Social Welfare Issues in Southern Europe

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Chapter 5
An analysis of pertinent issues in education in Southern Europe

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Rhythms of life, environmental sustainability and migration

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Impacts of colonialism

This region has been under the influence of Northern colonialism and subject to influences in education coming from the North. Of course, countries such as Italy have had influences, in both provision (especially its much-lauded early childhood education) and critique, emerging from within the country itself, namely the Emilia Romagna experiments with regard to Early Childhood Education (Lazzari, 2012), the work of important practitioners such as Danilo Dolci regarding community learning and action, Aldo Capitini regarding grassroots democracy, and Don Lorenzo Milani and the students at Barbiana with respect to critique of (and also provision of alternatives to) the bourgeoisie-oriented public school system (Guimarães et al., 2018). Other countries in the region have also produced their own forms of critique and educational possibilities but many, such as Malta, have imported models from colonial centres, either Paris or London.

Of course, colonial educational influences in education do not occur in a straightforward manner as many intermediary factors come into play, rendering the process of colonial cultural transmission messier than one would *prima facie* be led to believe. Compromises with local concerns and conditions, as well as religious mores, have always taken place. Most importantly, this region has offered its own contributions to education. These contributions are often conditioned by climatic conditions, including open air cultural manifestations that involve a certain degree of learning (think of the *suk* and gatherings there, amphitheatres associated with the Greco-Roman traditions or fiestas and community celebrations). They are also associated with popular education which manifests itself in different ways in various parts of the geographical global South. They include epistemologies that have been appropriated by the North and West, often patented and without recognition of the sources from which they derive, thus leading to what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2017) terms *cognitive injustice*. It is heartening to see sociologists who, like him, have worked in Southern contexts (in de Sousa Santos's case in his native Portugal and Brazil), thereby affirming southern epistemologies in this regard and their potential for alternative approaches to education ranging

from community to higher education. It is even more heartening to see sociologists of similar standing, located in the Anglophone world, namely Raewyn Connell, affirm the importance of Southern theory and epistemology as antidotes to the neoliberal juggernaut present in formal education, including Higher Education (Connell, 2019), in many parts of the world under the spell of what Santos (2006) calls 'hegemonic globalisation'.

In this chapter we identify and discuss education issues that are pertinent in Southern Europe (and the Mediterranean), namely rhythms of life and congenial educational systems, environmental sustainability and migration – the last two being quite intertwined. Further to this discussion of the impact of colonialism on the region a critical examination of Southern European social movements with educational outcomes and country-specific examples of education contexts will follow leading to flagging the pertinence of rhythms of life and congenial educational systems, environmental sustainability and migration. The chapter concludes with a Gramscian-informed invitation to consider a critical engagement with essentialism, alterity, caricatures, exoticization and (mis)representation as salient points of an agenda for studies on education in Southern Europe in a post-crisis context.

Social movements with educational purpose in Southern Europe

There is much that can emerge from southern alternatives to education, especially popular education associated with social movements that often evolve in reaction to totalitarianism. One such example can be found in Portugal, demonstrated by the learning dimensions of activities carried out by the social movement Que se Lixe a Troika! (To hell with the Troika!) which was also responsible for the organization of some of the largest demonstrations to take place in Portugal since the 1974 Democratic Revolution (Guimarães et al., 2018).

In Portugal, civil society organizations (CSOs) that emerged after the 1974 *coup d'état*, became

> popular education collectives. A strong social movement triggered a push towards adult education and a central state office directed by Alberto Melo put administration at the service of popular education groups with the hope that they could be the basis of a future adult education system.
>
> (Guimarães and Fragoso, 2010: 23)

However, the process of rebuilding the state from 1976 onwards neglected CSOs (in terms of funding, human resources and the provision of technical support in particular) pushing CSOs out to a 'suspicious ghetto' (Silva, 1990). Although they did not completely disappear,

major global trends, the political guidance delivered by the EU and the specific orientations of the successive national governments to speak of social emancipation in Portugal today, is to go beyond policy. Examples of social emancipation practices could be found as the exception.

(ibid.: 29)

In Italy, adult education and learning (AEL) initiatives have been associated with 'sites of contestation open to the perpetually contradictory processes of both domestication and empowerment' (Guimarães et al., 2018: 61) that respond with resistance to a conventional legacy of AEL as an instrument of integration of a previously dispersed population into the new post-Italian Risorgimento state (ibid.).

Popular education associated with social movements can serve as an antidote to neoliberal education focused on the market and that widespread concept, lifelong learning (Guimarães et al., 2018) which, contrary to the old United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) discourse of Lifelong Education (Faure et al., 1972) that had a Third World ring to it, is very much Western oriented. It promotes a notion of learning in order to earn and to be employable that is very much consonant with the industrial concerns of the North, a point which Rosa Maria Torres (2013) from Ecuador has raised. There is not enough space here to list examples of antidotes to Northern neoliberal education which emerged from the Mediterranean including Southern Europe (see Mayo, 2018, 2019; Santos, 2017). However, given the interest of this edited volume in post-crisis Southern Europe, Santos's (2016) discussion of European complexity is notable in view of his critique of postcolonial scholars arguing for a monolithic Europe or Western modernity. Conversely, Santos identifies internal colonialism in Europe that has 'become very visible with the financial crisis' (ibid.: 17) that hit the countries of Southern Europe.

Theoretical 'indebtness'?

Regarding the impact of the social science thinkers on the sociology of education, especially Marx, Weber and Durkheim, who are recognized, alongside Comte, as the founding figures of 'classical sociology', Santos (2017) heralds the work of Tunisian historian-cum-social analyst, Ibn Khaldun. He gives examples of how his notion of solidarity has been echoed, without any acknowledgement whatsoever, by Emile Durkheim, going on to say something to this effect: do you expect a nineteenth-century French scholar to acknowledge the intellectual influence of a fourteenth-century North African Muslim living and working in a territory that would eventually (in 1881) become a French protectorate (around the time that Durkheim was writing)? This renders appropriate Mahmoud Salem Elsheikh's term 'the debtor's syndrome' (1999: 38). In Elsheikh's case, it is the indebtedness of the West to Islamic and Arab (not to be conflated) thought.

A Southern European/Mediterranean perspective is needed to counter the issue of historical amnesia and to convey a sense of cognitive justice by

highlighting the contributions of Southern thinkers, who might well have borrowed and elaborated their concepts on the basis of other contributions (Bernal, 1987), to what we erroneously regard as the fund of knowledge of 'Western civilization'. There is ample work from Spanish, Italian and Arab authors to lend authority to these demands for cognitive justice and here we would include, together with Mahmoud Salem Elsheikh, an Egyptian who spent most of his scholarly and political life in Italy, the likes of Miguel Asin Palacios and Antonio Gramsci. The latter is Southern European, hailing from Sardinia, and has had an impact on sociological and educational thought (Mayo, 2015). These contributions need to be highlighted because they have been hidden from general consciousness or given lip service in Western-dominated disciplines, either through appropriation/misappropriation or through their suffering *epistemicide* (another Santos term), as with Indigenous knowledges from Africa, India and the Americas.

To this end, and informed by the above-mentioned under-represented theoretical influences hailing from Southern Europe and Mediterranean contexts, this chapter's discussion critically engages with select issues deemed pertinent to contemporary educational systems and contexts in Southern Europe; more specifically rhythms of life, migration and climate change/environmental sustainability.

Rhythms of life

Many countries on the northern side of the Mediterranean and also Portugal (which is not Mediterranean *in stricto sensu* but which shares a Mediterranean Latin atmosphere), are subject to educational directives emerging from the European Union (EU). The Union has been criticized for imposing its Northern and Western dominated systems (Guimarães et al., 2018; Guimarães and Fragoso, 2010) that are more suited to the climate and mode of living in North and Central Europe than of Southern Europe, whose traditional rhythms of life are more suited to certain climatic conditions described as a variant of the sub-tropical. Discussing education in the context of climatic conditioning of rhythms of life is a key theme missing from most conventional analysis of social welfare issues in Southern Europe (as well as other areas of inquiry and discourses, such as sociology of education and critical sociology of education).

One key source of influence here is the French *annals* historian, Ferdinand Braudel who associated climate and vegetation with specific rhythms of life throughout the Mediterranean region (1972: 236). Drawing on Braudel (1985, 1972), Godfrey Baldacchino stated that

> humankind's clear penchant for claiming agency, legacy and impact, the solid and resolute impact of geography and climate on human events is often trivialised or under-rated. And yet, these geophysical forces have shaped and constrained societies – as they implacably continue to do …

> Sitting back, and fumbling with the magnification of the lens that guides
> our social analysis, we are reminded of the staying power of location, of
> material resourcefulness, of environmental heritage.
>
> (2016: 5)

Referring specifically to Malta and the surrounding central Mediterranean (is)lands, Baldacchino added, 'This geographical destiny is enhanced by the triple circumstances of smallness, islandness and jurisdiction' (ibid.: 6).

A recent corpus of environmental sociology literature can also inform us about rhythms of life in Southern Europe and the relevance of these in understanding education in Southern European countries and related stakeholders, the dynamics at play, welfare and policy design, provision and evaluation. For example, research on whether EU accession empowered environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs) in Southern European Malta revealed an uneven process resulting from intersections between legal frameworks, civil society mobilization, political party influences, type of ENGOs involved (in terms of extent to which ENGOs would be 'Europeanized') and the specific environmental issues (Briguglio, 2015).

Such studies illuminate overlaps between the aims of environmental sociology and those of research (sociological and beyond) on education in Southern Europe. For example, understanding the social construction of environmental problems, has been described as 'imperative for environmental issues to reach agendas' (Briguglio, 2012: 475). Informative to the study of education in Southern Europe is also how environmental sociology lends itself as an 'analytical tool for politics which aims to unite social justice with environmental justice. This can be of great value both to campaigners for human rights as well as to those who adopt an ecocentric approach' (ibid.: 475).

Alas, thus far, these works appear to have had little influence on the sociology of education and social welfare analysis with education concerns, save for work specifically focusing on the Mediterranean (e.g. Sultana, 1995) and a more recent special issue of the journal *Comparative Education* entitled 'Comparative Studies in Education in Southern Europe', in which special issue editors Donatella Palomba and Carlo Cappa (2018) acknowledge Southern Europe's 'peculiar geopolitical position' (2018: 435), while contributors such as Ana Isabel Madeira imply the relevance of Southern European rhythms of life when arguing that '[o]ur experience, as people of the South, tells us that there are no universal principles detached from real contexts' (2018: 460).

Migration and climate change

Migration has been one of the greatest phenomena affecting countries located around the Mediterranean for quite some time now (see Chapter 1 in this volume). Together with climate change, it is an urgent issue of global

resonance and especially of Southern European/Mediterranean resonance. It is impossible to consider education in these countries without discussing migration. The number of people who traverse the central Mediterranean beggars belief with tragedies being part and parcel of this process. The reasons for people to migrate to Europe have been formulated time and time again. Apart from female genital mutilation, religious fundamentalism and civil wars, the latter fuelled further by a Western-based arms industry, agricultural imbalances caused by massive subsidies to European and US farmers to the detriment of those languishing in the tricontinental world (Latin America, Africa and Asia), legacies of colonial underdevelopment (Rodney, 1973) and the colonial indoctrination of Southern subjects referring to the North and West as the repository of the good life (i.e. the Eldorado), there is the very alarming situation of climate change and environmental degradation.

As argued in an article on lifelong learning and the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (English and Mayo, 2019), we are likely to witness an exponential increase in migration from South to North, and from South to South. Capitalism, especially through corporations and their irresponsibility, exacerbates the 'greenhouse effect' and its social ramifications. Disputes over resources can easily lead to wars (Empson, 2016: 1–2), once again stoked by a Western-based arms industry (see Mayo, 2019: 81). Furthermore, countries in the South, riven by the threat of militant Islam and confronted by strongmen (Gaddafi, Assad), have constituted playgrounds for Western intrusion, a huge market for the arms industry and therefore civil wars, as in Libya and Syria, leading to mass migration – certainly in the latter case.

All this makes desperate mass migration, through the Mediterranean, rise exponentially. This has wide implications for the politics of schooling as reaction takes the form of rising right-wing populism and fascism with their implications for national educational policies. The possible impact of these conditions on educational policies in southern countries, and their underlying political influences, merit research attention and are key to social welfare research, policy and practices; particularly if informed by a sociology of education from a Southern European perspective. Of course, it would not be unique to this region and has wider resonance (populism is a feature of politics worldwide). The challenge here is for the evolution of an educational strategy deriving from a sociology of education discourse running counter to current right-wing populist positions. People migrating bring with them more than labour power and potential. They carry learning, knowledge and wisdom traditions, described as the 'Portability of Cultures' (Mayo, 2019: 78).

Moving forward

Critical Southern European (including Mediterranean) sociology of education and related or broader social welfare analysis would, in this context, benefit from a wider discussion of Antonio Gramsci's 'Southern Question' having

resonance beyond Italy. In discussions around this issue in a broader Mediterranean context (Mayo, 2007, 2015), points for an educational agenda and strategy for critical education were formulated. In this section we propose some of the above-mentioned points with a new interest in how they could inform the development of an agenda for studies on education in Southern Europe (and the Mediterranean region) that critically counters/engages with the following:

Essentialism

Studying the variegations and cultures that flourished as a result of hybridization and cultural cross-currents is key to countering essentialist notions of immigrants, Islam(s), Arabs, Africans, Blacks, etc. Gramsci questioned teacher preparation programmes in Italy and their ability to steer teachers and their students away from such stereotyping. In his trenchant criticism of the popular literature of his time, Gramsci instructed us to learn about migrants not only by understanding their predicament in the context of destination, but also by studying carefully the context of origin (Gramsci, 1975: 2201, q. 23, fn 9). It is important to look at the existential conditions that forced the person or persons concerned to leave their country or region in the first place in order to seek pastures new elsewhere (Mayo, 2020: 40). This is to grapple with the complexity involved yet not to yield to totalizing generalizations and stereotyping of the persons or groups concerned. For instance, life in and throughout Africa and among Africans is much more complex than any set of ideas would make us believe, prone as people are to essentializing. The title of Handel Kashope Wright's 2012 chapter, 'Is this an African I see before me?' that was borrowed from the dagger scene in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* seems very apt in this context (Mayo and Vittoria, 2021: 94).

Alterity

This should include, but of course not be limited to, knowledge of the different religions of the Mediterranean, including the religions which immigrants bring with them from other areas such as sub-Saharan Africa. Once again, as with Gramsci's portrayal of the Southern regions and islands in Italy, one must also avoid romanticizing these religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam and African). They should be subjected to critical scrutiny.[1]

Additionally, critical engagement with alterity should invest in research on faith-based education provision, most relevant to countries of Southern Europe where Catholic and to some extent Muslim and Hebrew systems of education make their presence strongly felt in denominational schools, public schools in certain places and others that are attached to mosques. The latter grouping is particularly pronounced owing to the mass influx of immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa and sub-Saharan African in very

recent years. This is a particularly pertinent theme for education, in its wider contexts, including non-formal education, in Southern Europe.

Critical engagement with alterity should also be cognizant of intersections between religions and historical epochs. For example, Gramsci writes about historical incidences of sustenance derived from modernizing tendencies in Islam and Buddhism (Gramsci, 1975: 2090). Today, we can revisit this question with interest in the relationship between Islam, traditional African religions (since many migrants who cross the Mediterranean come from sub-Saharan Africa) and (post-)modernity; post-financial crisis, post-pandemic contexts, etc.

Caricatures, exoticization and (mis)representation

Gramsci decried Northern conceptions of the Southerner that allege 'biological inferiority' and Northern misrepresentations of legitimate struggles of Southerners who were denied land by the Northern 'liberators'. In a similar vein, unravelling (mis)representations/conceptions of the other that reflect 'positional superiority' on the part of those who provide the representation (Said, 1978) is key to critical studies on education in Southern Europe, particularly with reference to (mis)representations of immigrants heading to Southern Europe from the southern shores of the Mediterranean and beyond.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed issues that are pertinent to understanding education in terms of legacies, provision, stakeholders in post-crisis Southern Europe, namely rhythms of life and congenial educational systems, environmental sustainability and migration. The chapter's broad analysis of Southern European regional geopolitical and cultural dynamics and country-specific examples (e.g. Greece, Italy, Portugal, etc.) drew on a Gramscian perspective and other (often subaltern) Southern European/Mediterranean scholarly contributions to learning, knowledge and social science, particularly those committed to 'cognitive justice'.

In response to the present volume's attention to pronounced changes and processes in the Southern European region in a post-financial crisis/austerity context the impact of economic crisis, migration, precariousness and diversity (among other phenomena and dynamics), the analysis was followed by the presentation of salient points for an agenda for studies on education in Southern Europe (and the Mediterranean region) that critically engages with essentialism, alterity, caricatures, exoticization and (mis)representation.

Note

1 Cursory analysis reveals ambivalence in this regard. For instance, in Malta advanced secondary school learning outcomes (Level 9) of Ethics – the subject offered to those who opt out of (the traditionally compulsory subject) Religion – feature some learning

outcomes that imply potential for critical engagement, such as 'I can discuss the positions, for and against the sanctity of life doctrine, and discuss it in light of life and death issues' and 'I can assess how gender differences are treated within the Maltese society'. Conversely, learning outcomes such as 'I can discuss how the three monotheistic religions deal with life and death issues' imply more content-based 'banking education' instances (Learning Outcomes Framework, n.d.).

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