Book Review Symposium: Maria Chalari (2020) Crisis, Austerity, and New Frameworks for Teaching and Learning. A Pedagogy of Hope for Contemporary Greek Education. New York. Routledge. ISBN 9780367728694

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In this book review, I explore the usefulness of the book as it makes a cutting-edge departure contributing and uncovering new knowledge. The fascinating aspect of this book is the fact that Chalari examines the emotional dimensions of the socio-economic crisis in Greece rather than emphasizing on the impacts as mentioned in previous studies. More precisely, Chalari's book attempts to discuss the possibilities of hope which derive from the voices of teachers in the context of the Greek socio-economic crisis. The author also presents new frameworks for teaching and learning for contemporary Greek Education. In other words, the book gives voice to the teachers' anxieties, concerns and hopes.

In the first part of the book, Chalari provides the social context of the study discussing the political and economic changes relating to the Greek context namely, economic crisis, xenophobia crisis, crisis of values and identity crisis, causing feelings of uncertainty and insecurity among Greek people. Through a standpoint epistemology, the author attempts to explore the ways towards deconstructing the Greek education system. The author interestingly makes use

of the term 'policy windows' (Kingdom, 1984) to emphasise the temporary opportunities which can encourage the adoption of a new policy due to the emergence of a problem. The crisis of 2008 was not merely a financial crisis but indeed a multifaceted crisis. The draconian austerity measures introduced by the Greek government caused the dissatisfaction of the Greek population which has to encounter high rates of unemployment leading them to emigrate. As mentioned before, crisis was multifaceted and therefore impacted several sectors, one of them being the sector of education. The financial crisis led the government to reduce the annual budget concerning the Ministry of Education.

In the second part of the book, the author discusses the impact of crisis in Greece by highlighting the ways in which hope may arise. Through conducting interviews with teachers in both primary and secondary schools, Chalari mentions that several teachers referred to the possibility and opportunity of educational reform given the socio-economic crisis, highlighting an optimistic approach to the current state of Greece. Teachers spoke of philanthropic networks aiming at offering help and strengthening family ties. Apart from the possibilities of hope, the crisis has caused, according to the teachers' perspectives, a dramatic deterioration of both teachers and students' well-being and as a result, the emergence of educational inequalities.

Chalari discusses the social and political problems which evolved due to the crisis. The narratives of teachers indicate a political corruption, decline in the values and moral principles of Greek people and suggests an immediate political change as well as change in the behaviour and mentality of Greek people. Finally, the author addresses the role of Greek education in encountering the consequences of the socio-economic crisis and the reconstruction of the Greek society. It is argued that the management and the function of schools need to undergo significant change in order to cope with the

emerging challenges. Teachers also suggested that changes in the curriculum and textbooks need to happen with the aim of developing well- rounded individuals who will be skilled enough to become responsible citizens. It is recommended that educational institutions function as 'prefigurative practice' sites (Fielding and Moss, 2011) to provide an early indication to students about an equal society promoting human rights and democratic values.

The strength of this book lie in the discussion about how education can function as a catalyst by highlighting the positive aspects of the Greek education system such as its free and public character, the quality of Greek students and the values encompassing Greek teachers such as solidarity, altruism, initiative, pride, hope, teamwork and cooperation. All the aforementioned can play a vital role in the process of educational and social transformation. It inevitably depends on teachers to promote a sense of hope by adopting a pedagogy of hope.

The book constitutes an inspiring read as it provides a conceptualization of the Greek socio- economic crisis as an opportunity for reflection and hope for reconstructing the Greek education system and society at large. The author herself adopted a standpoint of hope which, consequently, informed her entire research. I would encourage the author to further explore the aspect of gender and teachers' gendered identities that may occur based on their positionings in relation to their understanding of hope in the context of a socio-economic crisis in Greece. Given that in the neoliberal era there is a great emphasis on the newly developed neoliberal subject, it would be fascinating to explore Greek teachers (and/or students) as neoliberal subjects in relation to gender and the gendered identities which may emerge. Chalari gave voice to teachers' anxieties and concerns which occur due to the neoliberal context which is characterized by neoliberal performativity (Ball, 2012) a term which suggests that they make

themselves more effective and efficient, which can also become a source of anxiety and pressure. Although in her concluding remarks the author suggests that further research could be conducted using psychoanalytic frameworks, I would suggest that the adoption of a psychosocial approach, which is more of a social constructivist approach, could also be of interest. That is, through a psychosocial approach, the author will be able to explain how teachers' narratives are informed by the socio-economic context and the identities which emerge as a response to what happens in the social sphere.

The book can be of significance to teachers and policy makers as it widens the understanding of pedagogy of hope and uncovers ways in which 'policy windows' may open for possibilities of action towards social and educational reform rather than merely focusing on the impact of the socio-economic crisis. This inspiring book is also recommended to scholars whose expertise lies in the area of Education in the context of Neoliberalism exploring the concepts of anxiety, pressures, concerns and hope.

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This is an important contribution to the study of the consequences that neoliberal policies have on education; it is also a book that grapples with the important question of finding alternative ways forward, ways that resist to the erosion of educational thought by neoliberal ideology. That is why it merits our close attention; but that is also why it should be treated with a critical distance. The book focuses on teachers' perceptions and experience of the immense difficulties encountered during the darkest days of the Greek fiscal crisis (2009-2014). The well-structured story Maria Chalari offers us can be seen as a topical example of "education under siege" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 2003/1985). As Chalari makes clear "[t]he neo-liberal agenda has [...] been taking shape for some time in Greece" (p. 27); the assaults on education that gained unprecedented momentum at the height of the Greek fiscal crisis, are, therefore, to be regarded as the result of a larger process of imposition of neoliberal reforms in education. These reforms induce "a mode of pedagogy and set of social arrangements that uses education to win consent, produce consumerbased notions of agency, and militarize reason in the service of war, profits, power, and violence while simultaneously instrumentalizing all forms of knowledge" (Giroux, 2013, p. 459).

At the same time, the crisis has not only caused serious dislocations to the social, political and productive web of Greece, but it also stimulated the formation of various affinity groups and local movements. The dislocative power of the current neoliberal form of capitalism has not led to the emergence of a single political subject, but to the multiplication of social actors on a local level. Each of these dislocations may be linked to alternative political options that oppose neoliberalism, state authority and representative democracy.

Dislocations are, hence, the condition of possibility for social and political creation and institutional re-articulation. One may, therefore, see a positive dimension in dislocation (Laclau, 1990, p. 82). A positive aspect of the crisis was that it motivated many people to form movements, groups and collectivities, which aim at the democratization of political, social and economic life.

To a certain extent, Chalari's book seems to be looking for 'windows' through which dignity and justice might become guiding principles and at the same time a result of the practice of education. Following the legacy of Paulo Freire, who, in his *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2006/1992) offered further reflections and elaborations on the thinking behind his landmark work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000/1970), Maria Chalari reflects on the global economic crisis and its bleak imprint on Greece and seeks hope for a democratic emancipatory education through interview data collected from a sample of sixteen teachers. Adopting a Freirean perspective, the author centralizes the theme of hope and introduces it as an ontological need (for hope).

As Freire notes, although hope alone is not enough to achieve liberation and emancipation, without hope there is no struggle at all. Hope was there during the Greek crisis, because a significant number of people, among them many teachers, became involved in everyday practices of solidarity and resistance. Since the beginning of the global financial crisis, many Greeks, especially young people, resisted neoliberalism and state authority in various ways. They forged new ways of political participation in society, and aspired to become socially useful and to maintain an optimistic attitude in a world beset with conflicts, tensions, and rapid change as independent social beings. They elaborated strategies to access educational and professional opportunities in a

spirit of cooperation. They experimented and improvised. Especially during the square movement of the Greek indignados (aganaktismenoi) in 2011 and the mass occupation movement of school buildings by students also in that same year (2011), many people searched for hetero-politics, namely practices of alternative community organisation in response to social dislocation and to the failures and the pressures of the market and the state (Pechtelidis, 2016a, 2016b). A common hetero-political habitus seems to have been developed by way of participating in various alternative social and cultural sites, displaying a common political dynamic despite and beyond differences.

These struggles culminated in the overwhelming victory of the rejection of the memorandum policy in the July 2015 referendum, and the conquest of the governance for the first time in the country's political history by the left-wing SYRIZA party, also in 2015, who, however, was painfully forced to sign a further memorandum that essentially ignored the result of the referendum and perpetuated austerity policies, increasing alienation especially of young people from the political system and official political representation (Kioupkiolis & Pechtelidis, 2017 - whether this was the only possibility at that moment is an issue that has been fiercely debated).

Central to Chalari's book is the notion of crisis-as-opportunity. On the one hand, it is clear that the fiscal crisis emerged as a perfect 'opportunity' and an excuse for advancing neoliberal reforms as a remedy for what were regarded as 'backward looking' aspects of Greek education and its perceived inability to function as a 'tool' for 'economic prosperity'. But on the other, the crisis can trigger the formation of alternative narratives and practices that resist neoliberal givens. Although Chalari invokes the famous declaration by Stanford economist Paul Romer at a venture-capitalist meeting in California in 2004 that "a crisis is a terrible thing to waste" (p. 4), she wishes to follow the second pathway.

However, this endeavour is undermined by her adherence to the dominant narrative about the origins and the causes of the Greek crisis, adopting the stance of guilt and the inevitability of 'paying the price' for being 'careless' and 'ill-prepared':

When the global financial crash of 2008 struck, Greece was ill-prepared to deal with it. [...] The major sources of deficiency were identified as the serious structural weaknesses in the Greek public administration, economy and society, which led to bureaucracy, corruption, low quality of services and high costs (p. 18).

But this is the gist of the dominant narrative of the crisis that mistakes results for causes, obscuring the lengthy process of colonialism (de Sousa Santos, 2016a, 2016b), internal colonialism (de Sousa Santos, 2016a; Martins, 2018) and crypto-colonialism (Herzfeld, 2002, 2016a) that has rendered Greece a peripheral and exploitable 'weak' economy and has imposed narratives that rest on "the essentially racist assumption that there is some sort of essential European culture that the not-quite-European Greeks threaten to undermine" (Herzfeld, 2016a, p. 11). As anthropologist Michael Herzfeld has argued,

Under neoliberalism, the economically weak go to the wall; economically fragile countries are represented as 'deserving' the precariousness that is now their lot. This stems directly from the logic that Handler (1985) has identified as the possessive individualism that underlies nationalism: if the 'culture' that is 'our' inalienable possession is flawed, then we, as a collective individual, must pay the price (Herzfeld, 2016b, p. 10).

It is true that the data presented in the book often seem to lead Chalari towards this direction. For example this is what one of her informants states: "People have cut unnecessary spending [...] there is job evaluation in many sectors now, which I think is the most positive thing of all" (p. 67). But it is also the case that

the data remain under-theorized; the author remains rather too close to her informants' statements without probing them further, without looking, for example, for how subjugation and unconscious internalisation of dominant narratives play a role into how teachers perceived the crisis, its causes and its possible solutions (see Fisher, 2009).

For example, the thorny issue of evaluation is discussed as a positive and welcome 'outcome' of the crisis, underemphasising that the neoliberal approaches to evaluation focus on implementation of striation processes that celebrate superficial and measurable results on the basis of a commodified view of what counts as knowledge and of what is the role of knowledge in people's lives. At the same time missing from the discussion are alternative approaches, approaches that are vastly different from their neoliberal counterpart, approaches that emphasise collaborative, down-top evaluations that uphold the agentic role of teachers and students' alikeⁱ.

Also, the teachers interviewed by Chalari seem to adhere to the well-worn motto in the public discourse on education in Greece which says that the calamities of education are due to the frequent changes of educational policies by successive education ministers. In the book, this is treated as an unproblematic given (see p. 71), failing to inquire into the possibility that the perceived need for stable educational policies flirts with the idea that education 'must' stay 'out' of politics – a quite conservative position indeed. Hence we read that "One of the major obstacles to the success of neo-liberal educational reform in Greece has been the discontinuity brought about by frequent political changes" (p. 27); one could ask the question what a successful neo-liberal educational reform would look like, and whether this is something to be desired, especially in the face of the book's search for sources of hope.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the data on which the book bases its analysis were collected just a few months prior to the rise of SYRIZA in power. The author conducted her research in 2014 when the crisis in Greece had reached a peak. That the book was released six years later, when social, economic and political conditions had changed significantly is inevitably shedding a different light to its possible readings. In 2019 the country moved into a post-memorandum era. In that same year, after four years of SYRIZA's rule - which, with the exception of some notable acts of support of the notion of public education and democratic thinking, it delayed but essentially failed to reverse the neoliberal attack on education - the right-wing New Democracy party came to power. From day one, the new conservative government worked to restore the old traditional establishment through the restitution of the postdemocratic consensus which was consolidated in Greece in the 1990s and at the dawn of the twenty-first century, reflecting similar shifts in liberal democracies in the UK, Germany, France and across the world. These involve the diffusion of a consumerist, a-political individualism among citizens that goes hand-inhand with the attachment of the ruling party to the neoliberal doctrine as the sole reasonable option for a developed and prospering economy. The treatment of political issues as technical questions, the increasing authority of 'experts' in governance (who act in ways that support and legitimate specific elite interests - a tragic example of this is the way in which private health sector has been treated throughout the pandemic), the eclipse of real alternative choices within the political system, are all trademarks of an impoverished form of postdemocracy dominated by elites (Crouch, 2004; Mouffe, 2005).

It must be emphasized that the Greek version of oligarchic post-democracy has been increasingly taking an authoritarian turn from 2019 onwards. It could be said that we are now facing authoritarian neoliberalism of a most extreme kind. As Bruff has argued,

under authoritarian neoliberalism dominant social groups are less interested in neutralizing resistance and dissent via concessions and forms of compromise that maintain their hegemony, favoring instead the explicit exclusion and marginalization of subordinate social groups through the constitutionally and legally engineered self-disempowerment of nominally democratic institutions, governments, and parliaments (Bruff, 2014, p. 116).

In exactly this kind of approach, at the moment that these lines are written (autumn 2021) the Minister of education uses all sorts of legal threats to crack down teachers' massive resistance to the implementation of 'school evaluation' - a neoliberal misnomer for impoverishing public education.

We think that the central problem, and one that is not, in our view, adequately addressed in Chalari's book, is that in Greek education, teacher-centred, rote-learning based, ethnocentric, mono-cultural, centrally-controlled and examcentered traditions have never, despite all progressive efforts, lost their dominance, and that the most fervent supporters of this conservatism have now fully endorsed the maxims of the neoliberal marketisation of education that exhibits an unprecedented hatred of public schooling (on this notion see Masschelein & Simons, 2011).

The current regime frames its education policy on the basis of two complimentary axes: (a) a reactionary-populist approach to the aims and the content of education and (b) an authoritarian neoliberal ideology that despises teacher autonomy, and democratic imperatives, capitalising on the use-value of education, turning everything (this 'everything' includes creativity, respect for the other, etc.) into a 'skill', thereby trivialising it. One can reasonably argue that Greek education policy is at the moment dominated by reactionary-populist neoliberalism (see González-Ruibal, Alonso González & Criado-Boado, 2018), a term that wishes to draw attention to the complex entanglement between anti-

liberalism and neoliberalism. This current has resulted into a further nationalist twist in history education, ii a ban of music and art from the upper secondary school program on the basis of a perceived 'lack of relevance' and 'popularity and the marginalisation of a number of subjects related to democratic citizenship education, social sciences and sociology. iii Recently, the President of the British Sociological Association (BSA), Professor Susan Halford, has sent a letter to the Greek Education Minister expressing serious concerns about the political decision to repeal the subject of Sociology in schools. iv

We are aware that in presenting this account we might be seen as having succumbed to 'left melancholy', refusing "to come to terms with the particular character of the present" (Brown, 1999, p. 20), remaining attached to "a certain narcissism with regard to one's past political attachments and identity" (Brown, 1999, p. 20). We would like to refuse this, arguing instead for the need to search for forms of 'hyper-and pessimistic activism' (Foucault, 1983) that create openings that permit us to pursue 'Education in a wide sense', namely, "reflection, meaning, critique, problematization, trust, paradoxes, and creativity – processes that seem completely beyond the logic that quantifies and measures." (Straume, 2011, p. 252). To this end, it is a source of hope that Chalari's book, despite its limitations, has brought to the fore voices of teachers who are strongly committed to 'education in a wide sense'.

Notes

¹ Examples would include *participatory assessment as learning* practices (e.g. Partti, Westerlund & Lebner, 2015; Kanellopoulos, 2020), pedagogical documentation as an alternative form of participatory evaluation (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013), or the radical potential of the perspective on program evaluation that Saville Kushner put forward quite some time ago (Kushner, 2000).

¹ https://www.keeptalkinggreece.com/2019/09/06/education-minister-history-textbooks/

 $^{^{1} \}underline{\text{https://www.ethnos.gr/ellada/111152}} \underline{\text{katargisi-kallitehnikon-mathimaton-ti-ishyei-kai-ti-apanta-ypoyrgeio-paideias}}, \underline{\text{https://www.alfavita.gr/panellinies/342928}} \underline{\text{panelladikes-me-tilekpaideysi-i-enishytiki-gia-ta-eidika-mathimata}}$

 $^{^{1}\ \}underline{\text{https://www.alfavita.gr/ekpaideysi/346046_ekpaideytikoi-epanafora-ton-mathimaton-poy-katargithikan-sta-lykeia}$

¹ https://es.britsoc.co.uk/bsa-president-writes-to-the-greek-minister-for-education-about-the-closure-of-sociology-in-high-schools-2/

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