

YOUTH IDENTITY AND MIGRATION

CULTURE, VALUES AND SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

*EDITED BY
FETHI MANSOURI*



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Melbourne
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Introduction

Contextualising migrant youth experiences in émigré societies

Fethi Mansouri

The lives of young people represent wider social, cultural and economic experiences. These experiences are affected by the processes of globalisation – technological advances, economic development, demographics – as well as natural disasters and conflicts. Young people, broadly defined in this book as those between the ages of 10 and 24, currently represent 27 per cent of the world's total population (Population Reference Bureau 2006). The lives of these young people at present are more complex and varied than ever before as they come face-to-face with sociocultural issues, economic challenges, health risks and security threats as well as new opportunities through education, digital technologies and productive diversity. Contemporary times are characterised as being high risk, requiring individuals to have both the capacity to make choices and be more resilient in the context of rapid change locally and globally. Youth, therefore, represents an optimal group for examining complex social and cultural phenomena.

Young people in general and migrant youth in particular are the next generation of workers and citizens in increasingly more cosmopolitan societies. They are both agents of social change and highly vulnerable, whose life chances are shaped not only by education, but also through school life choices and opportunities. As subjects of mediated discourses affecting, and in many cases shaping, identity formation, the representational worlds young people inhabit are in need of focused attention and analysis. The

current Australian Government inquiry into the effect of increased sexualisation of girls in the media demonstrates the significance of research into youth culture.

Against this backdrop of increased opportunities and risks, the key objective of this book is to explore identity and wellbeing among young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. The chapters collectively explore some of the most critical issues in research into second-generation migrants, namely identity formation, social connectedness and the role of social policy and intervention in dealing with these complex issues. The book also focuses on the problematised nature of certain migrant groups, such as Muslim youth in the West. The book consists of thirteen chapters organised around three broad thematic sections, namely: migrant youth identity and social connectedness, focusing on cultural adaptation and wellbeing among migrant youth; global and educational perspectives on the social experiences of migrant youth, focusing in particular on comparative insights from Australia, France and the US; and the interaction of migrant youth with new media and its implications for social connectedness. As these three themes provide the central points for the various contributions to this book, this introductory chapter will discuss briefly the nature of arguments and debates surrounding these issues.

Cultural adaptation and wellbeing among migrant youth

Contemporary societies, characterised as they are by increased cultural and religious diversity, are facing significant challenges in understanding and 'managing' the process of migrant settlement and integration (Skrbis, Baldassar & Poynting 2007). The conceptual approaches to the social phenomena of hyper- or super-diversity have been varied and diverse focusing on a plethora of interrelated issues, ranging from belonging as an affective perspective (Hage 2003), to diversity as an accelerated globalisation process (Vertovec 2007), to citizenship from a sociocultural viewpoint (Kymlicka 1995; Stevenson 2000; Turner 2000) to connectedness and inclusion from a social angle (Putnam 2001).

The challenge of understanding the implications of super-diversity in our increasingly pluralist societies is magnified further in the context of migrant youth (included in the term 'second-generation youth', as this group is commonly referred to as being of 'migrant' background). The historical trend characterising social policy in this context has been one of associating migrants with ethnic/homeland cultures in a way that portrayed such cultures as potentially problematic for the realisation of full and active citizenship. Perhaps the key social policy area where such problematic assumptions can be observed is education. A quick scan of education policies in terms of both content and approaches reveals a tendency to ignore the various cultural perspectives that student populations are increasingly exhibiting in Western multicultural societies.

This edited volume will try to reflect on this and other complex issues that characterise the social experiences of migrant youth in émigré societies. In fact, Mansouri and Francis in chapter one attempt to locate key conceptual debates pertaining to hybridity, intercultural identity and cultural adaptation within wider intellectual and research agendas. They examine the role social policy can play in shaping the life opportunities of young people. The roles of both government agencies as well as non-government organisations are considered and linked back to settlement outcomes among differing types of migrant youth.

Hunter's chapter zooms in on refugee young people who, by the very nature of their experiences, are typically typologised as transnational migrants (United Nations, cited in Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues 2005, pp.vi–vii; Coventry et al. 2002). Hunter raises the question of how this transnational experience may affect the settlement outcomes and patterns of refugee youth. Hunter's chapter reviews the transnationalism literature for clues as to the foundational concepts and categories that could be engaged in a measurement of refugee young people's transnational activity. She interrogates the role of transnational activities and what transnationalism means to young refugees in the context of settlement. Hunter also considers employing non-elite notions of cosmopolitanism to deepen our understanding of the social experience of settlement at both local and transnational levels. In this sense Hunter attempts to respond to Cheah and Robbins (1998, p.1) when they state that cosmopolitanism 'should be extended to transnational experiences that are particular rather than universal and that are unprivileged – indeed, often coerced'.

In line with argument on the role of transnationalism in shaping migrant youth settlement experiences, Mansouri and Miller's chapter further explores identity formation and social integration amongst migrant youth in Australia. The chapter investigates the attitudes of first- and second-generation migrant youth and the ways in which they articulate their intercultural identities and multiple senses of attachment to place, community and society. Engaging with current theoretical debates on cultural identity, Mansouri and Miller draw on empirical data to explore the role of formal and informal social structures and networks in shaping migrant youth paths towards cultural adaptation and social connectedness.

Whilst this first section of the book considers and explores more general theoretical and conceptual issues, the next section focuses on the education experiences of migrant youth and draws on some useful comparative international research.

The social experiences of migrant youth: educational and global perspectives

In terms of education experiences and the issue of race and identity, Arber's chapter explores new directions for the discussion of identity and difference in schools in times of immense demographic, technological and

global change. Arber focuses on the ways that community representatives discuss local and international students and the impact of this discursive construction on the school community. Arber reports on recent literatures that describe communities, such as those of schools, as ones of perception and materiality whereby some are included differently from others. Real attempts by school representatives to understand the academic and pastoral needs of all students become confused as these requirements are negotiated in relation to government demands for economy and accountability, student demands for international and Western education and the marketing and educational imperatives of the school. In Arber's view, discourses of identity and difference take on new forms at the global-local interaction, which lead to the implementation of international programs that might have consequences for the everyday lives of school community members. International students, therefore, may find their otherness inscribed and embodied in a schizophrenic process of antagonism and desire shaped by powerful discourses of identity and difference, cosmopolitanism and commodification.

Not too dissimilar to Arber's summation of the discursive representation of international students, Santoro's chapter deals with the changing student populations in our educational institutions and emerging new challenges for schooling systems and teachers, worldwide. Santoro reminds us that in the last twenty-five years the ethnic and cultural make-up of communities has undergone rapid and radical change in émigré countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, Britain, Europe and many other parts of the world. The unprecedented movements of refugees and immigrants across national borders in many regions of the world, as well as the development of global labour and education markets, has resulted in communities, some of which have traditionally been culturally homogenous, becoming increasingly diverse. This super-diversity (Vertovec 2007) has implications for race relations as well as educational policies.

Mansouri, Jenkins and Leach's chapter reports on a project that attempted to come to grips with high levels of cultural diversity in secondary school settings. The chapter is based on a longitudinal project that looked into the management of cultural diversity in secondary schools. It discusses how Arab and Muslim Australian students and their families understand and construct their own social and educational experiences in relation to wider social discourses. The chapter goes beyond the mere description of social and education challenges to outline key pedagogical interventions and community-school partnership initiatives that have been collaboratively developed to effect positive change in the multifaceted schooling experience of migrant youth.

Whilst much of the discussion in this book reflects issues and developments in Australia, a number of international perspectives are also provided. Indeed, Latrache's chapter examines identity politics as well as discrimination and the struggle to belong among Arab youth in the United States and in France. This is especially important in the light of recent international events and the 2007 presidential elections in France that have

highlighted controversial and contested connections between issues of minority status and immigration policies on the one hand and national security and identity on the other hand. Focusing on the issue of educational disadvantage in Australia and France, Windle's chapter also looks at how academic and social integration are managed in contexts that combine high levels of ethnic diversity with educational disadvantage across two contrasting systems. Windle argues that when the rewards of education are few, the task of finding meaning in school becomes particularly challenging, and students and teachers alike tend to emphasise the social and affective dimensions of school life as sources of value and identity. The chapter highlights the fact that working-class, migrant-background students whose parents have little experience with senior secondary school are particularly vulnerable to the messages they receive from schools.

Both Latrache's and Windle's contributions show that, irrespective of the national policy framework and irrespective of the constitutional arrangements adopted by the host country, migrant youth are susceptible to long-term social exclusion and economic disadvantage if their educational potential is not fully realised.

Migrant youth: the new media and social connectedness

But like education, young people's access to and consumption of new media is emerging as one of the key factors shaping their sense of identity and belonging in their local environments and offering opportunities for connectedness at the transnational level.

Hopkins and Dolic's chapter deals with first- and second-generation migrant youth growing up in Australia's multicultural society, and their use of new media technologies for communication both locally and internationally. The access to and use of new media seems to facilitate a particular way of 'being' that challenges traditional notions of identity. Hopkins and Dolic argue that being brought up in a diasporic community, but also within a global youth media culture, can mean that the experiences of young people and their views towards community and ethnicity are very different from that of their parents. In fact, because of their greater participation in the educational system and the broader society at large, many of these young people have become bilingual, bi-cultural and ultimately exhibit and experience vastly different ways of life from those experienced by their elders. They have had to build on their ability to move interchangeably between various social realms and consciously switch their language and behaviour (Elley & Inglis 1995). Yet, for these young people to feel included and recognised rather than alienated and socially excluded, a better understanding of the processes that inform the creation and maintenance of both heritage and Australian mainstream cultures is needed. As already discussed by Mansouri, Jenkins and Leach, it seems that this is especially the case for migrant youth of Muslim background, who face a particular challenge in

maintaining their cultural heritage in spite of an increasingly hostile public and media discourse.

Going beyond new media and technologies, Khoo's chapter examines the social connectedness of migrant youth in comparison with their Australian-born peers, as measured by their social and support networks and participation in social and community groups and activities. Khoo's analysis makes use of data extracted from the 2006 General Social Survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. As Khoo notes, the survey collected nationally representative data on friendship and support networks, attendance at community events, active involvement in various types of social and community groups and organisations, and engagement in a variety of civic activities, allowing for a comparison of migrant youth with Australian-born youth on these issues. This chapter shows that while most migrant youth have social and support networks on which they can call for assistance, young migrants from non-English-speaking countries are not as well socially connected as other migrant youth and Australian-born youth. Khoo's key argument is that migrant youth who are not employed are particularly at risk of not having family and friends on whom they are able to call for support and assistance.

Focusing specifically on Arab Australian youth, Toohey's chapter reports on an initiative of the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY), 'Take a Closer Look', a project that explores further the serious concerns held by youth and family support workers in Melbourne's North. The project focuses specifically on the social disengagement of second-generation Australian Lebanese young people. Toohey describes the wide consultations that helped to identify specific problems experienced by Australian Lebanese young people and their families. Toohey's chapter explores the connection between the social disengagement on one hand and particular approaches to service provision and intervention on the other.

In his chapter on identity formation among Pacific Islanders, Francis argues that for young people from Pacific Island backgrounds, the transnational ties they maintain to other young people in the diaspora are as important in the creation and development of identity as those they maintain to the homeland. These ties affect identity formation and belonging in new and interesting ways. In order to illustrate this phenomenon, Francis focuses on the involvement of young people from Pacific Island backgrounds in gangs in Australia. The chapter considers the racialisation of migrant youth in public opinion and the role heritage culture can play in providing opportunities for creating a sense of self-worth and belonging.

Perhaps one of the most pressing issues facing migrant youth in contemporary Australian society is that of discrimination, in all its manifestations, and its impact on social health and wellbeing. The chapter by Paradies, Forrest, Dunn, Pedersen and Webster draws on the work of two ongoing collaborations – Challenging Racism: The Anti-Racism Project and a program of work being undertaken by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth). The authors explore the link between racism and ill health and then examine promising strategies and approaches to

addressing this. They conclude by summarising the state of research in this field and detailing existing and future opportunities in research and policy on racism and youth health in Australia.

Conclusion

This book attempts to bring together a diverse array of perspectives and insights in an attempt to provide a deeper understanding of the multifaceted process of migrant settlement in culturally pluralist societies. The various contributions collectively paint a picture that is full of hope for a more positive future (with better access to education, settlement services and new media technologies) whilst providing insights into major challenges in the area of public media, racism and racialisation of youth problems.

The key outcome of this book is that the patterns of settlement and integration amongst migrant youth are extremely diverse. As such, one-dimensional positivist representations are bound to fail to capture the complex processes of inclusion and exclusion in the wider societal setting that affect the individual young person who happens to be of 'migrant' background. In other words, the cultural frames of reference and identities of migrant youth are subjectively negotiated by the extent to which 'meaning is applied to self, others and the world' (Elsden-Clifton 2006). Failure to recognise this subjective agency can lead to misdirected policy formulation and intervention that in the long term would exacerbate the situation rather than help to deal with it.

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Part 1

Cultural adaptation and wellbeing among migrant youth

The key objective of this book is to explore identity and wellbeing among young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. The chapters collectively explore some of the most critical issues in research into second-generation migrants, namely identity formation, social connectedness and the role of social policy and intervention in dealing with these complex issues. The book also focuses on the problematised nature of certain migrant groups, such as Muslim youth in the West. The book's thirteen chapters are organised around three broad thematic sections, namely: migrant youth identity and social connectedness, focusing on cultural adaptation and wellbeing among migrant youth; global and educational perspectives on the social experiences of migrant youth, focusing in particular on comparative insights from Australia, France and the US; and the interaction of migrant youth with new media and its implications for social connectedness. The book addresses a critical gap in the literature on the cultural, social and economic aspects of migrant youth integration into Western societies.



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