we cannot have a daily contact with it. Wouldn't be possible to place Turkish languages in public signs?"*). Finally, they partly questioned the decisions that are taken in municipal meetings such as minority is represented by individuals that they have been elected and participate in city affairs (*"We have some people who are chosen by us and we also know that they recommend many things that can be done to support the contact with our culture and language but at the end nothing happens"*).

Discussion

Reaching at this point of the dissertation, the findings that have been collected from the interviews of the participants will be correlated and justified with the academic resources that are provided to the literature review. In the first place, regarding the dimension of identity, there are many literature references that have a direct contact with the sayings of the participants. To begin with, the participants are more than aware of their identity and they are conscious about what their identity stands for and the fundamental compounds of it (Fearon, 1999). As it was quoted

from a participant, as long as he observed some critical attributes to his profile, he immediately defined himself as a Turkish inhabitant who belong to a Greek community, without perceiving it with a bad manner. Hence, they are able to find common attributes among the people who have the same identity with them and they can spot differences with identities that are different than theirs. Respecting the previous one, people are not only able to distinguish the common characteristics of their identity among other individuals with the same one (Tajfel, 2010) but they can compare them in different social structures that they do not constitute part of them. This latter procedure is constant and takes place when each individual interacts with another one, a process where someone is trying to define himself (Spears, 2011). Furthermore, with regard to personal comprehension of the identity, it was shown that the interview findings are corresponding to the literature that Parekh (2010) and Triandafyllidou (1998) published. In this motive, an individual distinguished the religion and the cultural factor that constitute him, thus those two principals are some of which a person can identify himself in the field of national identity.

Continuing the correlation between the findings and the proposed literature review, something that was addressed by the participants was the fluidity of the identity. As it was stated in the beginning of the dissertation, the identity is not something that is perpetually stable and continually changes (Darkwah & Ampah, 2023). Through the exploration of relevant publications, it is understandable that the fluidity of identity depends on the interactions that a person has. Concerning this, as it was quoted by the participants, they occasionally define themselves as Greeks and Turks. For instance, one statement was dedicated to the circumstance in which a person finds himself. More precisely, they can easily detect the cultural environment in which they are located and act correspondingly according to its social norms and traditions. Following the literature, this can be advocated to the statement of Hopkins and Reicher (2011) where they underlined that each individual who could possibly represent more than one identity should understand its consistency and culture. It has to be mentioned that people who come in contact with multiple identities totally celebrate the term of multiculturalism and they are able to expand

the horizons of it in order to improve the social cohesion of a default society and significantly help local population and minorities to come closer.

Furthermore, regarding the question about the possible challenges that the minority people might face from the community of Western Thrace the feedback that they provided is related with the academic resources in many points. Initially, through the years of the interaction and cultural impact with the local population they managed to maintain a peaceful environment. According to the literature, when the borders of Greece and Turkey were established and the population exchanged was completed, the Turkish minority which remained in the Western Thrace is constantly coexisting with the native people and the other minorities (Anagnostou, 2001), as each individual pay respect to the cultural diversity. One more finding that is relevant with it, is that a parent was concerned for any possible incidents for his child in the school but as he referred nothing wrong happened. As it was mentioned, since the kindergarten when children are starting to interact with their peers, they initiate to spot identity differences or differences if the classroom is characterized by a multicultural environment (Kranz & Goedderz, 2020). As observed, an individual which is part of a multicultural community must receive a holistic education which will start from the beginning of cultural exchange. This is something that is crucial in order to avoid any possible behaviors which will lead to discrimination of minority groups without improving and maintaining their rights and their position in the society that they live. Continually, one reference had been made about the possibility of cultural acceptance in Western Europe in relation to the examined area. More specifically, it seems that there is still area for improvement in those societies as minority people do not feel totally accepted in them, something that partly contradicts with the literature where it was stated that Europe tolerates more than the variety of cultures to its core (Alam, 2007). Even though Europe has struggled a lot to foster the diversity and protect their rights especially in the last decade, it must continue this difficult effort in order to protect and assimilate the upcoming minorities. Despite the fact that some of the countries of Europe do not support adequate integration and educational programs for the minorities it is

more than proven that through these procedures people of minority tend to be more active in the society and more productive in their tasks (Dasopang et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the incidents of xenophobia are not entirely restricted in the continent of Europe. When minority people migrate to a country that is totally different than their own in the field of language and sociocultural area, many times confront harsh situations from local people. Concerning this, Muslim minorities especially are getting maltreated when they interact with people with low levels of consciousness as it was observed in the paradigm of United States of America (van Doorn-Harder, 2014), fact that could concern governments who foster minorities around the world.

At this point of the discussion section, the findings which were dedicated to the incorporation of sociolinguistic attributes of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in the society will be compared with the provided academic resources. In the first instance, minority people recognize the similarities that the Christianity with the Islam have such as both religions are monotheistic and their upper purpose is the immortality (Shiddiqi, 2014). The fact that the participants admitted that they do not have something to tear apart from the locals in terms of religion proves that Islam is represented differently in each country or social structure. (In Ben Amara et al, 2024). Even though the minority people of Western Thrace believe in the same god as people in Middle East do, they demonstrate a different perspective of worship as they reject any perception fundamentalism which is highlighted there. Nevertheless, the findings of participants reveal that they cannot spot any Islamic cultural attribute that could be easily incorporated in the society. More specifically, the doctrines of Islam are radically different from Christianity. For instance, Muslim people devote a certain amount of time each day to worship their God (Mojtahedzadeh & Qureshi, 2023), something that it is very difficult for people who live accordingly to the contemporary standards. Additionally, the latter quote is confirmed with the paradigm of Ramadan, where the majority of people could not be able to integrate it into their repertoire (Das et al., 2019). Another participant made a reference to the past where the obstacles that existed put them in a conflict with the state initially and they ended up being partly marginalized secondly (Borou, 2009). It seems

doubtless that the minority people bear in mind the difficult situations that their relatives confronted in the past and they prefer to maintain the structure of social culture as it is without trying to alternate it. In the same motive, a clear reference was realized about the Islamic law. As it was extensively assigned in the beginning, Muslim populations are strictly following the Islamic law in their daily life with a result of having different worldview in relation to Western societies. Something that was previously cited is the total difference of Islamic law with the Western standards. Muslim people follow Sharia's holy guidelines where cases of marriage, divorce and financial are included in it. Having this in mind, minority people are aware that local people would not accept a completely different structure to the one that they follow. According to relevant researches it is indicated that many countries around the world are not keen on into this as those laws are opposite with their social norms (Khiri, 2007). One alternative interpretation of this one could be justified to the perception of uniqueness that Muslim people have about Islam and its doctrines. People who are devoted to Islam are not keen on to combine various Western attributes to their culture and they totally prefer to retain their belief and their core as it is (Najjar, 2005).

Although the participants do not seem familiar with the perspective of incorporating their cultural attributes to the society, they have a different point of view in the dimension of supporting their language. First and foremost, the participants underlined the importance of promoting the minority language at the public school units. Minority people claimed that this initiative will promote the social justice and equality in a nutshell. Moreover, it was stated that the majority of minority schools which are devoted to the teaching of Turkish and Greek language is concentrated to the rural area with the result that students will not be able to approach it as they belong to public schools. Hence, the Greek educational system could not find an appropriate teaching method which will embrace both languages in public schools, something that seems to be opposite according to the suggested literature source (Anagnostou & Triantafyllidou, 2007) which referred that the Greek government was able to enact tailored educational programs which will target to the needs of the minority. It has to be cited that the adequate integration of a minority in

the social core initiates from the understanding of their needs firstly and the embrace of its diversity secondly. As a participant's reference it cannot be forgotten that the Turkish minority constitutes an accountable population size in Western Thrace, thus they must be dealt appropriately. Additionally, the presence of bilingualism in a classroom which fosters more than one identity could bring fertile results to all the students. As participant's themselves mentioned that this initiative can bring people closer and establish a society which is relied on multiculturalism (Chen et al., 2008). Taking into account the aforementioned concerns, the example of Western Thrace could be a prototype where its direct measures would significantly aid every region of Greece which has minorities in its society. As it is widely known, Greece accepted a massive wave of refugees in the past decade and for this reason the need to properly absorb them into the social core of the country is imperative. Continually, participants were able to make a comparison of educational systems such as Greek and German. This shows that they are aware of the practices that other countries apply and can wonder if it is possible to apply them in the Greek reality. The latter one proves that governmental officials need to observe the contemporary European educational systems in order to adopt them and reconstruct the Greek one.

The last paragraphs of the discussion section will be focused on the impressions that the local people have for the existing diverse identity according to the minority and broadly the local authorities in general. First of all, the totality of the participants highlighted the coexistence among the local population. The majority of them stated that they have never faced an incident that could have offended them and put them into a difficult position. It has been observed that in many countries there are many incidents of racism from people who do not respect diversity at all. In this case, it has been proven that the region of Western Thrace which is consisted of various identities is not affected from these behaviors which aim to harm the people who belong to diversity and put them in margin. As the suggested literature quotes, people in this examined area learned to coexist respecting each other's identity and embracing the different sociocultural characteristics at the same time (Anagnostou, 2001). While observing other Greek societies who performed behaviors of xenophobia

and maltreatment of minorities trying to push them to leave the country, here local people indicate that the coexistence is more than feasible. Minority people are not afraid to perform their sociocultural repertoire during religion events or tradition occasions as they receive understanding from local people. Teachers themselves are trying to spread multiculturalism among the classroom showing the native students the passage of cultural understanding and intercultural communication. It can be mentioned that the educators are implementing various methods that could strengthen the bond between the local population and minority in order to maintain a peaceful environment and further evolve it in the future (Grzymala -Kazłowska, 2017) with the result that those initiatives prove to minorities that they are active members of the society.

On the other hand, regarding the feedback that they receive from the local authorities and the stakeholders, minority people tend to have some complaints about the support of their identity and language. Initially, since the participants are residents of an urban area noted that the local authorities never organized a public event which will be devoted to them. Having in mind that a certain amount of minority population lives in rural areas of Western Thrace they can celebrate their religion events much more easily there, especially in the squares of the villages. This fact obliges the urban residents to move to the countryside in order to express their sociocultural profile and feel more comfortable. Taking the latter one into consideration, it is urgent that the government must take into account the cultural needs of each minority and not neglect them in order to highlight intercultural communication and social justice among the citizens. In the same motive, it has been observed that the local authorities and more widely Greek government could not adequately support the minority language in the society. The participants mentioned that their language is highly restricted only in some districts of the city which are inhabited by minority people. Regarding this, government itself must broaden the horizons of language fostering in order to extend the interpersonal communication (Kenesei & Stier, 2017). Moreover, the rationale of the participants is the promotion of language in a practical essence in order to feel that their linguistic identity is respected and embraced from everyone. Likewise, the local authorities and more broadly government must totally

overtake barriers such as prejudice and stereotype (Zhu, 2020) and to focus on building a social structure which will be devoted to the identity support of all social strata in order to prove that the legislations are based on diversity acceptance.

Conclusion

The main interest of this thesis was to further explore the perceptions of Turkish speaking Muslim minorities of Western Thrace about the possible incorporation of sociocultural and linguistic attributes in the society. The introductory part made an extensive analysis about the historical context of Greece and Turkey which concerned the political decisions which established the position of Turkish minority population in the Western Thrace. Continually, it provided critical information about the aspects of existence of local population and minorities in the broad area through the passage of time and the educational units which support language education to minority people. It was explained that many countries around the world are not keen on with the religion and the culture of Islam with the result that the believers of Islam face certain predicaments such as their beliefs do not keep up with the standards of globalization. Regarding the academic resources that were concentrated it supplied the fundamental ideas in which the thesis was dedicated as interpreted the significance of identity, its compounds and its fluidity. Willing to further analyze the term of Islam the author gave a flourishment of information so that the reader could absorb them and understand the mentality and hypostasis of an Islam believer. The term of intercultural communication was used in order to examine the manners that different social groups interact and coexist together in a society. In the same motive it was indicated that an education which is relied on the needs of minority people can create the adequate circumstances to highlight multiculturalism among a society. Concerning the methodology, the author selected to implement a qualitative research in order to better interpret the impressions and attitudes that the participants have for the examined issue and to draw conclusions which will contribute to the existing literature. The collected data from the semi-structure interviews

provided significant information to be analyzed according to the targeted questions. It was shown that the participants are aware of the term identity and they can easily determine it according to their beliefs. Some of them defined as Turkish since they possess cultural and religion attributes same as Turkish people, others defined as Greek people who believe to Islam and finally others spoke about identity fluidity where the environment which surrounds them constitutes a basic criterion about the identity selection. As far as the possible incorporation of cultural attributes is concerned, the majority rejected it as they prefer to maintain the culture of society as it is, fact that indicates that they have concern about the way that it could be implemented. On the contrary, many interesting findings extracted upon the minority language where they believe that the educational system of public schools does not properly support it and it is not contemporary. With respect to the impression that the local people have about their culture, they mentioned that they receive the corresponding respect such as the majority of the examined area have sympathy for them, something that it is proven among the years. Nevertheless, local authorities do not seem to be keen on supporting and organizing events that will be completely dedicated to the traditions of minority, as they mentioned. Moreover, in the field of minority language existence in the area they stated that it is more than restricted in a small number of districts which are inhabited by minority people. Something that it is hopefully positive is that since people have a complete respect and understanding towards them the society itself can built on this reality and enact respective legislations that could embrace their linguistic repertoire. The possible educational programs that could be enacted in public schools which foster multiculturalism and bilingualism must concentrate to the support of both languages as it was proven that every student gain positive features with it. It has to be said that this research attempted to express the feelings of Turkish minority people of Western Thrace and their impressions about the incorporation of their attributes in the society. Likewise, it can be used by other scholars which endeavor to seek the difficulties that minorities are facing in other regions of Greece so that they could find the source of the problem easier. On the subject of possible restrictions of the research, as it was previously mentioned the author selected minority people who are residents of the urban area of

Western Thrace. In a possible next relevant research, a researcher could extensively focus in the rural area where the minority people have formed a different kind of bond such as they do not approach the urban areas often. With this way, a comparison could be implemented which will reveal the similarities and the differences that they have in the way that they perceive the reality that they live.

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Interview Guide

Demographics

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Profession
4. Family Status
5. Educational Level
6. Language Skills

About Identity

1. How would you describe your identity?
2. Which language do you think expresses you the most in your everyday life?
3. How important is religion to your identity?
4. Name some attributes of your culture.
5. Have you ever faced any challenge regarding your identity?

About the Incorporation of their characteristics

1. Do Christianity and Islam have common elements?
2. Talk about whether it would be possible to integrate your culture attributes into society.
3. Has the Greek government and society helped to preserve your language?
4. Could Turkish be taught in public school?

About the impressions of local people and the position of the society

1. What local people believe about you? Do they respect you?
2. What is the position of the society towards to you?

Appendix B

Consent form

Research Title: “Sociolinguistic Views of the Muslim minority in Western Thrace”

Researcher: Themistoklis Chaitidis Institution: Open University of Greece

Personal Details: -

Dear participant,

I invite you to participate to my inquiry which examines your impression about the integration of sociolinguistic attributes of Turkish speaking minority in Western Thrace. Your participation is absolutely voluntary and you can abandon it whenever you like without any consequence.

Purpose of the research: This interview seeks your personal opinion about the incorporation of your characteristics (cultural, linguistic) in our city.

Procedure of the interview:

- The interview will last approximately 15 to 20 minutes.
- Your answers will be exclusively use for research purposes (in this case to my dissertation).
- Our interview will be recorded (for credibility reasons) only with your permission.

Privacy:

- Your personal data will be highly encrypted and only at my disposal.
- In case of further processing of your responds and your personal data you will be immediately informed.

Confirmation of Consent:

I hereby declare that I am totally informed about the content and the context of the interview and I give my permission for my participation.

Name/Surname: _____

Signature: _____

Date: __/__/__

Researcher:_____

Signature:_____

Author's Statement:

I hereby expressly declare that, according to the article 8 of Law 1559/1986, this dissertation is solely the product of my personal work, does not infringe any intellectual property, personality and personal data rights of third parties, does not contain works/contributions from third parties for which the permission of the authors/beneficiaries is required, is not the product of partial or total plagiarism, and that the sources used are limited to the literature references alone and meet the rules of scientific citations.