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Young migrants' narratives of collective identifications and belonging

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Abstract

The article sheds light on the intricate relationship between migration, 'identity' and belonging by focusing on young migrants in the context of Greek society. Based upon a qualitative study of youth identities, the key objective is to examine their collective identifications, formed through the dialectic of self-identification and categorization. The analysis of young migrants' narratives unpacks how their sense of belonging and emotional attachments to their countries of origin and settlement are mediated by processes of racialization and 'othering'.

Keywords

Belonging, Greece, identifications, racialization, young migrants

Introduction

In the era of unprecedented migration waves, an ever-increasing number of children and young people experience mobility and dislocation as crucial part of their lives (United Nations, 2016). More than ever children and young people move between and across states leading transnational and translocal lives (Anthias, 2002; Punch, 2007), thereby disrupting the idealized notion of childhood as unfolding in fixed and bounded spaces (Ní Laoire et al., 2010). Research with migrant children and young people in diverse national and local contexts has documented their struggles to belong to settlement societies, often facing discrimination, hostility and exclusion (Fassetta, 2015; McGovern and Devine, 2015; Ní Laoire et al., 2011; Sirriyeh, 2010; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2002). This article is framed against these migration-related challenges as they are tightly bound up with questions of 'identity' and belonging. Drawing upon a qualitative study of youth identities in the rapidly changing and increasingly diverse context of Greek society, the article examines the complicated ways through which young migrants narrate their ethnic identifications, allegiances and sense of belonging vis-à-vis the countries of origin and settlement.

Since the early 1990s Greece, a traditional migrant-sending country, has received large inflows of migrants, especially from Central and Eastern European countries following the collapse of communist regimes. Although a significant part of the country's population is foreign born – approximately 11% – migration policies remain fragmented and inconsistent (Triandafyllidou, 2014). Notably, several studies have documented the marginalization of migrants and their entrapment in a state illegality and uncertainty (King et al., 2000; Labrianidis and Lyberaki, 2001; Lazaridis and Koumandraki, 2001). Moreover, the economic crisis afflicting Greek society has given rise to anti-immigrant attitudes (Karyotis and Patrikios, 2010), while also exacerbating migrants' predicament with many losing their jobs and consequently their stay permits and legal status (Michail, 2013). Additionally, polarizing political discourses have been argued to institutionalize boundaries between migrants and Greek citizens, thus, further reinforcing an 'us' and 'them' dichotomy (Triandafyllidou, 2014).

Against this socio-economic backdrop, the article focuses on young migrants, an under-researched group in the Greek context, placed on the periphery of scholarship and public debate. Young migrants as social actors (Corsaro, 2005; James et al., 1998; Qvortrup et al.,

2009) actively engage in interpreting and making sense of the material and socio-cultural milieus within which they find themselves. Aligned with this approach, the article throws analytical light on young migrants' strategic negotiations of 'identity' and power (see also Devine, 2013). More specifically, it unpacks their identifications and sense of belonging to ethnic and national communities, with the key objective to illuminate the dialectic of self-identification and categorization, belonging and racialization. The article thus seeks to contribute to the emerging literature on children's and young people's identity formation and belonging-making, especially as the latter evolve in the course and as an outcome of wider migration and dislocation processes (Anthias, 2002; Colombo et al., 2009; Fangen, 2007; Ní Laoire et al., 2011; Sirriyeh, 2010; Valentine et al., 2009; Vathi, 2010).

In the following section, the conceptual framework is placed within the relevant theoretical literature; then, the study's methodological considerations are briefly presented, followed by the analysis of selected young migrants' narratives. The article concludes with arguing for the need for child- and youth-centred research and theory to elucidate the contemporary configurations of ethnic and national identifications and belonging as the latter cross-cut with patterns of migration.

The question of 'identity' and belonging

Social axes of difference, particularly along ethnic, cultural and national lines (but also in terms of social class, gender, religion, sexuality, disability) underlie 'some of the ways in which questions of collective identity get posed' (Anthias, 2002: 501–502). The present article is theoretically located within the wider debate of collective 'identities', focusing on how these are felt and narrated by young migrants vis-à-vis their 'imagined' ethnic and national communities (Anderson, 1991). At the core of its conceptual framework lie the two key analytical categories of *identification* and *belonging*. These concepts, it is argued, can better unpack the inter-subjective, transactional and emotional dimensions of what comes to be conceived and termed as collective 'identity' (see also, Brubaker and Cooper, 2000).

First, *identification* captures how one identifies oneself and others, a process that arguably permeates every sphere of private and public life. As an analytical category identification is active and processual, thus, it does not carry the 'reifying connotations of "identity"'; rather, it invites us to 'specify the agents that do the identifying' (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 14; Jenkins, 1994, 2008; Rattansi, 2007). Another facet of identification involves the process of 'identifying oneself emotionally with another person, category or collectivity' (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 17). Furthermore, social agents in addition to identifying themselves – the internally orientated process of *self-identification* – they are also identified and categorized by others – the externally orientated process of *other-definition* or *categorization* (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Jenkins, 2000). These two processes make up the internal and external poles of the dialectic of identification (Jenkins, 2008).

Second, the analytical category of *belonging* relates to 'important social bonds and ties' and encompasses feelings of emotional safety and being at 'home' (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005: 528). This affective dimension lies at the heart of *belonging*, constituting the latter a process rather than a fixity, reflecting as much the emotional investments as the 'desire for attachments' (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 202), that should not be conflated with and reduced to identifications. It is pertinent to underline here the interaction between the *formal* dimension of belonging, involving the rights and duties that stem from citizenship or lack thereof, and the *informal* dimension, namely the lived experiences of inclusion and exclusion (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005). In similar vein, these dynamics of exclusion are foregrounded by scholars who argued for the study of ethnic minority groups in terms not only of their adapted ethnocultural and religious heritages but also of their strategies and mechanisms of coping with and counteracting racism and racialization processes (Modood et al., 1994; see also Modood et al., 1997, 2002).

In line with these conceptual foci, the article queries into young migrants' identifications – how they identify themselves but also how they are identified and categorized by others – and their sense of belonging to ethnic and national collectivities.

Narrating identities: The study

The study upon which this article is based sought to qualitatively explore youth narratives of 'identity' in the context of Greek society. The fieldwork included observations, three focus groups and 46 in-depth interviews, carried out in two educational institutions located in Thessaloniki, the second biggest city of Greece. The selection of institutions was based on the ethnic diversity of the student body after consultation with the local educational authority and the head-teachers. Given the prime focus of the study being the exploration of the boundary aspects of young people's collective identifications, a purposeful decision was made to include participants belonging to migrant groups and to the Greek ethnic majority (see Katartzi, 2018, for an analysis of Greek young people's ethnonational identities). Furthermore, researching with young people of diverse ethnic backgrounds was considered to better explore the 'shared terrain of disadvantage cutting across country of origin' (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005: 531). In total, 103 young people (54 males and 49 females) aged between 16–19 years participated in the study. In-depth interviews were conducted with participants of self-identified Albanian (N = 16), Georgian (N = 5), Armenian (N = 2), Palestinian (N = 1) and Greek (N = 22) ethnicities. The interviewees were selected on the basis of the biographical details they provided (e.g. ethnicity, parental occupations and educational qualifications) with the view to ensure a relatively balanced sample along the lines of migration background and gender. The migrant participants were all foreign-born and migrated with their parent(s) to Greece, residing continuously in the country for the minimum of 6 years and with their residence varying from 6 to 15 years. The following section reports on in-depth interviews with young migrants. The interview guide was organized around four main topics: (1) the participants' sense and narration of self, (2) their migration journeys, (3) their experiences in the educational context and (4) their aspirations and imagined futures. The interviews lasted from 1 to 2.5 hours, they were conducted in Greek, as all participants were fluent in Greek language, they were audio-recorded, fully transcribed and then translated to English. The study followed the established ethical codes for working with children and young people (Morrow, 2008). Pseudonyms were given to all participants to protect their anonymity.

Epistemological emphasis was placed on social actors' experiences, perceptions and interpretations as these are storied in narratives. Narratives, more specifically, are central to the making sense, articulation and presentation of one's self, 'actively participating in the very construction of subject positionalities' (Anthias, 2002: 501). The analysis was informed by a narrative-discursive approach (Reynolds et al., 2007; Taylor and Littleton, 2006), that is useful for unpacking social actors' sense-making processes, along with the pre-existing and widely available discursive resources they use in their talk. The analytic method entailed the identification of key themes, formed around recurrent content (Phoenix, 2013), and of 'interpretative repertoires' (Wetherell, 1998: 409) that involve culturally familiar and relatively coherent lines of argumentation and making sense. The material reported in the following section is organized along the two key themes of collective identifications and sense of belonging.

Narrating collective identifications

In young migrants' accounts, collective identifications are narrated in terms of ethnic origin, mother tongue, culture and allegiance to their motherlands. This is illustrated in the following account by 17-year-old Dimitri:

I am Georgian; my ethnic descent is Georgian, I was born there, my parents are from there, all my relatives are there and this cannot change. Probably this is what unites me the most with my country; it is the civilization and the people. Georgia is above all; it is the first country in my heart; I may have not lived so many years there, I came very young here, I do not know though [pause] Georgia is my motherland, because I come from there and I feel love for my compatriots, because we understand each other, the problems we have. (Dimitri, 17 years, Georgian)

This young man's identification as Georgian is explicitly defined in terms of ethnic descent. Georgia, his motherland, is narrated as a place of birth and locus of family genealogy, given force and flesh through the bonding function of ancestry and kinship, thereby granting it an almost indubitable, sentimental preponderance, as 'the first country in [his] heart'. This account provides an indication of how an 'identification with a group based on a concept of common "home" place can provide feelings of love and belonging for individuals and groups' (Easthope, 2009: 72). Furthermore, shared historical and cultural experiences are perceived to bond co-ethnics with common understandings and affective familial and friendship ties.

In similar vein, the case of Alexander, a young man self-identified as 'Christian-Orthodox Albanian', is characteristic of the narration of collective identity as an amalgam of ethnic, linguistic, cultural but also religious identifications:

I am Christian Orthodox Albanian. Being Christian is important but being Albanian is the most important thing of all. It does not matter that I am in Greece. Sometime I will go back and die there. With other Albanians, I believe, we are the same, there is no big difference; we are of the same ethnicity and we understand better each other as co-patriots. That means we are glad to be Albanians and we do not regret being born Albanian and not something else. (Alexander, 17 years, Albanian)

We can see in this young man's narrative the claim to the stability and durability of ethnicity. According to Alexander, ethnicity is associated with assumed similarity with the in-group members and shared understanding with one's co-patriots, resonating with a conceptualization of ethnicity linked to the myth of common descent and shared culture (Eriksen, 2002). What becomes evident in the same quotation is the process of emotionally identifying with one's ethnicity, echoing Hall's (1996) argument that 'identity' requires investing in certain subject-positions. By extension, it is this process of emotional investment that seems to re-assert and re-valorise ethnic identifications, as these are powerfully captured in the following quotation by Eleanor:

Despite that I have lived most of my childhood years here in Greece, in Albania I lived just for four years and for my life remaining I am planning to stay here; however, I don't feel Greek. First, when I was brought up in Albania there were incidents, situations, as it happens usually, that they have stayed with me as memories and sometimes come to the fore. Hence, I can't say I'm Greek. I believe that ethnicity remains stable, let's say if I changed and believed that I am Greek, I may have said that but whichever the case is I am Albanian. I want to be Albanian and I am not ashamed of that like others are. (Eleanor, 17 years, Albanian)

In this young woman's account, ethnicity is discursively constructed as *stable* and *given*, linked to ethnic descent and memories of early childhood in the country of birth, while being captured as a process that involves *choice* and *emotional investment*. Notably, Eleanor's own positive emotional investment in her ethnicity is contrasted with the negative emotional investment, the shame and regret felt by some of her co-ethnics. When examined in tandem, these two

interpretative repertoires sum up the tension between the perceived fixity of ethnicity and the fluidity of ethnic identifications. This resonates with Fangen's (2007) conceptualization of ethnic 'identity' that sees 'both the solid, fixed quality and the processual, context-dependent quality as acting in conjunction' (p. 401).

Collective identifications emerge across young migrants' accounts as a constellation of ethnic identification, religious beliefs, linguistic and cultural ties. This is evident in the following narrative by young Palestinian Nur:

My language, my religious convictions, that I am Muslim, my ethnicity, that I am Palestinian, all are very important to who I am. When I came here I was feeling as if I had lost somehow my identity, for I started forgetting several words, I had forgotten what some difficult Arabic words mean. And I did not know then the Greek language, I was also forgetting Arabic and I was saying to myself 'what do I know? Who am I?' Being Palestinian means everything to me; it is the pride for all these years that we are fighting; so many people have been killed and we still fight and care for our history. I miss so much Palestine; it is my homeland where the family and whatever well-known and familiar is, but under the warfare it was not a life what we led there. (Nur, 17 years, Palestinian)

In Nur's account, collective identifications are discursively constructed along the lines of her allegiance with Palestinian ethnicity, Arabic language and Islamic faith. Echoing the findings of other studies, religious identifications are central to young people's sense of self (see Katartzi, 2018; McGovern and Devine, 2015; Valentine et al., 2009). Furthermore, in Nur's account, the inextricable relation between her sense of self and mother tongue is rhetorically captured in the emotionally laden, self-referential questions 'What do I know? Who am I?' quoted in the passage above, pointing to the powerful emotional vector of ethnocultural identifications (see Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Katartzi, in press). Additionally, her ethnic identification is closely interwoven with the struggles in the name and defence of collective history invoking prideful feelings for her co-ethnics. Notably, ethnic bonds are narrated as forged and fortified through the calamities and sorrows caused by historic conflicts, a discursive resource that constitutes a recurrent trope in national narration (Triandafyllidou, 1998).

Ethnic identifications are additionally cross-cut by historic dislocation that further compounds the process of ethnonational 'identity' formation. The multiplicity and intricacy of the identification process is evident in the case of Irene, whose members of extended family were part of the Armenian diaspora that fled during the First World War and settled in neighbouring Georgia, where they formed solid ethnic communities. As Irene narrated:

I am from Georgia but, basically, I am Armenian. My grandparents are of Armenian origin but they lived in Georgia. There is a city there that everyone is of Armenian descent. My mother studied Literature and my father also studied there. Here [in Greece] I only have a residence permit, nor identity card or anything else. I do feel a little Greek since I live here, but not so much, for I am a foreigner; mostly I feel Armenian. (Irene, 17 years, Armenian)

A diasporic conceptualization of ethnic identification is evident in Irene's account, in which the state seems to lose its hold whereas 'ethnos' (Smith, 2002), taking the 'imagined' yet concrete form of a historic motherland, exerts an affective power. The intricacy of ethnonational identifications in the context of uprooting, of forced displacement and migration, features prominently in her narrative, with Armenia, Georgia and Greece all laying claims to her self-identification. Irene's biography bears the traces as much of the turbulent Armenian history, as of her family's more recent migration to Greece. Ethnonational identifications are then mediated by diasporic and migratory experiences and a sense of otherness experienced in

the Greek context. The next section sheds more analytic light on the ‘othering’ processes and the ways they impact on belonging.

Narrating belonging: The role of racialization and ‘othering’

Having examined how young migrants’ identifications are narrated along the allegiance to their motherlands, but also to shared religious, cultural and historic legacies, this section unpacks the situated and dialogical processes through which belonging comes to be experienced and articulated. Notably, several studies have documented how the legal, political and institutional context in host countries crucially affect migrants’ modes of integration, with the latter being shaped *inter alia* by migration and citizenship policies and civil society’s attitudes (Brubaker, 2001; Hatziprokopiou, 2003; Jørgensen, 2017; Ní Laoire et al., 2011; Thomson and Crul, 2007). The centrality of state-ascribed otherness to young migrants’ sense of belonging feature centrally in the narratives of this study’s participants. This is illustrated in Nickolas’ account quoted below:

To who I am it is important the fact that I am migrant; that I am a foreigner. I am not from here; I do not descent from here. It is a different thing to be in your motherland and do what you want. Nobody can tell you that you are a foreigner, that you come from your country and you mess around here. Georgia is the country of my parents, and I love it despite that I have not lived many years there. In the past I was thinking of going back to Georgia and do something there; I wanted to get into politics but with the war everything was turned upside-down there. Now, I would like to be visiting and staying there not for ever but for a while [pause] I love my motherland and there is no case of ever forgetting my language Georgian, ever; it is just that I would not particularly like the idea of going back – I am fine here – but I like going back and visiting my relatives. I like it here; I got used to living here; it is different. I am here with the lads and they do not consider me a foreigner; they do not treat me like a foreigner. I have made friends, I have company, I have known people; I like many places here and the environment too. It is just that I want citizenship, so I will not have these papers, and the one and the other all the time; things that make our life difficult. (Nickolas, 17 years, Georgian)

Although Nickolas does not identify himself as Georgian, he nevertheless emphatically states his strong affinity and attachment with the ‘country of his parents’. Notwithstanding the young man’s ethnic identifications and allegiances, his future orientation features to be tied with his life in Greece. More specifically, an unfolding process of belonging to Greek society is captured in his account, which however is undermined by the state-assigned otherness mainly attributed to the semi-legal status of non-European Union nationals. It is ‘through and around their encounters with structural regimes and with complex socio-cultural influences’, that young migrants like Nickolas struggle to locate themselves in ‘often contradictory and sometimes restrictive contexts’ (Ní Laoire et al., 2011: 155). In this case, it is worth underlining that Nickolas’ identification as a foreigner is interestingly juxtaposed with the positive lived experiences in the context of host society, particularly with his Greek peers’ friendly, accepting treatment and his evolving sense of place-based belonging (Valentine et al., 2009).

Unlike Nickolas, most of the study’s participants powerfully narrated their felt categorization as ‘others’ by their Greek peers, and the unbearable weight of carrying demeaning and de-humanising labels. Racializing and marginalizing incidents seem to set in motion a reflexive search for ‘identity’, as it is characteristically narrated by Paul:

Sometimes girls and boys say ‘you are Albanian; you are a foreigner; go away’ and this makes me think about my identity and that in Albania I never told someone something like this. This has not happened many times, but in these two–three times that has happened, it

did disturb me very much. They say things that have nothing to do specifically with Albania or Greece, neither with the fact that you are not from here [pause] because we are all humans after all. But for them you are a foreigner and they treat you as inferior. Then I come to think that I came here whereas in Albania was better. Some Albanians say ‘we are ashamed to be called Greeks’; they do not want this because they believe that Greeks are very racists and think differently than us and they say ‘we are not like that, we are always united; we are different’. Most of my friends are from Albania. We are co-patriots, we speak the same language and it is easier to become friends. We say ‘motherland’, even if we do not know someone we will try to be friends with him. We have left from Albania and we feel – I do not know – that something bigger unites us. We share the same motherland, we talk, we laugh and that unites us and we do not fight with each other, we do not mock and swear each other and thus I feel better. (Paul, 17 years, Albanian)

What is narrated very emphatically in this account is the power of others to name and exclude, indicating that ‘identities’ are ‘only partly a matter of self-identification’; rather, they involve the practice of ‘drawing boundaries around characteristics of “sameness,” and thus belonging’ (Rattansi, 2007: 115). The young man narrates the acute effect of racializing and excluding treatment on his sense of non-belonging, echoing the findings of other studies (Gogonas and Michail, 2015; Vathi, 2010) on young Albanians’ incorporation into Greek society that have similarly reported their perceived low social status and the discriminatory attitudes of members of host society towards them. Furthermore, as Paul narrates, those who are ‘othered’ project back their imposed otherness to those who classify them, categorizing the latter as ‘others’ on the grounds of their racist behaviour and the purportedly insurmountable differences that distance the two groups. Arguably, we can see in this account how otherness and sameness are naturalized and reified through the process of racialization, capturing the latter the ‘different mixes of biological and cultural connotations of difference, superiority and inferiority’ (Connolly, 1998; Rattansi, 2007: 107). This case further illustrates how migrants’ experiences of discrimination and hostility in the context of settlement society give rise to a sense of marginality (see also Fassetta, 2015), but also reinforce ethnic identifications, allegiances and a sense of belonging to the country of origin, while reinvigorating the ties and bonds with co-ethnics. The forging of friendships, as other studies have documented, constitutes one of the central features of children and young people’s migratory experiences (Sime and Fox, 2015), with same-ethnicity peer groups contributing to the maintenance of ethnocultural ‘identity’ (Reynolds, 2007). As McGovern and Devine (2015) argue in relation to migrant children in Ireland ‘within the care world of their peers, solidarity appears conditional on “being the same”’ (p. 10). It is not surprising then that co-ethnic networks constitute a ‘site of affection, emotions and warm relations’, as Colombo et al. (2009: 54) have reported on the case of young migrants in Italy. Furthermore, participating in co-ethnic networks, not least for the recognition, acceptance and emotional comfort they offer (Devine, 2013; McGovern and Devine, 2015), makes up one of the key negotiating strategies that young migrants, but also minority groups (see also Zembylas, 2010), mobilize to buffer racism.

Furthermore, the struggle to belong that young migrants experience is mediated by informal processes of ‘othering’ and racialization, working in conjunction with the legal and institutional regimes of host societies (Jørgensen, 2017; Ní Laoire et al., 2011; Yuval-Davis et al., 2005). The case of Dimitri is illustrative in that respect, with the young man identifying himself as a foreigner, a marginalized member of Greek society, despite his 14-year-long residence in Greece and his evolving allegiances to the country:

I like it here too; I love Greece but not as much as Georgia. I do not feel as a member of Greek society, I feel as foreigner; I feel foreigner here although I have lived in Greece for

fourteen years. The papers are the reason. It would have been different if I had the Greek citizenship, the Greek identity card, for I would be freer and I would lead a better life. Whereas now you are a foreigner, police officers stop you for identity checks, they take you in [the prison] and in general they make your life difficult and you do not feel free. More than that is the way they treat foreigners; they are racists; they scorn them; they do not treat them in the best of ways. In general, I wish racism did not exist to such a great extent. There is colour racism; the blacks, the Chinese; I have friends who are black and I know how they are treated. There is racism towards the language; the Russian, the Georgian, the Albanian, they scorn them and say ‘how do you speak like that? What is this language?’ We also have a different accent when we speak Greek. (Dimitri, 17 years, Georgian)

The young man attributes his self-identification as a foreigner to his citizenship status, which casts young migrants like him (see Katartzi, in press) in the place of having to renew their residence permits every second year, to visit frequently police stations for verification purposes and to be subjected to regular ‘stop and search’ by police officers. The ascription of otherness by the state, through migration and citizenship policies (Brubaker, 2001), law enforcement and bureaucracy, inescapably impinges on how belonging is negotiated, felt and narrated. The adoption of incoherent, restrictive and highly securitized migration policies has been argued to contribute to the strategic construction of migrants as a burden and threat to Greek society (Karyotis, 2012). Surveillance, linked to the securitization of migration, is then ‘directed against anyone who might be “different” enhancing in this way the racialization of “others” in Western countries’ (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005: 516). More specifically, racialization is made sense of with respect to ‘arbitrary signifiers’ (Valentine et al., 2009) including, as young Dimitri also states in his account, colour of skin, but also language and accent. This resonates with other studies documenting how cultural markers of difference, with language skills and accent being among the most common (Colombo et al., 2009), are mobilized to racialize, vilify and exclude certain groups (Modood et al., 2002; Valentine et al., 2009).

Conclusion

The article illuminated the intricate ways through which a group of young migrants in Greece narrate their identifications and sense of belonging vis-à-vis their ‘imagined’ ethnic and national communities. This study’s participants provided eloquent narrative accounts of their identifications, as these were being formed and crystallized through a dynamic interplay of self-definition and categorization, emotional investment and de-investment, thereby illustrating the cognitive and emotional dialectic of the identification process (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Brubaker et al., 2004; Jenkins, 2008). The analysis of young migrants’ narratives elucidated the inter-subjective and negotiated nature of ethnic and national identifications, especially as these take shape in the context of migration and in interaction with the significant and generalized ‘other’ of the settlement society. Young migrants’ identifications were narrated in relation to their motherlands, languages, cultures, religions and shared historic experiences that bond co-ethnics with common understandings and affective bonds. More specifically, the participants of this study narrated their ethnic affinities with Albania, Georgia, Palestine and Armenia bolstered by their childhood memories, family ties, accompanied by emotions of pride and commitment. In more detail, they powerfully articulated their attachment to their motherlands, captured the latter as the birthplaces, the loci of childhood upbringing, of indelible memories and of kinship and social ties. For these young migrants, motherland seemed to exert an affective, almost quasi-familial power, as exemplified by their emotionally laden accounts of care, love and pride for their home countries. Bonds predicated on shared ethnicity, along with the assumed similarities and shared understanding, formed the basis for forging friendship ties with co-ethnic peers, which in turn re-asserted ethnic identifications and allegiances.

Furthermore, the article narrated young migrants' sense of belonging, their attachments and bonds, as much with their countries of origin as with the host society. The young migrants detailed their struggles of belonging to Greek society, their semi-legal status, resulting in the state of precariousness and in the constant fear of being stopped and searched. As a result, most of this study's participants narrated their evolving allegiances to Greek society as being undermined by state-ascribed otherness and the racializing and discriminatory treatment they often received. Notably, it is through the processes of 'othering' – being externally defined and treated as 'other' – and racialization that young migrants negotiate and articulate their claims of belonging to host society. In other words, the exclusionary dynamics of 'othering' and racialization decisively shape the experiential contours of belonging to host society but also the constellation of identifications.

With migration and dislocation affecting the lives of an ever-increasing number of people across the globe, our understanding of these processes can only be enhanced by researching the lived experiences of migrant children and youth (see also Ní Laoire et al., 2010; White et al., 2011). This article contributes to this understanding by placing emphasis on young migrants' identifications and belonging. Arguably, these analytical categories can better illuminate what comes to be perceived as collective 'identity', the inter-subjective and deeply emotional negotiation that takes place while social actors attempt 'to steer paths through processes of acceptance and affirmation' (McCrone, 2002: 317). These are context-specific and socio-politically bounded processes, in the frame of which boundaries are being drawn and bonds are forged based on alleged similarities and differences between the 'self' and 'others', 'us' and 'them'. Future research can shed further much-needed light on the contemporary configurations of children's and young people's collective and intersecting identifications and belongings as these are formed in globalized and super-diverse contexts.

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