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Paper **154**

## **Superdiversity and discourses of conflict: Interaction in a Greek- Cypriot literacy class**

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# **Superdiversity and discourses of conflict: Interaction in a Greek-Cypriot literacy class**

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores the interplay between discourses on diversity - and recently 'superdiversity' - and interethnic conflict, focusing on the conflict-troubled Greek-Cypriot context. Drawing on ethnographic data from Greek-Cypriot literacy classrooms, and particularly, on lessons about the Cyprus conflict, it examines how children from diverse backgrounds, statuses and experiences are introduced to conflict Discourse, and how they socialise and/or become literate in the conflict narrative, with what implications. The findings show that although diversity was mostly acknowledged and discussed unproblematically in 'ordinary' lessons, when conflict figured as a topic in classroom interaction, teachers tended to resort to stereotypical representations of 'us' and 'others', creating further complexities for the children. The paper points to the potentials and limitations of using diversity as a point of departure for the renegotiation of ethnic and emotional boundaries within a context troubled by a legacy of conflict, and it discusses the implications for teachers and students.

## **1. Introduction**

There are currently many scholarly discussions on the increasing diversity (and recently on 'superdiversity'; see Vertovec, 2001) in most parts of the world, and these discussions highlight the fact that linguistic, ethnic and cultural boundaries are now becoming fused, due to the rapid demographic changes, changes in migration patterns, social transformations and the increasing use of new technologies (Blommaert, 2013; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011; Arnaut, 2012). But what happens when these changes take place in a conflict-ridden society which struggles to preserve its ethnic and cultural boundaries, especially the boundaries between the national 'self' and the national 'other'? How do children from diverse backgrounds experience this reality and get socialised into the discourses of conflict that reproduce 'us' versus 'them' dichotomies, with what implications? This paper focuses on the conflict-troubled Greek-Cypriot context and sets out to show how the tension between these two opposing forces – the traditional discourses reproducing Greek-Turkish animosity and the new reality of 'superdiversity' – is played out in classrooms. Looking at classroom interaction during literacy lessons, we analyse the ways in which this tension is handled, and we reflect on potential consequences for both teachers and students.

During the last century, Cyprus suffered an intense conflict between the Greek- and Turkish-Cypriot communities, the two largest ethnolinguistic communities on the island. There was interethnic violence in the 1950s, with both communities imagining themselves as incompatible and as parts of the historical conflict between Greece and Turkey, and it continued even after the establishment of the Cyprus Republic as a bicomunal state in 1960. As early as 1963, interethnic violence resulted in the creation of Turkish-Cypriot ethnic

enclaves, and in 1974, following a pro-Greek coup, the Turkish military forces invaded the island. Since then, Cyprus has been de-facto divided into the southern part (Cyprus Republic) and the northern part (non-government controlled areas where Turkish-Cypriots and Turkish settlers reside). Research shows that over the last half century both Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities have been dominated by strong nationalist discourses emphasising ‘Greekness’ and ‘Turkishness’ respectively (Bryant, 2004). These discourses have been very visible in the press and media, public discussions, museums, monuments and national celebrations (Papadakis, 2008), and especially in education (Christou, 2006; Zembylas, 2008; C. Charalambous, 2013) resulting in the representation of the Turkish Other in opposition to the Greek-Cypriot national self.

On the other hand, the Republic of Cyprus has been recently experiencing rapidly increasing migration – mainly workers from Eastern Europe, East Asia and Middle East. As a result, classrooms are now becoming less and less ethnically homogenous, whilst the formal educational system struggles to respond to the challenge of effectively accommodating the increasing diversity. This is of course not a new development and there is a vast literature on intercultural/multicultural education and the tensions around it (Papamichael, 2009; Theodorou & Symeou, 2013; Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2013; Hajisoteriou, 2012). However, there is not enough said on how children from diverse backgrounds experience, learn and become socialised into the discourses of interethnic conflict and with what implications.

In what follows, we firstly look at how a conflict ‘ethos’ is constructed in conflict-ridden contexts, based on a repertoire of social beliefs, emotions and an underlying narrative that legitimises conflict, pointing at the same time to the importance of language in this process. Then, we introduce the overlooked relationship between education, conflict and superdiversity, and describe briefly the Greek-Cypriot educational context, in which our study was conducted. In order to examine this relationship we analyse classroom data from a ‘mainstream’ Greek-Cypriot classroom and analyse the tensions in efforts to preserve an ethnolinguistic identity in a changing context, as well as the subtle ways with which children become literate in the conflict narrative. In the last section we discuss the implications for teachers, students and the academic community.

## **2. Theoretical and historical background**

### *The narrative & language of conflict*

Concluding an edited volume on the role of language in war or post-war situations, Kelly reminds us that “all conflicts, like all other human activities, are fundamentally conducted in and through language” (Kelly, 2012: 242). Indeed, *Discourse*<sup>1</sup> is generally a salient part of social activities through which people negotiate membership in different groups and social networks (Gee, 1996), and can be understood as also extending beyond linguistic forms to include “other symbolic expressions, and artefacts of thinking, feeling, behaving, valuing and acting” (ibid.: 131). Turning our attention to situations of intractable conflict in particular, Bar-Tal (2004; 2007; Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005) emphasises the role of a similar

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<sup>1</sup> James Gee (1996) suggests a distinction between what he calls big D/Discourses – that can be understood as “ways of being into the world”, “identity kits” or “forms of life” (Gee, 1996) – and small d/discourses which are the linguistic elements of big Discourses. Although we don’t strictly follow Gee’s distinction throughout the paper, we occasionally find it useful for emphasising that the conflict Discourse includes also range of social practices, apart from the linguistic elements. When this is the case, we use the capital D.

constellation of symbolic expressions together with societal beliefs, attitudes, memories, and emotions - that Bar-Tal calls a “socio-psychological infrastructure” - in creating and sustaining a “conflict ethos”. Put differently, what Bar-Tal seems to describe, is a “conflict Discourse”, a “form of life” (Gee, 1996) that tends to reproduce and continue pro-conflict stances, attitudes and practices that are largely shared in the society.

According to Bar-Tal (ibid.), at the basis of the infrastructure that cultivates a culture of conflict lies a well established narrative – or what Gutierrez et al would call a ‘transcended script’, namely “dominant forms of knowledge generally valued as legitimate by both the local culture and the larger society” (1995:448). This provides the epistemological foundation and justification for the conflict, and may draw on a number of sources (such as history, religion, etc.) for imbuing itself with authority, building the rationale for the conflict, justifying collective emotions of hatred, fear and animosity (see also Zembylas et al., 2014), political decisions and often the use of violence. Although other semiotic modes are important (e.g. national symbols), language constitutes a fundamental part of this narrative. The choice of certain words over others, the omissions (what is not said), the use of specific vocabulary and canonical texts, as well as the use of metaphors are essential for conveying a particular interpretation of the conflict facts. Furthermore, the adjectives used for characterising the parties involved in the conflict are crucial for portraying certain representations of ‘us’ – usually the poor victims – and the perpetrators, the ‘evil’ Others (see Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). As the conflict narrative becomes institutionalised and is stereotypically reproduced by media, press and other governmental or non-governmental bodies (Bar-Tal 2007), certain words often become emotionally loaded as they are associated with a specific set of social beliefs, indexing certain stances or ideologies towards the conflict.<sup>2</sup>

Attention to language is becoming generally more widespread in political studies and the international relations literature looking at how authoritative actors, such as the state or other institutions, can constitute certain issues/entities as existential threats through language (see for example literature on securitization, e.g. Emmers, 2013). In particular, there are many discussions on how terrorism and immigration are together portrayed in the media and public documents as imminent threats (Khan, 2014; Adamides, 2014; Bigo, 2002). Analysing the vocabulary and linguistic structures used to describe terrorist acts, as well as the identities and representations assigned to the categories of ‘us’ and ‘terrorists’-Others, Jackson (2005) for example points out the emergence of a ‘new language’ (including forms of expressions, expectations, vocabulary) that constructs the ‘overarching narrative’ of terrorism, and which forms the basis for counter-terrorism campaigns. As he states,

“The enactment of any large-scale project of political violence – such as war or counter-terrorism requires a significant degree of political and social consensus and consensus is not possible without language. For a government to commit enormous amounts of public resources and risk the lives of its citizens in a military conflict, it has to persuade society that such an undertaking is necessary, desirable and achievable.” (1995:1 )

Of course alternative Discourses, and alternative scripts or narratives always exist – e.g. from people with different political ideologies – as there is never an absolute consensus. Even in

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the word ‘rapprochement’ in Cyprus has been ideologically loaded and is usually seen as indexing a leftist political agenda (for more details see C. Charalambous et al., 2013)

situations of prolonged conflict, there will be some groups supporting a pro-peace culture. Nevertheless, in the cases of intractable conflicts, these alternatives tend to remain subordinate. In fact, as Bar-Tal (2007) argues, the nature of the conflict (whether it will remain intractable or not) depends to a large extent on whether the conflict narrative and its accompanying embodied dispositions are indeed embraced by the population of a conflict-ridden place. As he claims, the routinization of a conflict ethos is largely based on the acquisition and the wider use of the shared repertoire of social beliefs, memories and emotions that form part of the conflict narrative. In his words, the institutionalization of the conflict's 'sociopsychological infrastructure' is premised largely on the appearance of conflict discourses in cultural products and educational materials, as well as on following two elements:

“(a) *Extensive sharing*, the beliefs of the sociopsychological infrastructure and the accompanying emotions are widely held by society members. Society members acquire and store this repertoire, as part of their socialization, from an early age on. (b) *Wide application*, institutionalization means that the repertoire is not only held by society members but also put into active use by them in their daily conversations, being chronically accessible. In addition, it appears to be dominant in public discourse via societal channels of mass communication”. (2007: 1445)

In this paper we are interested in how young members of the Greek-Cypriot society acquire the conflict Discourse from an early age, and in particular, on how the specific narrative and language of conflict is taught in literacy classes in early primary education. At the same time, we will be looking at the roles, identities and positionings that teaching the conflict Discourse entails for the non-Cypriot children, as well as at changes that occur when the conflict Discourse is not invoked in ordinary lessons. As we explain in the following section, although there is vast literature on the role of education in maintaining the conflict narrative or breaking the conflict cycle, this literature tends to ignore the experiences of children from diverse backgrounds.

### *Education, conflict & (super)diversity*

The complex relationship between education and conflict has received increased attention in recent years (Novelli & Lopes Cardozo, 2008). Conflict impacts education in a range of different ways: directly, in cases of ongoing warfare through the losses of life and destruction, and indirectly, through restricting the access of children to safe schools, creating economic and social situations that deprive children's educational opportunities (Davies, 2004). Even when there is an absence of violence, conflict Discourses still have an impact on education as they can influence educational philosophies and curricula. Conversely, education can influence conflict situations, either by reproducing stereotypes and contributing to violence or working against it (Novelli & Lopes Cardozo, 2008; Smith, 2005).

During the last few decades, a large scholarly literature has developed that is dedicated to peace education, that is, to education committed to addressing issues of conflict and contributing to the active establishment of peace, or at least to the elimination of violence (Harris & Morrison, 2003; Reardon & Cabezudo, 2002; Salomon & Nevo, 2002). This body of literature reflects on the theoretical and philosophical principles underlying educational programmes that aspire to overcome conflictual narratives and boundaries by cultivating peaceful coexistence and reconciliation. At the same time, research on peace education has

also examined the resistances expressed by both students and teachers, because in situations of prolonged conflict, attempts to break the hegemonic conflict ‘ethos’ often give rise to intense emotional reactions (Bar-Tal, 2002; 2004; Zembylas & Ferreira, 2009; Zembylas et al., 2011a; Zembylas et al., 2011b). However, most peace education literature tends to focus on the two sides that are in conflict and are part of the conflict narrative (e.g. Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots, Israeli & Palestinians, Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland etc.). The fact that societies and classrooms are becoming more and more diverse is seldom given serious consideration.

Diversity has of course been at the centre of academic studies in other areas. In fact, in recent academic discussions, the term ‘superdiversity’ often appears as a replacement for the notion of ‘multiculturalism’ (Blommaert, 2013; Arnaut, 2012), in an attempt to account for the rapid demographic and social transformations, and the “sea-change in the global design of transnationalism” (Arnaut, 2012:3). Vertovec (2001) used first the term ‘superdiversity’ in order to describe the “*diversification of diversity*”, that is, a new condition that brings into play a set of interacting factors that influence people’s lives beyond ethnicity (Vertovec, 2007; 2010). Whilst the discourse of multiculturalism (or ‘diversity’) relies on well-defined ethnic groups, religions, languages, and cultures, discussions on superdiversity point out that current realities challenge all kinds of neat categories – be it language, ethnicity, identity, religion etc. According to Blommaert (2013) superdiversity primarily challenges the usual categories of ‘us’ and ‘them’, more evident in the multicultural discourse:

“The interaction of these two forces – new and more complex forms of migration, and new and more complex forms of communication and knowledge circulation – has generated a situation in which two questions have become hard to answer: who is the Other? And who are We? The Other is now a category in constant flux, a moving target about whom very little can be presupposed; and as for the We, ourselves, our own lives have become vastly more complex and are now very differently organized, distributed over online as well as offline sites and involving worlds of knowledge, information and communication that were simply unthinkable two decades ago.” (Blommaert, 2013:6)

But, how does this relate to conflict-troubled contexts? Whilst the notion and realities of superdiversity are associated with hybrid practices and blurred boundaries, conflict-troubled contexts are dominated by homogenizing discourses and a coherent narrative that constructs binary categories between the national self and national other(s). This tension can be seen in the context of Greek-Cypriot education, described below.

### *Conflict discourses & diversity in Greek-Cypriot education*

Cyprus is often cited in the literature as an example of intractable conflict - despite the absence of violence in the last couple of decades - and education has traditionally had a pivotal role in maintaining a conflict ethos (e.g. Bryant, 2004; Papadakis, 2008; Spyrou, 2006). Schools in both communities have been cultivating the ties with Greece and Turkey accordingly, teaching different versions of conflict narratives. Whereas Turkish-Cypriots focus on the interethnic conflict and Turkish-Cypriots’ suffering before 1974, the Greek-Cypriot narrative focuses exclusively on 1974 and its devastating consequences for Greek-Cypriots (Killoran, 1998; 2000). Scholars researching formal Greek-Cypriot education agree that a ‘Hellenocentric’ discourse that emphasises the Greekness of Greek-Cypriots has

always been dominant in Greek-Cypriot schools, at the same time constructing negative images of the Turks (and Turkish-Cypriots<sup>3</sup>), whilst ethnographic research shows that ‘Turks’ emerge as the ‘primary national Other’ in classrooms, textbooks and national celebrations (Zembylas, 2008; Theodorou & Symeou, 2013; Spyrou, 2006; Zembylas, 2010; Author 1, 2012; Hadjipavlou-Trigeorgis, 2000). Furthermore, since the 1974 invasion, one long standing education goal has been the so-called “*I don’t forget*” objective, aiming to cultivate remembrance of the conflict and occupation among younger generations. The “I don’t forget” objective is supported by a specific textbook given to students, and the curriculum includes learning about the places occupied as well as acquiring the important vocabulary of the conflict (Zembylas et al. 2014).

The first attempt to introduce peace education ideas in Greek-Cypriot schools occurred in 2008,<sup>4</sup> when for the first time the Ministry of Education set a new educational objective calling for the “*cultivation of a culture of peaceful coexistence*” between the two communities. This objective tried to emphasise the commonalities of the two Cypriot communities but caused fierce reactions in both the public and press, and research has also revealed teachers’ resistance (see Zembylas et al., 2011a; 2011b; C. Charalambous et al., 2013; P. Charalambous et al., 2014). Crucially for this paper, the cultivation of conflict discourses and the development of peaceful coexistence both imagine a pupil-audience that is ‘essentially’ Greek(-Cypriot), sharing the dominant collective narrative. As the text explaining the introduction of the ‘peaceful coexistence’ reassured teachers and parents: “*The Greek-Cypriot Education will continue to be Hellenic Paideia*<sup>5</sup> because it cultivates the Greek language, traditions and distinctive cultural features that characterize us as Greek-Cypriots (Ministry of Education & Culture, 2008).

However, the image of a homogenous Greek-Cypriot population is in contrast with the current reality of most Greek-Cypriot classrooms. Since the 1990s, Greek-Cypriot society has seen increasing migration waves, which have also been reflected in the composition of contemporary Greek-Cypriot classrooms. The last census (2011) revealed that around 23% of the Republic of Cyprus’ population comes from different countries. Furthermore, there is also diversity within the Cypriot population of the Republic, and the constitution recognises different religious communities in addition to Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots – Maronites, Armenians, and Latins. Although these communities are considered as native Greek-speakers, they have access to diverse linguistic and cultural resources as well as to different collective narratives.

Still, historically the Greek-Cypriot educational system has been rather late in acknowledging the diversity in people’s experiences and practices, especially as this comes into contrast with the traditional educational objective of cultivating ‘Greekness’ (Gregoriou, 2004). The discourse of ‘multiculturalism’ was formally introduced in Greek-Cypriot education in 2001, but as scholars have pointed out, this new discourse reinforced rather than challenged the essentialist conception of (Greek-) ‘Cypriot’ society as a homogenous monocultural and monolingual entity (Gregoriou, 2004; see also Papamichael, 2009; Ioannidou, 2012;

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<sup>3</sup> Although school discourses target mainly the ‘Turks’ as the most significant national Other, and are not as explicitly focused on Turkish-Cypriots, research has showed that children and teenagers have difficulties distinguishing between the two (Spyrou, 2006; C. Charalambous 2009)

<sup>4</sup> The only other (rather implicit) reconciliatory initiative was the introduction of the Turkish language as an optional course in secondary education (see C. Charalambous 2012; 2013; Rampton et al. in press)

<sup>5</sup> A term used in Greek-Cypriot educational discourses to denote the cultivation of Greekness through education – see C. Charalambous 2009.

Theodorou, 2011).<sup>6</sup> As Gregoriou (2004) explains, EU discourses regarding multiculturalism were received by the Cyprus Republic with concern and a fear that acknowledging and legitimising the existence of other ethnic and cultural groups could potentially have a negative impact on local politics around the Cyprus Issue. Admittedly, intercultural discourses now figure more prominently in ongoing educational reform (Committee of Educational Reform, 2004). Even so, there is evidence that the unresolved conflict in Cyprus has an impact on ethnic minorities, and especially on Turkish-speaking students such as Turkish-Cypriots, Roma, Kurdish who – as we will show – can be assigned the negative attributes of the ‘enemy’ (e.g. Theodorou & Symeou, 2013; Zembylas, 2010).

### **3. The study: Researching Peace & Reconciliation pedagogies**

The paper draws on data from a two-year ethnographic project investigating the possibilities for intercultural education, reconciliation and social justice in Greek-Cypriot primary schools (funded by the Open University of Cyprus), and was driven by the more general question: “to what extent can the reality of superdiversity lead to a renegotiation of traditional linguistic, ethnic and emotional boundaries in the classroom?” Data collection involved 40 semi-structured interviews with Greek-Cypriot teachers, 3-month ethnographic fieldwork with classroom recordings in 6 classrooms (October-December 2009), and a peace education intervention - mainly through a series of peace education workshops (see Charalambous, Charalambous & Zembylas 2013). For the purpose of this paper, we focus on a Year 2 class of 6-7 year olds, in a rather ‘mainstream’ school in Nicosia, although our interpretations are always informed by analysis of the whole dataset. The Year 2 class was chosen mainly for the age of the students, because according the national curriculum, children at this young age still needed to be taught the official conflict narrative, its associated vocabulary (e.g. ‘Turkish invasion’, ‘refugees’ etc.), and its associated social and emotional meanings. Focusing on this class, we can gain insight into how students in literacy lessons were not only learning the language but were also learning and being socialised into the conflict discourses.

For the data analysis, we first coded the transcribed classroom interactions and fieldnotes using Nvivo9, and then looked more closely at classroom interaction in selected episodes, using an ethnographic perspective - in line with linguistic ethnography (Rampton, 2007). More specifically, we first examined everyday practices in the literacy classroom, selecting all instances where a collective identity (collective ‘we’) was constructed and/or negotiated in the class (e.g. through the use of pronouns or verbs that indexed a ‘we’, ethnic adjectives etc.). Then we focused on a series of lessons (total 120 minutes) in which the Cyprus conflict figured as the main topic. These lessons occurred in mid-November, when Greek-Cypriot schools usually organise events to condemn the illegal establishment of the so-called ‘Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus’ (TRNC). The two different kinds of activities (ordinary lessons and ceremonial remembrance of the conflict) allowed us to show in detail the contrasting ways in which different political dynamics - conflict and superdiversity - were played out in the classroom.

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<sup>6</sup> As stated in the document: “The Cypriot society, which until recently was *a relatively homogeneous society with Greek Orthodox population*, has been experiencing during the last decade the consequences of mass influx of alien workers and Greek-Pontian expatriates from the previous USSR” (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2002, cited in Gregoriou, 2004: 245, our emphasis)

## 4. Findings

### *Handling superdiversity in everyday classroom practices*

In the Year 2 class, we conducted a total of 12 hours of observation (18 x 40-minute lessons), out of which 7 hours were audio-recorded (12 lessons). Ermioni, the Year 2 teacher, was a very motivated teacher and gave the impression of being always in control of her classroom. During her lessons, she used plenty of extra material (e.g. pictures, leaflets, cards etc), engaged her class in varied types of activities (drawing, role-plays, teamwork, whole class discussion, etc), and gave students space to express their opinions in the various discussions they had. She also seemed to have very good rapport with her pupils who usually listened to her and responded to her questions, instructions, and activities.

Her class consisted of 18 pupils between 6-7 years old. Four children were of Bulgarian (Tim & Anastasia), Romanian (Laura), and Kurdish (Becjan) backgrounds. According to Ermioni, Tim, Laura and Anastasia had been living in Cyprus for the last few years and were quite proficient in Greek. All of them had very good literacy skills in Greek and two pupils attended private lessons in home languages (Bulgarian and Russian) in the afternoons. Their parents often came to school and were concerned with their children's progress. In fact, Tim and Anastasia were very high-achieving pupils and according to Ermioni, were amongst the best students in their class. However, the Kurdish student, Becjan, had arrived very recently as a political refugee, spoke mainly Turkish (Kurdish variety), and had very limited knowledge of conversational Greek. According to fieldnotes:

Becjan seems to understand some Greek but not enough to follow the lesson. He can't read and write in Greek either. Usually students sitting next to him help him out, sometimes on their own initiative, showing him what he is expected to do. At the beginning of the observations Becjan was punished by spending break-time in the classroom due to naughty behaviour, but during the lessons he is fairly quiet. He seems to try to understand what is going on in the classroom and copies in his notebook things from the children sitting next to him. Ermioni often walks past him and tries to help him out whilst she gives instructions to the rest of the class (fieldnotes, October 2009)

Looking at the everyday literacy practices, we noticed that Ermioni seemed sensitive to the classroom's diversity. She often tried to incorporate intercultural activities in her teaching – for example asking pupils to reflect on their own differences and similarities beyond ethnicity – and she often acknowledged students' different backgrounds in her talk. Around the beginning of the year, she dedicated a lesson to getting to know students' backgrounds: she brought a map to class where she noted the different places where students came from, and asked them to talk about their flags and the symbolisms behind them. She also told students about Kurdistan, explaining that “*legally Kurdistan is not a separate country. It takes a small part of Turkey, as well as Syria, Iran and Iraq*”. Students seemed to enjoy this lesson and were eager to participate and offer their experiences. In general Ermioni often tried to find occasions for exploring students' diverse experiences. On another occasion, for example, the class read a story from their Greek textbook talking about ‘Arben’ (one of the textbook series' protagonists) losing his baby-tooth. Ermioni talked about the protagonist's Albanian background and then she invited all the children to talk about their (different) customs related to losing baby teeth.

Even when Ermioni occasionally overlooked diversity in her talk, pupils were comfortable bringing it up themselves. For example:

### Extract 1

Literacy lesson on the topic “traditional professions”. After explaining the word ‘professions’, Ermioni asks pupils what ‘traditional’ could mean. (simplified transcript)

- 1 Maria Does it mean Greek professions?  
2 Ermioni: Yes, they are Greek- or actually, Cypriot professions  
3 ((she shows pictures with old Cypriots in “traditional professions”))  
4 Ermioni ‘Traditional professions’ means old Cypriot professions.  
5 Like a basket-maker. Have you seen any? ((she shows the picture of an old basket))  
6 Tim Miss, you can find the same baskets in Bulgaria, they put fruit in it  
7 Ermioni So we may come from different countries but we have the same traditional professions.  
8 ((Then Ermioni asks Tim to show Bulgaria in the map. After he points it out, Ermioni shows Turkey))  
9 Ermioni: Somewhere here in Turkey and a bit further down ((shows outside the map)) is the country where Becjan came from.  
10 ((Students do not comment. Becjan smiles happily and seems excited))  
11 Ermioni So you see that something that might be considered traditional in Cyprus might be also the same for other countries.

In this extract, Ermioni restricts the notion of ‘tradition’ to Cyprus in her initial definition of ‘traditional professions’, thereby excluding the children’s diverse experiences from the discussion. But Tim immediately challenges this construction of Cypriot authenticity, observing that the same professions exist in Bulgaria. Looking at Tim’s use of personal pronouns we notice that he avoids identifying himself with either group, but separates the teacher (you) and people in Bulgaria (they). Ermioni eagerly accepts Tim’s correction and uses it as a way to emphasise similarities across ethnic boundaries, this time using a ‘we’ that includes everyone irrespectively of where they live or come from. Furthermore, in line 9, she tries to explicitly include Becjan in the discussion over similarities, disregarding geographical locations (perhaps assuming that baskets were widely used in the region), and this is something that he seems to enjoy. In her concluding sentence, in line 11, before moving on to another task, Ermioni reformulates the semantic meaning she had initially offered for the concept of tradition (as something Cypriot – lines 3-4). This time she avoids using any identity-discourse (‘come from’, ‘we are’), and uses the earlier discussion of locating different countries on the map as an apt example for expanding the meaning of the new word. So she moves away from a discussion of identities, and in her utterance there is now a distinction between teacher and students (‘you’) which is based not on ethnicity but on their roles in the classroom.

Similar examples were also observed in our larger data set in other schools, for example:

### Extract 2

Year-6 class. The teacher, Petroula, talks about Saint George’s day and some related religious practices (e.g. on that day “we celebrate”, “we go to the church”), assuming that all pupils follow the same religion (Greek-

Orthodox). At some point, though, Giannis, a Maronite<sup>7</sup> student takes the initiative to interrupt her in order to point out:

Giannis : Miss he is our own Saint too

Petroula: Yes he is an important Saint also for the Catholic religion.

Here Giannis maybe realises that he is probably excluded from the orthodox collective ‘we’ constructed in Petroula’s talk and he interrupts her to point out some similarities between the Maronite and Greek-Orthodox religious practices. In his utterance, he clearly differentiates himself from the teacher and his classmates, as his ‘we’ does not include the rest of the class. Petroula immediately accepts his point and, like Ermoni, she is then willing to negotiate a broader collective identity. In fact, during the rest of the lesson, she continued making reference to similarities across different versions of Christianity.

In general, throughout our ethnographic observations, we noticed that when differences in students’ experiences, affiliations, and identifications came up, either on the teacher’s initiative or from students themselves, this did not cause trouble in class, and neither was it treated as something problematic. On occasions of this kind, Ermioni and other teachers were willing to negotiate a broader collective identity that included students’ diverse experiences. What happened though when the Cyprus conflict Discourses came to the fore in their lessons? The next section focuses on a literacy lesson in Year 2 class when the main topic was the Discourse and narrative of conflict.

### *Teaching the conflict narrative*

The lessons described here took place on 15<sup>th</sup> November, the day of the declaration of the ‘TRNC’, and they were followed up on the next day as well. On the 15<sup>th</sup>, all schools organise commemorations-denunciations of the event, and the Cypriot conflict – the narrative and associated vocabulary – often figure as a topic in literacy lessons. Ermioni dedicated two 80 minute sessions to the commemoration of the conflict (and these were the only occasion when she talked about Cyprus during the period of our observations). It is worth noting here that in addition to teaching about the conflict, Ermioni also aimed to include the objective of ‘peaceful coexistence’ in these two lessons, and this included talking about the commonalities between Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots.

### *The language of conflict*

As Year 2 children (6-7 year olds) were supposed to be not (yet) fully literate in the conflict discourse, the two lessons we observed focused explicitly on acquisition of the basic vocabulary related to the Cypriot conflict, together with the associated emotions. At the

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<sup>7</sup> The Maronite community is recognized by the constitution of the Cyprus Republic as a religious minority within the Greek-Cypriot community. It is Catholic in religion, it historically originates from the area in and around Lebanon, and it used to speak a Maronite version of Arabic, which is now considered an endangered language. Before 1974, the Maronite community centered mostly around the four Maronite villages (Kormakitis, Agia Marina of Skylloura, Asomatos and Karpasia), which are all now located in the northern occupied part. Today Kormakitis is the only village still accessible to Maronites - in the other three, access is denied due to the presence of Turkish military bases – and, despite the division, the Maronites of the village have continued to cross to the north to visit their village since 1974.

beginning of the first lesson, following her usual practice in literacy lessons, the teacher wrote on the board what students were expected to learn together with the important new vocabulary. She also made sure that these things remained on the board for the following day as well.

### Extract 3

Ermioni's writing on the board

<p><b><u>Our lesson's objectives:</u></b> Learn about the invasion</p>	<p><b><u>Vocabulary:</u></b> Missing people, occupation, pseudo-state, refugees</p>
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The illustration above mirrors how part of the board looked at the beginning of the lesson, and shows how from the onset of the lesson, certain words were explicitly identified as important vocabulary. The flagged vocabulary was not just a list of new words – it contained key components in the hegemonic conflict narrative, words which provide the foundations of the Greek-Cypriot viewpoint and interpretation of the conflict, all imbued with emotional and ideological significance. The selected words highlight the traumatic consequences of the 1974 war, in which what is seen as an illegal invasion results in an unrecognised political entity (pseudo-state).

During the lesson, Ermioni put particular emphasis on making sure that pupils learnt these words. First, students were asked to look and underline the meaning of these words in a text they read in class from the textbook “*I don't forget*”.<sup>8</sup> The protagonist of the story (Spyros) was talking about his occupied village and his missing grandfather. After underlining the sentences that provided the meaning of these words, the students read them aloud, and then they talked about emotions associated with peace (e.g. happiness, love, joy) and collective emotions related to the 1974 war (e.g. sadness, fear, crying, injustice anger etc – for the collective discursive construction of emotions in the classroom see Zembylas, C. Charalambous & P. Charalambous 2014).

All these practices – emphasis on new vocabulary, reading, and underlying new words, talking about emotions in relation to the story's protagonists etc. – can be recognised as standard literacy practices and they were part of all Ermioni's literacy lessons involving text comprehension. In this particular lesson, though, they reproduced and socialised children into the dominant conflict repertoire, which was presented as ideologically neutral and not as one interpretation amongst many. Despite Ermioni's intention to cultivate the ideals of peaceful coexistence, the vocabulary of the conflict carried a heavy ideological load and constructed the clear roles of victims and perpetrators which form part of the conflict ethos. Furthermore, the roles and identities involved in the conflict discourses excluded pupils' diverse experiences. This became more evident in the teaching of the conflict narrative.

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<sup>8</sup> All state-schools in Cyprus use the same textbooks, which are provided by the Ministry of Education & Culture. The “*I don't forget*” textbook includes short extracts from children's literature where the 1974 war is the main topic, as well as information about and pictures of occupied areas.

### *The conflict narrative*

In order to teach the little children about the 1974 war, the teacher dedicated the second part of the lesson to telling them an allegorical story about two dwarfs and a bad giant – which echoes the biblical story of David and Goliath. During the story the teacher attempted to bring in the peaceful coexistence discourse, in line with the annual educational objective at the time, talking about the similarities between Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots (the two dwarfs). At the same time though, as our analysis shows, the dominant conflict narrative was inscribed in the children’s story, containing all the important vocabulary and basic elements of Greek-Cypriot nationalist discourse. Some of these elements are evident in the representations of the two ‘dwarfs’ in the Extract 4:

#### Extract 4

Summary of the story up to this point: Once upon a time, in the ancient years, a Dwarf came to Cyprus from Greece (Greek-Cypriots), and decided to live there. At some point a Giant (Turkey) came to the island and brought his dwarf son (Turkish-Cypriot) with him. Then the Giant left and the two dwarfs stayed on the island.

Ermioni “The dwarf that came from Turkey, because he **lived fewer years** in Cyprus, he was **the one that got influenced** by the habits and traditions of the first dwarf. He was the one that **changed the most**, and he even started speaking the language of the other dwarf, who was **the one who lived here from the very-very old times.**” (our emphases)

This extract contains the basic elements of Greek-Cypriot nationalist discourse. As pointed out by many scholars (e.g. Bryant, 2004; Papadakis, 2005) Greek-Cypriot nationalist discourse emphasises ‘continuity’, arguing that Greek-Cypriots have been living for many more centuries on the island than the Turkish-Cypriots, and that they have preserved their (and the island’s) ‘authentic Greekness’. This was emphasised several times in the story using different interactional techniques – repetitions, change in the pitch of voice, elongated vowels etc. – which all flagged what was said as important: eg. “So now, there were in Cyprus, the first dwarf, who was living here since ((*rising intonation*)) ma::ny many many years ago, and the other dwarf”. Furthermore, kinship metaphors (e.g. ‘giant’s son’) pointed to the existence of blood ties between the two ‘motherlands’ and the Cypriot communities.

During the story the teacher also made sure that she recapitulated the basic points and vocabulary taught in the morning, which all form part of the official conflict narrative.

#### Extract 5

1 Ermioni: {Turkey} came to Cyprus to do what? (1)  
2 What did we say earlier in the morning?  
3 Pupils ((*all together*)) invasion  
4 Ermioni So {Turkey} didn’t come over to save the Turkish-Cypriots but  
to::  
5 (1)  
6 ((*slower*)) o(.)ccu(.) [py  
7 Petros [occupy Cyprus!  
8 Ermioni half of Cyprus  
9 And we also said that..?

10 Petros     That this happened in 1974  
 11 Ermioni   Well done  
 12             This happened in 1974.

In the extract above, we see that Ermioni not only asked students for the basic information about the war, but also insisted on the specific language needed to talk about the events. By employing interactional techniques familiar to students (recapitulation, word guessing, recalling past knowledge, praise) Ermioni tried to make sure that students used the right wording in order to talk about 1974 (e.g. ‘invasion’, ‘occupy’, ‘half Cyprus’). Similar episodes occurred throughout the lesson, with Ermioni repeatedly asking for the very specific words “how do we say this little word”, and not accepting synonyms or paraphrasing “no we said another nice word that describes that”.

However, students did not always follow what the teacher was saying, despite the seriousness in teacher’s tone, and according to our fieldnotes, they didn’t seem to enjoy this lesson as much as others. Several times students provided rather random answers which were loudly disapproved by the teacher. For example:

### Extract 6

Talking about Turkish-Cypriots declaring a new state

1 Ermioni     And they gave it its own name...?  
 2 Andri       =Pseudostate!  
 3 Ermioni     No! we call it pseudostate (.)  
 4             They named it Turkish Republic of No:rthern:...? { V`o:ria::?}  
 5 Tim         America!  
 6 Maria       Africa!  
 7 Ermioni     ((*very angry and loudly*)) Cyprus! Northern Cyprus!  
 8             Come on children!  
 9             For God’s sake!

One of the children reprimanded above was Tim, whose two parents were from Bulgaria, and who several times appeared rather ‘ignorant’ of the conflict discourse and its associated vocabulary, even though he was always keen to participate in classroom interaction. In fact, in the extract above, most probably, Tim (and Maria) mistakenly took the elongated [a:] sound of the word [v`oria:] (northern), together with Ermoni’s rising pitch, as the first letter of the next word (i.e. “V`oria A:... ?”). Providing the first letter of a word was a usual practice for Ermioni when she was looking for specific words as answers, and so the children offered countries’ names beginning with an ‘A’ (‘America’, ‘Africa’). The children’s mistake met with a fierce reaction from Ermioni, who, through heightened pitch, loud voice and the angry exclamation “For God’s sake”, marked the declaration of ‘TRNC’ as a topic of significance equally for all students, regardless of their backgrounds.

The next section focuses specifically on the ways in which diversity itself was handled in this lesson, and the ways in which children from different backgrounds were positioned in classroom interaction when the conflict was the focus of their talk.

## Negotiating diversity

The end of the story narrated by the teacher was: “*one day the bad Giant {Turkey} came back and took half of the island*”. But before moving to this, Ermioni wanted to make sure that the children understood who the allegorical characters referred to. So she initiated a long discussion about the two dwarfs being Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots, and about their having many similarities. In the rest of this paper, we focus on an episode from the end of this discussion where identity became salient, but students and teacher differed in their understandings of it. By following the interaction as it unfolds, our analysis shows that when conflict was the main topic of the interaction, superdiversity seemed to become problematic.

### Extract 7: “what are we all”

The teacher summarises her main point of the previous discussion – the commonalities of the two dwarfs – and tries to check whether all students have understood it. As students offer their replies all together, we cannot identify them in the recording.

1. Ermioni: So these two are Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots  
But they are both?
2. (Few): Turks {T`urki}
3. Ermioni: What are we all?
4. (Few): [Turkish-Cypriots {Turkok`iprii}
5. S.: [Turks
6. Ermioni Are we all Turkish-Cypriots?
7. (Few): No:::
8. S.: And Greek-Cypriots {Ellinok`iprii}
9. Ermioni We are all...?
10. S.: [EllinoT`urki! {Greek-Turks}
11. S.: [ EllinoK`iprii
12. Ermioni: Ts! ((sigh))
- 13 Which is the same part of the words Ellinikiprii and  
Turkokiprii?
- 14 ((very angry)) Anastasia, the board is over here honey!

In this extract, Ermioni wants to conclude the discussion by saying that both Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots are actually Cypriots, but the children do not seem to follow. In order to help them, she tries to point out the relation of the allegorical characters to the students’ experience, and she changes the question to “what are we all”, expecting that the children will now more easily reply ‘Cypriots’. Nonetheless, the children, perhaps being confused over who exactly ‘all’ includes (see also Extract 8), still cannot find the expected answer. In fact, in line 10, a student enthusiastically constructs a ‘Greek-Turks’ ethnic category which causes the teacher’s disapproving reaction (line 12). Although Ermioni could accept this answer as a possibility (there might be people having both identities), she does not treat the ethnic categories as negotiable. Instead, she gives up her initial identity question (what are we) and rephrases her question as a question of vocabulary one: ‘*what is the common part between the words Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots*’. But before giving the floor to the students, she stops and reprimands Anastasia, a high achieving student of Bulgarian background who was looking out of the window, for not paying attention. At this moment of trouble with identity-labels, Ermioni again marks the topic under discussion as one that needs full attention by all students, not considering that not all of them fit into her constructed “we are all” category.

Anastasia does not reply, and the teacher continues by giving the floor to another student:

### Extract 8

13 Ermioni: Say it!  
14 S.: the [part] "Cypriots"  
15 Ermioni: So we are all...?  
16 S.: Cypriots  
16 Ermioni: Cypriots  
18 Nikos: M- (.) Miss?  
19 Ermioni: Because our homeland [(.) is...(2) Cyprus  
20 Nikos: [ what about Becjan's (dad who is)  
Turkish(-Cypriot)?  
21 Ermioni: Tell me?  
22 Nikos: Eh::  
23 Ermioni: Becjan comes from Kurdistan  
24 S.: Yes!  
25 Ermioni: And is  
26 S.: [Kurdish!  
27 Ermioni. [partly located in Turkey  
28 we talked about it another time  
29 ((Emilios turns and whispers to Becjan "you Turk!"))

When a student finally provides the right answer about the part that the two words share ("Cypriots"), Ermioni tries again to bring back her initial identity question "so we are all...?", in order to extend discussion of the fictional protagonists to the lived experiences of the students in the classroom. But Nikos immediately spots a problem with this question and interrupts to point out that this does not apply to Becjan, the Kurdish student who had very recently arrived from Turkey. As described earlier, students did occasionally point out inconsistencies in the teachers' talk in 'ordinary' lessons (Extract 1), but this time the interruption seems to be marked interactionally as a troubling topic. In line 21, Ermioni invites Nikos to repeat his question, as if she hadn't heard what he said because it overlapped with what she had been saying, but Nikos does not respond and there is a lengthened hesitation marker in line 22. Ermioni does not leave much time for Nikos to reply and in line 23, she takes the floor back to correct Nikos and restate Becjan's 'Kurdishness', at the same time also limiting his relationship with Turkey ("only partly located in Turkey"). All these actions – the turn-taking and hesitations – suggest that both Nikos and Ermioni have realised that Becjan's background has become difficult to talk about in this lesson. Indeed, this time Ermioni doesn't take the student's comment as an invitation to expand on classroom's diversity but instead, after emphasising that Becjan's identity is Kurdish and not Turkish, she closes the subject down as something that does not need any further commentary or explanation, and then moves on. Her concern not to discuss Becjan's background at this particular moment can be better understood in line 29, when Emilios whispers "you Turk!" to Becjan (even though Ermioni is unlikely to have heard this).<sup>9</sup> Being identified as a Turk during discussion of the conflict has unavoidably negative associations.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Emilios was sitting at the back very close to the researcher and the recorder. During the interview at the end of the fieldwork, Ermioni confirmed that she never heard this comment.

<sup>10</sup> Other research has also shown that being identified as a Turk was used interactionally by Greek-Cypriot adolescents as an insult (C. Charalambous, 2009; 2012)

So we can see that although Ermioni tried to introduce the discourse of peaceful coexistence, she still referred to blood ties and kinship metaphors which did not correspond with children's experiences. Neither the 'I don't forget' nor the 'peaceful coexistence' discourse left much space for negotiating diversity, because in both, the two primary identities available were those of 'us' (Greek-Cypriots/Cypriots) and 'them' (Turkish-Cypriots/Turks). Moreover, the conflict narrative implied that the 'us' and 'them' binary matched 'good' and 'bad'. Despite the fact that Ermioni did try to challenge these binaries in subsequent talk (e.g. by asking students "But are all Turks bad people?"<sup>11</sup>), during the narrated story itself the archetypal characters of the 'bad giant' occupying Cyprus and the suffering 'dwarf' did not allow for an examination of different perspectives, trajectories and experiences, and when these actually emerged, Ermioni thought it was too risky to draw the children's experiences into the discussion.

Socialisation into the conflict narrative that constructs essentialised identities and restricts diversity has significant implications for children as well as teachers, and these are discussed in the concluding section.

## 5. Discussion

According to Heller (1999), "the legitimacy of globalization lies in being able to create linkages which increase (and supposedly democratize) the circulation of valued resources in ways which create room for local and regional differences" (p. 336). Examining in her case a francophone minority school in Ontario, Heller points out a resulting "state of tension between monolingual nation-states and supra-national structures and processes" (p.339) – a tension between globalizing forces which seek to unify markets and resources, blurring different types of boundaries, and a force pushing in the opposite direction, preserving boundaries and valuing local linguistic and cultural authenticity. The same tension can be observed between two major institutional ideologies in education. Schools in Cyprus need to "represent the authentic members of a homogeneous... nation [and] on the other hand, they are supposed to be both democratic (that is, not practice exclusion on the grounds of essential characteristics, like race or gender) and oriented to facilitating... entry into the modern, increasingly globalised world" (ibid.: 343). In our case, the tension becomes even more evident, with Greek-Cypriot education set to cultivate the remembrance of a history of conflict and to sustain a "conflict ethos" based on the (re)assertion of ethnic and cultural boundaries, despite the superdiverse realities current in classrooms and society in general. More specifically, through the ethnographic and interactional data we analysed, we saw this tension being played out in different types of classroom activity – the ordinary convivial practices of everyday lesson talk on the one hand, and on the other, the ceremonial activities commemorating the conflict, through the teaching of the conflict narrative.

As Rampton observes "low-key everyday 'conviviality' is quite often invoked as a vital source of social cohesion in superdiverse urban environments", as social scientists seek concepts that allow them to describe new form of social cohesion based on low-key informal activities (2014: 1). Indeed conviviality – a term used by Gilroy to describe "the process of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculturalism an ordinary feature of social life"

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<sup>11</sup> At the end of the lesson, Ermioni tried to relocate Turkish-Cypriots in the 'good' place of the binary, but this was done by emphasising their Cypriotness ("we are all Cypriots") and by downgrading their Turkishness, something that did not actually challenge the primary categories.

(2004: xv) – provides resources to interrogate fixed classifications, including the structured categories of community, difference, and identity (Zembylas, 2009). This was evident in the data from the ordinary lessons where the teacher and students routinely engaged in the everyday literacy practices, where linguistic, ethnic and cultural differences weren't treated as salient when they emerged, and where they didn't pose any problems for classroom interaction. Despite evidence in other studies showing the marginalization of migrant students inside and outside the classroom (Theodorou & Symeou, 2013; Theodorou, 2011; Zembylas, 2010),<sup>12</sup> in the present case, we observed migrant students being high-achieving, and diversity in the classroom was mostly treated as 'ordinary'. The teacher used students' experiences from different cultural backgrounds as a learning point, and was willing to negotiate more inclusive categories that did challenge – to an extent – the solidified categories of '(Greek-Cypriot) us' and 'others'

On the other hand, though, even when infused with some ideas of peaceful coexistence, the ceremonial activity of remembering and talking about the conflict was largely based on the reproduction of a set of well-rehearsed habitual practices that ignored the superdiverse realities of the classroom. These activities were dominated by the conflict Discourse which involved a homogenous 'we', a coherent narrative with allocated roles of 'good' and 'bad', 'victim' and 'perpetrator', as well as a collective emotional culture. So it did not leave much space for diversity. As became evident from our analysis, the essentialised identities of 'Greeks' and 'Turks' imposed by the conflict Discourse resulted in clear-cut categories that could not, for example, include convivial 'Greek-Turkishness', and did not take into account students' diverse experiences. When the conflict figured as the lesson's topic, ethnicity became salient and diversity was treated as problematic, particularly when Turkishness was involved.

So what are the implications of all this, and to what extent does the conflict Discourse have an impact on the children in the classroom? As this research was not longitudinal, we do not have evidence on the extent to which lessons such as the one we described had a longer-term impact on students in general and on children from diverse backgrounds in particular. But we can still argue that lessons of 'conflict literacy' constitute a space where students can be socialised into the conflict Discourse and the representations of 'us' and 'others' in Greek-Cypriot society. This involves learning the narrative (even through allegorical fairy-tale stories), learning the keywords (e.g. words like pseudostate, refugees, Turkish occupation), and learning the associated emotions (e.g. anger, frustration, sadness, hatred). Other research has also shown the particular role of language and literacy lessons in constructing negative representations for the ethnic 'other', as well as for establishing in the classroom a certain emotional culture for remembering the conflict past (Zembylas, Charalambous & Charalambous, 2014). As Kelly (2013: 241) points out,

“When conflicts have ended, languages continue to play a role in the area of representation, affecting the cognitive and emotional capability of people to mediate and remember events in the post-conflict world... The fact that language contributes to structuring the way people understand the world means that language plays a large role in the way conflicts are subsequently represented and remembered. It also means that the role of language itself becomes an issue in the post-conflict world.”

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<sup>12</sup> Also according to Philippou & Theodorou (2014), Europe is often used in order to distinguish between “more likeable” and “less likeable” groups of ‘ethnic-others’.

Linguistic anthropological research in the last few decades has also highlighted the role of language as a “fundamental medium in children’s development of social and cultural knowledge and sensibilities” (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2011), showing the potential consequentiality of small ritual interactions. Research in language socialization and literacy studies has revealed the subtle ways in which children learn social, cultural and emotional norms through language and literacy practices, as well as how they learn to make meaning in culturally relevant ways (Duranti et al., 2011; Rymes, 2008). In our case, emphasis on the very specific vocabulary required for the “I don’t forget” objective often implies essentialisation of the category of the ‘Others’, and this can result in the construction of very negative images of Turks. In fact, other ethnographic research confirms the marginalization that Turkish-speaking students often face (Zembylas, 2008; 2010; Theodorou & Symeou, 2013).

But could the convivial everyday experiences offered by superdiversity work as a way to renegotiate linguistic ethnic and cultural boundaries and subvert – even only partially – the conflict Discourse? As Gilroy (2004) explains, conviviality does not signify the absence of racism and does not indicate that conflict is banished. Rampton (2014) also points out the risk of ‘naïve optimism’ if the notion of conviviality is not sufficiently contextualised and its relations with other ideologies are not scrutinised. Having shown here the tension between convivial classroom ideologies and the Discourse of conflict, all we can argue at the moment is the importance of identifying the ‘small openings’ that can help teachers and students navigate away from conflict Discourse, while at the same time pointing to the problems and potential dangers that the conflict Discourse may pose for the experiences of migrant children.

Indeed, Bekerman and Zembylas (2012) argue that if a change (even with small ‘c’) is to be achieved, then researchers’ attention should be directed towards the practices and contextualised interactions of everyday classroom life. As they say, “we should be aware of the ways through which teachers ask questions, give feedback, speak the ‘correct language’ and decide on the criteria for identifying students” (p. 222). At the same time it is also important to look at children’s convivial interactions in superdiverse contexts, as children might often ‘see’ the world through more flexible identity categories than those dictated by present national paradigms (ibid). Still, to fully understand these practices we need to analyse the historical, cultural and political conditions that enable these interactions to take place. In this paper we have performed such an analysis and we have identified the limits that the conflict Discourse imposes on interaction – when it is invoked – and the barriers it poses for a renegotiation of traditional cultural, ethnic and emotional boundaries. At the same time, however, we have also identified the “small openings” offered by superdiversity, not so much as an established Discourse but as a lived reality in ordinary classroom interactions. Unveiling the interactional practices and types of activities that either reproduce the Discourse of conflict or that allow for negotiation is, we believe, an important first step. But of course further longitudinal research is needed to explore the potential of superdiversity to challenge the boundaries that a conflict-ethos maintains.

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