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‘A window to knowledge is a window to the world’: socio-aesthetics, ethics and pedagogic migrant youth journeys in crisis-shaped educational settings in Greece

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This paper explores the processes, tensions, opportunities and constraints that migrant youth in Greek higher educational institutions experience at the present time which are characterised by social crises, economic austerity and political instability. In doing so, we also put forward an agenda of critical and feminist pedagogies in developing inclusive spaces of educational citizenship and social justice. Building on a larger collaborative study on youth and migration, this paper draws on a sample of 130 interviews with women and men second generation migrants who are currently, or have been in the past, university students at various institutions in Greece. Migrant youth expanding on their aspirations and capacities harness a developmental pathway of cosmopolitan pedagogies which alter their circumstances and social possibilities. The paper advances alternative discourses in crafting spaces of anti-oppression in the academy through a feminist lens which will cultivate learning communities of equity, justice and reflexivity.

Keywords: youth migrants; Greece; higher education; feminist and critical pedagogies; socio-aesthetics; ethics; social policy

Introduction: feminist and critical pedagogies, inclusive diversities and cosmopolitan citizenship

A decade has now transpired from the advent of the global financial crisis in 2008. Yet in some countries, such as Greece, the debilitating effects continue to devastate society, with particular relentless negative impact on the younger generations (Christou, 2013; 2016a).

While all sectors of society are vulnerable when it comes to waves of austerity hitting Hellenic shores, education remains susceptible to attacks from both budget and other structural constraints. Our research focus is on the challenges that youth migrants face (Michail & Christou, 2016) and the changing landscape of higher education in Greece (Christou, 2016b; Christou & Mentzeniotis, 2015). This paper combines two angles: it examines how these two spheres of social life create difficulties for young migrant graduates who attend universities in Greece at present;

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it also advances a perspective that embraces the socio-aesthetics of critical pedagogies of feminist acts to shape inclusive learning communities.

With that objective, this paper examines the innovative approach of the ‘aesthetic event of education’ (Lewis, 2014) in viewing teaching and learning as *aesthetic performances* in their political and liberating possibilities for society. In unpacking the core concepts we tackle in the analysis that follows, we include *socio-aesthetics* to denote the socialisation processes taking place in educational encounters as aligned to the definition that Lewis provides above: *counter-diaspora* to refer to participant performative repertoires as second generation migrants inherently ‘reverse’ their ancestral diasporic condition by seeking transformative potential beyond their countries of birth or settlement; ‘*diasporan habitus*’ as the discursive and practical matrix of participants harnessing migrancy histories, personal-cultural and political conditions in creating platforms for agentic capacities and aspirations for educational and social futures.

This paper is based on a larger study and specifically draws from interviews with second generation youth migrants in Greece, both graduates and currently students attending a number of different inter/disciplinary departments in a variety of public higher education institutions. In the next section we offer a more detailed methodological note on the research study, but here we outline some of the core theoretical underpinnings of the project. We then engage in the central empirical arguments, and in the conclusion we offer a number of reflections on future social policy considerations.

There is a sense of moral turbulence that has swept in a multi-directional way our contemporary (western) livelihoods of polarising inequalities. A complexity of values, meanings and scales of modalities have reconfigured education in a neoliberal context. These are escalating as continuous budget cuts undermine pedagogic integrity since the commodification of education has concretised as a practice in many public institutions (Christou, 2016b). We consider such crises in education as part of a wider web of societal crises. Henry Giroux (2013) describes the current academic landscape as one of –

... repression of critical thought. Too many classrooms at all levels of schooling now resemble a ‘dead zone’, where any vestige of critical thinking, self-reflection, and imagination quickly migrate to sites outside of the school only to be mediated and corrupted by a corporate-driven media culture. (pp. x–xi)

The latter is particularly troubling for any educational system, but particularly pressing in a global context of crises and exclusions. What is at stake here is the continuing diminishing of autonomy through the evaporation of the dialogic essence that a reflexive education provides. It is the central tenet of the Socratic paradox which unveiled the essence of knowledge as the realisation that ‘one knows nothing at all’. The fluidity of such criticality of knowledge is similar to the notion of ‘diaspora’ as an analytic signifier to denote a process of un/boundedness (Mavroudi, 2007) and one that can be dismantled in order to be situated within pertinent social categorisations (Christou & Mavroudi, 2015).

The study of ‘counter-diaspora’ (Christou & King, 2015) has illuminated the theoretical contributions of the concept of diaspora in interdisciplinary migration studies, but, according to Ilan Gur-Ze’ev (2010):

The philosophy of Diaspora has been neglected for too long and at too heavy a price. In recent years, however, the abandonment of Diaspora as a philosophical tradition and as a special way of life has become a prospect for a serious reflection. It is a celebrated challenge to ‘our’ present, a challenge which actualizes itself within existential, cultural, political and educational arenas, dimensions and prisms, as well as in their fruits, disciples and enemies. These should be courageously addressed. (p. 13)

This paper is an effort to contribute new knowledge to the sociology of education informed by a diasporic philosophy of counter-education (Gur-Ze’ev, 2010). Such an approach incorporates an eclectic insight into both the diasporic condition and the objective of reconstructing pedagogies of the oppressed for an education of liberation as regards identities and personal development. Our empirically driven study of migrant youth critical pedagogies embraces a theoretical framing that views participants in their diasporic condition as social agents with (self) transformative potential.

The latter is very much an extension of our own pedagogic ethos and positionality. We do not claim to have all the answers but we are reflexively aware of the many questions we continue to ask ourselves as researchers and teachers. In that sense, this textual analysis of our insights into the unfolding spaces of youth educational and migrant lives, has elements of our auto/biographical journeys and encounters in those same spaces. As Liz Stanley (2004) suggests:

Feminist ethnography in this sense of the term is critically aware, reflexively constituted, analytically and epistemologically positioned, aware of its own knowledge-claims and concerned to give readers as many textual means as possible of engaging with, disputing, even rejecting, the grounds for these as well as the claims themselves. (p. 1830)

Ito et al. (2015) ‘propose “connected civics” as a form of learning that mobilizes young people’s deeply felt interests and identities in the service of achieving the kind of civic voice and influence that is characteristic of participatory politics’ (p. 11). In this particular framework they argue that:

‘Learning’ connected civics does not entail individually-driven ‘transfer’ between the personally meaningful cultural projects young people actively create and modes of concerted political engagement, but is centered instead on building shared contexts that allow for what we elaborate below as ‘consequential connections’ between these spheres of activity. (p. 11)

The authors then go on to further articulate the steps to achieve a project of ‘connected civics’ but we suggest that in the case of youth migrant students in Greece, a further step is required from ‘connected civics’ to *participatory pedagogic publics*. This should be understood as a process of overarching importance in including and involving individuals in the decisions that impact on their learning. This further underlines the need for a participatory pedagogical development, especially in incorporating the teaching of individuals about institutional structures and their civic engagement in ways that harness their agency.

We perceive teaching to be the co-production of knowledge inclusive of affective migrancy histories of particular communities and an objective to self-determination in the form of pedagogic agency (Walkerdine, 2016). We also situate this effort as one of public scholarship as the practice of knowledge production that aims to transcend academic contexts and intimately engage with wider publics (Burawoy, 2004; 2005). With somewhat of an overlap between critical, on the one hand, and, public, on the other, such academic knowledge production, indeed aims toward an outward facing

programme of social impact, ‘from interpretation to engagement, from theory to practice, from the academy to its publics’ (Burawoy, p. 324).

At the same time, as we have articulated elsewhere (Christou, 2016a; Michail & Christou, 2018), current austerity driven social crises have been shaped by a neo-colonial web of power entanglements in an institutionalised European hegemonic context. Such a globalised neo-colonial reality also reproduces fragmented and debilitated knowledge that often perpetuates oppressive forms of learning through a crippled educational system (Kincheloe, 2008). This in turn perpetuates a crisis of socially just pedagogy that would otherwise become a social force of rigorous anti-oppressive educational and social practices, the expansion of diversity of perspectives from multiple social and class locations and critical pedagogy views that seek to dismantle inequalities.

Such a dismantling of inequalities would ultimately create more inclusive diverse societies and would craft a form of social citizenship that is *cosmopolitan* in its core principles of membership. Despite the contested debates and controversies that the concept of ‘citizenship’ has historically yielded, we embrace the concept advanced by Osler and Starkey (2003) of ‘education for cosmopolitan citizenship’. This is a notion that is attentive to features of education for citizenship for young people living in a context of globalisation, and as such addresses national, regional and global issues. It is a critical perspective that prepares youth for more sustainable livelihoods in diverse local communities with an awareness of an interdependent global world. In reporting on the findings of their research, Osler and Starkey (2003) conclude that ‘a re-conceptualised education for cosmopolitan citizenship needs to address peace, human rights, democracy and development, equipping young people to make a difference at all levels, from the local to the global’ (p. 243). We argue further for an education attentive to the manifestation of *diversities* in all spheres of public and private life, be that identities, sexualities, bodies, families, etc., and we will articulate in the empirical section that follows the parameters of such an educational model, one which is grounded on a feminist vision of equity and justice. In a sense, this is vividly encapsulated in our title, ‘*A window to knowledge is a window to the world*’, proposed by one of our Romanian participants, Daniela.¹

It is important to understand here that multiplicity and intersectionality in learning communities is a strength and a building block to pedagogies of inclusivity. As Connell (2013) argues:

Educational encounter is always multiple, in terms of the numbers and diversity of people involved and the number of structures shaping educational relationships: not only class structures, but also gender structures, ethnic and race relations, connections with region and land, generational relations and more. Trust and citizenship cannot be limited, cannot be made a privilege of specific groups. Education is inherently socially inclusive; any failure of inclusion signals the presence of power. An exclusive education is a corrupted education. (p. 105)

We hope to illustrate in this paper some of those windows to a world of *critical pedagogy* and to offer some insights into the possibilities that more doors can open for migrant youth when public and social policy take notice. The embodiment of an educational cosmopolitan citizenship is a pathway to humanity, equality and solidarity with others (Christou, 2016a) and in particular ‘those whom we perceive to be different from ourselves’ (Osler & Starkey, 2013, p. 252) but in reality share intrinsic similarities.

Methods and participants

This paper draws from a larger collaborative study based at the Centre for Social and Migration Studies (CSMS), University of Western Macedonia, Greece. We particularly encouraged students who did not have a family history of going to university to participate as part of their employability and skills development portfolio.

The participants in our sample ranged from 19 to 35 years of age; they were either students or graduates of Greek higher education institutions. We took a methodological decision to limit the participants up to the age of 35, because we were interested in examining the transition from education to a life stage when participants take conscious decisions about their social and professional trajectories in their lives. Our data derived from a follow-up ethnographic component of the previously mentioned larger project that took place during early spring/late autumn 2016 and throughout spring 2017. We conducted in-depth interviews with 130 participants (100 women and 30 men), other than those who had participated in the original research, all second-generation Albanian (118), Bulgarian (5), Romanian (7) immigrants in Greece, 32 born in the host country and the rest in other countries. From those who were born in other countries, almost half (47 out of 98) came to Greece between the ages of 4 to 8 years. Of the others, 28 came to Greece between 1 and 3 years of age, and 23 between 8 and 12 years.

As part of the CSMS's programme of research placements, a number of students had the opportunity to gain first-hand experience of primary research and deepen their understanding of different research methodologies with mentorship and guidance. In involving research students in the earlier phases of applied research, the process also demonstrated the importance of piloting questionnaires extensively in confirming our methodological instruments. The respondents were contacted through personal acquaintances of the students and the researchers and the interviews were conducted in 30 different cities of Greece, including six islands. Half of our interviews, especially with informants residing in southern Greece and the islands, were conducted via Skype.²

The research design was particularly attentive to dimensions and modalities of intersectionality and as such embraced wider identity issues such as gender, class, ethnicity, age, and generation, as well as thematic focus on racism. The narrative guide of the larger project included themes such as 'family background', 'migration history and experience', 'ethnic identity and transnational ties', 'intergenerational transmission', 'legalisation and naturalisation', 'school experiences', 'university experiences and perspectives', 'socialisation and integration', 'gender identities', 'economic crisis', and 'future plans and return'.

The interviews were conducted in Greek, audio-recorded and then transcribed and translated during the data analysis stage process. Aligned to the epistemological underpinnings of the study, a focus on discursive accounts was undertaken by a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. In CDA, social practices encapsulate a dialectical relationship involving discursive events, social structures, institutions and societal situations (Wodak, 2009; Wodak & Fairclough, 1997). Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of the participants.

‘Greeks are those who partake in Greek education’: framing some theoretical underpinnings

Almost two decades ago, in 2000, a 15 year old male Albanian student based in Northern Greece received a Distinction; he achieved the highest grades in his class, and as a result was eligible to become the flag-bearer during a major national holiday.³ The issue soon became extremely controversial, resulting in reactionary nationalist protests. Despite having earned top grades, and, by extension the right to carry the flag, the student agreed to step down and give his place to a Greek student.

The late Konstantinos Stephanopoulos, who was at the time the President of the Hellenic Republic, defended the right of the young Albanian to be the representative of his school as flag-carrier in the commemorative school parade by quoting Isocrates: *‘Greeks are those who partake in Greek education’*. The underlining connotation of this quotation is that ethnic origin should not act as the defining criterion for one to substantiate the core definition of Greek nationality, as participation in the pedagogic values of Greek education should be the defining principle. Thus, what the Isocratic claim appears to underscore is caution against essentialised genealogical definitions of ‘blood’ in constructing a Greek identity, when cultural pedagogy should be seen as the paramount exemplification of belonging to the Greek nation.

Yet, this is not the case as evidenced in the first stage of this research project where we discussed some of these educational experiences of exclusion as experienced by youth migrants throughout their educational trajectories from their primary level schooling and ongoing (Michail & Christou, 2016). Some of those narratives recounted in painful detail racist behaviours from both (Greek) teachers/professors and (Greek) students as they talked about, ‘a sense of injustice’, ‘an explicit racist stance and behaviour’, being called ‘foreigners’ and experiencing ‘instances of racism’. For instance, non-Greek students said:

The first years I believe were very difficult; there was an expression of racism which would originate from the families of specific students ... They were prejudiced and closed-minded and having seen their trajectory and personal life journey even now so many years later, I can say that they were that way and continue to be so. (Student of Mechanical Engineering, Bulgarian female/Marianna 20 years old)

I have faced injustice at school on a number of occasions. In general, life is unfair. Some of my classmates stigmatised me because some of my co-ethnics had engaged in criminal activity. That does not mean that everybody who comes from the same country falls in the same category; not everybody is the same. Of course when I invited them to come over to my house, they didn’t always come and when they did they were very cautious with their personal belongings because they thought that I would steal them and they had this notion that I was very jealous of them. (Pre-School Education Student, Romanian female/Daniela 28 years old)

While there were exceptions to such narrations as the ones above with participants stating positive experiences with (Greek) classmates and (Greek) teachers/professors, by and large negative experiences appear to be the norm and continue to be so in a period of increased hostility and xenophobia (Dalakoglou, 2013; Ellinas, 2015; Kirtsoglou, 2013; Koronaiou et al., 2015).

There are parallel struggles that involve policy makers, inflexible immigration agendas, transnational practices and the logics of sovereign democracies that negotiate social and legislative accounts of citizenship and membership within the boundaries of the state. Additional complexities emerge when discourses of ‘migrant background’

or ‘student differentiation category’ are involved in modalities of Europeanisation and membership (Dubois-Shaik, 2014).

The conceptual contribution of ‘discrepant’ knowledge and mobilities (Collins & Ho, 2018) is a useful one that recognises that the way knowledge production evolves incorporates the ways in which people’s world views and actions emerge, not only as social subjectivities but also as formations of social interactions. The way that Collins and Ho (2018) employ a reading of Said’s original construction of ‘discrepant experiences’ mirrors the approach we embrace in understanding the cultural politics of the educational experiences of migrant youth as shaped by the discrepancies in their social experiences in displaying (ethnic) difference. And, we further argue to extend the combination of subjectivity and interactions to discourses of agency as shaped by migrant youth aspirations, capacities and motivations.

While we do not intend for the purposes of this paper to repeat those discourses of the cultural politics of racism in education as narrated by migrant youth participants in our first study, we nevertheless mark this point of entry into the discussions in the next section. Such discourses serve as the defining configurations of cultural contestations in how everyday life racialisations also enter the classroom, and, as a result, trigger an urgent need for educational reform in Greece. There is a need for a new set of policy and pedagogic practice portfolios for a more inclusive pedagogy in Greece. We reflect on these in the concluding section, while in the section that follows we draw from participant narratives to offer a glimpse into angles of socio-aesthetics and ethics in migrant educational lives. That is, we have theorised the expansive potential of critical pedagogic discourses which harness the positive impact of the socio-aesthetics of educational experiences in Greece leading to the aspirational achievement of ethical global citizenship in social and professional lives.

More specifically, we encapsulate within the socio-aesthetics of Greek education global values of justice, equity, compassion, humanity, hospitality, etc. By incorporating these, migrant youth should not only maximise reaching their professional potential, but they should also achieve truly ethical global citizenship livelihoods beyond the borders of Greece. While such achievements are quite subjective, driven by personal agency and enabled by being exemplified in the context of ‘diasporan habitus’ by youth migrants, the Greek state has the opportunity to truly reform its higher education curricula and train educators to embrace inclusivity, diversity and intersectionality (IDI) in their teaching roles. An IDI approach underscores feminist and critical pedagogic principles of equity and social justice which should become an objective of urgent incorporation by Greek social and educational policy makers.

Migrant cultural politics: participant pedagogic portrayals

Aspirations and capacities in narrative discourses

Initial reflections on migrant youth educational trajectories point to the prominence that education has in their lives. While both parents and offspring share a similar sense of aspiration toward educational achievement, for the most part motivated by views linking the latter with career prospects and professional development, this is often contextualised within the migrant life story. That is, the migration trajectory is often conflated with a dream of providing better life circumstances for the second generation in the host society. While specific microsocial family histories will have

particularities and specificities of when, how, why, for how long, where, etc., the first generation migrates to, for the vast majority of our participants, improving life conditions through better opportunities offered via educational pathways, for the second generation, has had a central role:

My parents always worked very hard to be able to educate me and my sister, and always stressed the importance of education. In Albania my father finished high school, but my mother did not finish school, so they always wanted a better future for both of us and they helped us. They did everything to help us finish school and university ... I see things have become more difficult now with the crisis. I am not optimistic about the future. I had in my mind to do other things like a post-graduate degree but now it seems too expensive and impossible. But also on a personal level things that I would like to do, like a trip, or other things, are no longer easy to do. (Graduate of Primary Education Department, Albanian female/Anna, 25 years old)

Anna reflects on various quality driven aspects of her life now possibly curtailed due to the crisis and inextricably linked with education, such as leisure activities and travel, but also post-graduate education. Although she and her sister were encouraged and actively supported by their parents to pursue higher education as a means to a better future, the current landscape appears rather bleak due to the challenges that the economic crisis has created for young people like Anna.

The extract below from Anastasis makes a clear connection between education and upward mobility in that he identifies his working class parental background and the difficulties that were endured by his parents who experienced a life of hardship and hard labour in the domestic service and construction sector. Education is equated with a degree of 'security' and prosperity; anything else would be failure which is a source of disappointment:

They [his parents] wanted me to study, that is why they were a little upset at the beginning when I failed the entry examinations. They wanted me to get educated, they knew that I wanted to become a physiotherapist. They wanted me to secure my future because they have faced difficulties and have lived hard years. My mother has worked as a cleaner and my dad in construction. They wanted a better future for me and my sister. (Physiotherapy Student, Albanian, male/Anastasis, 20 years old)

Class issues are also proffered by Endi who couples these with his migration heritage and both those with suffering and difficulty:

My parents wanted me to study because they are working class people who came from a foreign country. As you understand, they had dreams for their children and they wanted us to have a better life than them. Not to suffer the difficulties that they suffered. So, they always guided me and my siblings in studying and doing something bigger in our lives. (Student of Economics, Albanian, male/Endi, 24 years old)

Education is indeed seen as a 'window to the world' in developing one's future, in making one's life independent and sustainable, ultimately gaining confidence, autonomy and happiness. For some first-generationers there is no sense of grounding offspring to a particular country if the future there holds no prospects, as in the case of Greece where they often advise their children to even consider migrating elsewhere for more opportunities elsewhere:

My parents have supported me from the beginning, they wanted me to have a complete education. They told me: 'we do not want to stand in your way, because it is good for you to have a degree in order to be able to work in the future and make your own life'. They also told

me that if I did not see a future here, I should migrate, as hard as it may be at first after all it will be fine. They are of the belief that: 'home is where I hang my hat'. (Student of Primary Education, Albanian, female/Eni, 21 years old).

At the same time, parents might also change perspectives about their children's futures, based on the intercultural knowledge that they themselves gain when living, interacting and observing norms and behaviours in Greece. In the case of Aourella, her parents were not particularly interested in her pursuing studies in higher education but their exposure to the priority that most Greeks place on education made them reconsider and support her in that direction:

My parents may have preferred something else for me, let's say to do what they did, but because they saw that here in Greece things are different and the parents educate their children and help them to follow higher education studies, they started to think differently and so from one point and afterwards they helped me study. They helped a lot! (Graduate of Public Administration, Albanian, female/Aourella, 28 years old)

With the stimulus of intercultural exposure to norms, this creates opportunities to develop the kind of newly discovered cultural capital drawn from most societal interactions. Within the sociology of education there is an expectation that education is a process of social reproduction, but this also entails a critical view that the very process involves an exercise of power which by extension becomes a reproduction of dominant social privilege (Connell, 2013). At the same time, education can become a context where the development of capacities can then translate into the improvement of social positioning. The crux of the argument here is the intrinsic values that education should propagate. As Connell (2013) argues: 'To say that education involves nurture is important. Education involves encounter between persons, and that encounter involves care' (p. 104). Such encounters might involve layers of power as the latter exists in most social relations. However, educational relations of care refer to the active practice of eliminating effects of power through respect, reflexivity and reciprocity. It is in interactive learning communities that encounters transform into knowledge engagement which promotes equality and global citizenship.

'Diasporan habitus' and transformative futures

Within the research area of 'geographies of education and aspiration' (Holloway, Brown, & Pimlott-Wilson, 2011; Naafs & Skelton, 2018) a promising scholarship has studied youth pathways following higher education into employment but has also paid attention to their imaginations as regards better futures. However, this has unveiled not only the possibilities for more social, civic and political youth incorporation on a global scale but also an intensification of existing inequalities based on such social categorisations as race, class and gender (Naafs & Skelton, 2018). Hence, it is imperative that concepts used are situated and the discursive elements of power that they involve are thoroughly discussed. As Naafs and Skelton suggest:

... geographical, gendered and class-based pressures and divisions are often glossed over in the neutral language of education 'aspirations', yet are important to address. The notion of 'education aspirations' appears to be an acceptable and appropriate goal for young people. However the term is far from neutral because of inevitable geographical, gendered, ethnicised and classed inequalities that impact upon young people; their playing field is far from even. (p. 8).

This is why we are cautious in overly stressing the importance or prominence of ‘aspirations’ (Appadurai, 2004) and instead re-direct analytical attention to the concepts of ‘diasporan habitus’ and the particular ‘socio-aesthetics’ of educational experiences for our participants. In this section we draw on such evidence to discuss the potentialities emerging from ‘diasporan habitus’ and the particularities of pedagogic ‘socio-aesthetics’ which help to make concrete policy recommendations which we outline in the concluding section.

Reflecting the core processes of aesthesis in the midst of social life in educational contexts, issues emerging in the lives of youth migrants fluctuate from the lack of support in the family environment because the parents lack skills to provide help with homework, or the school itself not providing remedial instruction and study skills, to the more severe problems of bullying, racism and psychological and physical abuse from classmates. Although not indicative of every single experience, Stella’s narrative extract below highlights some of these issues:

It is really difficult, especially for us because we don’t have any help at home. It is quite difficult. My parents didn’t have the capacity or education to help us when it came to homework from an early age so we could have higher aspirations. Perhaps if the educational system offered some additional support ... But, I love Greece and I’m happy to be here, apart from some traumatic experiences that my brother had who endured many years of bullying and that impacted seriously on his health and well-being. That really hurt me, it was really harsh to see that happening to your sibling, and kids are relentless. I now see this happening at the nursery where I work after graduating. I see that and we try to resolve this especially with one particular child. But in the case of my brother, the teachers and professors did not help at all; they should have, but they didn’t help at all, and he endured a lot of physical violence and beatings at school from other kids. (Graduate of Pre-School Education Department, Albanian female/Stella, 20 years old)

Given the overall social geography of educational regimes described by participants as including obstacles and challenges, this kind of ‘diasporan habitus’ becomes an energising platform for change and personal transformation. Another interviewee:

I wanted to study in order to safeguard a better future; to have a good job and essentially to ground my skills through certified degrees so I can say this is who I am and these are my papers, in order to be independent, to stand on my own two feet. (Certified nursing assistant, Albanian, female/Rachel, 22 years old)

Youth research which is responsive to how young people negotiate their ‘self-fashioning’ through ‘the conscious deployment of elements of discourse’ (Tsolidis & Pollard, 2009) ‘provides a useful framework for the exploration of minority students’ (p. 432) and by extension how they utilise their unique habitus to that end. We are in total agreement with the argument advanced by Tsolidis and Pollard that ‘in the case of these students their self-fashioning involves the ironic deployment of the discourses available to them, including those that are racist’ (p. 432). These scholars also make the important intervention in youth and education studies that such research offers a critical examination of a new direction which recognises ethnic minority youth as individuals with skills in the form of ‘self-fashioning’ rather than angry, deviant, excluded. It is thus, not only a highly politicised issue emerging from a personal matter, but a more agentic and self-scripted pathway of self-development (Song, 2003). One of our participants, Catherine, now 33 years old and having return-migrated to her ancestral Albania in 2014, currently working at the Ministry of

Environment and Tourism following a degree in Public Relations and Communication, talks about ‘not being afraid to express my view and not being embarrassed for who I am and that is how I was brought up and feel lucky for that’.

Similarly, Matthew who studied Mechanical Engineering in Greece but in the past year and a half migrated to Manchester, UK, told us that:

It is the entire pedagogical experience in Greece that has even today helped me here where I am now. But, I also had resilience especially at certain times which were particularly challenging, so everyone has a different subjective optic lens, family experiences, there are so many different things. I had a very good educational journey. The University is not solely knowledge, it helps in the personal development of the individual. Of course, it helps and all this combined with knowledge and interactions, all this helps you develop.

In a sense, Matthew talks about education as socialisation, education as social psychological personal development. By extension, when higher education students accelerate a sense of self-empowerment through experiences of learning and socialisation, they may become important political actors in their civic participation and roles across the societies they choose to reside. We view this possibility as an added important dimension for consideration by policymakers.

Finally, participants also referred to less positive aspects of the ‘diasporan habitus’ that enabled them to pursue ethical outlets to self-development as opposed to the stereotypical and racist renditions of migrant criminality being the norm in media and social discourses. For example, Michaela, has mixed feelings about the education she received and talked about ‘professors being weird, the administrative support staff would not help, and did not have any interest in being collaborative’. All this required more effort and endurance on her part in finding out necessary information while at university, where she graduated despite having experienced racism. Adrian on the other hand, while training as an electrician specialising in refrigeration, underscored the need for additional practical training modules that would have prepared him better to enter the labour market where he had to actually self-train on the job. Yet, he still values the years he spent in education and sees those as an ‘investment’ to his future.

The poignant words of Gabriel, a 28 year old successful computer scientist underscored the combination of dynamics that led to a holistic development beyond gaining expertise and a very good job:

The impact of my education was tremendous, otherwise I would not have reached my objectives. But knowledge is not enough; you have to continue to self-develop. I learnt to struggle to make my dreams come true. My parents went through a lot of difficulties, but managed to transmit to us a love for learning, and their unconditional support of our choices. My migrant background made me persistent in wanting to achieve my goals and to succeed. I never strayed from those. We endured difficulties as a family. We were close and struggled. We went through famine and poverty but did not waiver. A lot of difficulties.

Gabriel went on to elaborate on the tenacity and determination of his parents and especially his father who although a medical doctor in his native Albania had to work as a metal worker for 10 years, and his mother worked as a cleaner in Greece; they have now both migrated further to Belgium. The parental de-skilling seen as a sacrifice is part of the ‘diasporan habitus’ that not only enabled Gabriel to pursue his studies but also accentuated his drive for success in recognising the limitless support and resilience his parents demonstrated. This is an agentic capacity to do well despite adverse experience. Building on the findings discussed in this paper, our conclusion reflects on the implications of our findings and makes suggestions for how

educational practitioners and policymakers can address rights, justice, and equity in education and society.

Conclusion: how to tackle inequalities and crises through social and educational policy reforms

Being ‘between Scylla and Charybdis’ is an idiom derived from Greek mythology, which means ‘to be caught between two equally unpleasant (evil) alternatives’. In this case, one ‘evil’ appears to be inequality and the other is crises. While aptly named as such, the idiomatic euphemism for *inequalities* and *crises* in Greece is captured rather poignantly in having such difficulties block the developmental paths of youth migrants in Greece today.

Yet, our findings show the agentic ways and pathways that migrant youth undertake when they overcome obstacles by harnessing their potential as shaped by their ‘diasporan habitus’ which transforms into a kind of socio-cultural capital when personal histories and objectives meet localised conditions. Higher Education in Greece has the possibility of asserting its intellectual signature by developing a set of curricula guided by a platform of ‘diverse and inclusive pedagogies’. It provides opportunities to articulate learning strategies for intercultural education that extend from understanding the complexity of diversities in social life, make sense of intersectional issues, develop arguments and actions that enable collective working in an ethical and inclusive context with vulnerable and excluded groups, to finding real life creative solutions to political and social problems.

Such ‘diverse and inclusive pedagogies’ mould a new matrix of scaffolding students in hybrid, blended and digital learning that places social diversities at the centre of student driven action learning. Not only grounded in practice and experiential based learning opportunities, but also in the very ancient Greek style teaching of democratic values in participatory learning through articulating collective competency and diverse sociabilities frameworks where values of inclusion, tolerance, compassion, resilience, ethics, integrity, respect, caring, accountability, transparency, etc., are underscored and integrated as learning outcomes across the curricula in higher education. In a sense, this is learning in ‘togetherness’ which destabilises the ruthlessly competitive driven nature of individual success and it involves an extensive rethinking of what is significant in demonstrable educational achievement; that is, the potential to become an *ethical global citizen*.

This exemplifies *feminist pedagogies* that seek to reform the relationship between educators and students by enabling the empowerment of students, building a community of learners, giving voice to those who are otherwise marginalised, and respects and promotes the diversity of personal experiences, while also challenge hegemonic views (cf. Webb, Walker, & Bollis, 2007; Abrahams & Brooks, 2018).

At the time of writing this paper, draft legislation has been tabled in the Greek Parliament that aims to grant *same-sex couples* the right to adopt a child. This has divided leftist SYRIZA, with several MPs raising objections to the proposed reform, arguing *Greek* society is not ‘ready’ for such a change. While it would be legally unsound and contrary to European *law* to discriminate between the rights of *same-sex* and heterosexual *couples* to become foster parents, it is astounding that essentialisations of ‘Greekness’ continue to shape political positions even within what is proclaimed to be the most progressive of the currently governing political parties (SYRIZA is the acronym for ‘Coalition of the Radical Left’).

This paper is a call to policymakers for educational reforms in Greece as a matter of urgency, to move on from the perpetual ‘crisis’ discourses which hinder progressive social change. While theorising from our empirical insights on migrant youth educational experiences, we seek to draw to the attention of policymakers that Greece urgently requires the promotion of rights based inclusive curricula that fill the void of a democratic deficit in exclusionary educational and social spaces plagued by populism and racism. At the same time, we have argued for pedagogic responsibility to harness research to transform and contribute to improvements in social policy.

Notes

- ¹ Daniela’s father repeatedly advised her of this; he was a trained dentist who initially struggled while facing exclusion but eventually succeeded in developing his dental practice in Greece.
- ² While any data collection technique can have its limitations, Internet based methods are becoming increasingly prominent and influencing researchers’ options. According to Iacono et al. (2016) there are advantages of using Skype, so they may be embraced with confidence. Given the fact that the data collected through both face-to-face interviews and via Skype were in response to the same narrative guide, research questions and epistemological underpinnings, we do not see any limitations to the scope of narrative responses we have gathered and which were subsequently analysed concurrently.
- ³ While Helena Smith (2003) writing in *The Guardian* at the time asserted: ‘The xenophobic attitudes have been increasingly blamed on the absence of a civil society in Greece and the lack of an anti-racist education in a country where children are still taught to take immense pride in their “ethnic purity”’. For a sociological framing and analysis of the incident refer to Tzanelli (2007) ‘Not My Flag!’ Citizenship and nationhood in the margins of Europe (Greece, October 2000/2003).

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