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**Youth, family and education: Exploring the Greek case of parentocracy**

**Dr. Eugenia Katartzi**

**Abstract**

Based on a qualitative study conducted in austerity-stricken Greece the paper provides a micro-level exploration of the mechanics of intergenerational transmission of (dis)advantage. Utilising the Bourdieusian toolbox the paper enquires into familial practices through the lens of young people's perceptions, focusing on the mobilisation of capitals, the inculcation and transformation of habitus taking place in the Greek educational field. In-depth interview material unpacks the pedagogic efforts young people and their families make, indicating that these are contingent on the varied volume and composition of capitals and the distinct distances from necessity that in turn constrain or afford the exercise of agency and the investments in the academic market. Further, the analysis sheds light on young people's accounts of educational and occupational expectations illustrating how these are tightly interweaved with familial legacies and parental wishes, and underpinned by the projects of distinction, mobility and respectability through education.

**Keywords:** Young people, capitals, habitus, field, parents, expectations

**Introduction: Families and education**

Scholars have long brought under scrutiny the transmission of privilege occurring at the interface of the institutional fields of education and family and the ways in which this interplay mediates patterns of social mobility and reproduction of inequalities (Boudon, 1974; Bourdieu 1973; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979;1990). More recent studies in different national contexts have demonstrated the impact of parental background on educational outcomes (Bodovski, 2010; Croll, 2004; Gouvias, Katsis and Limakopoulou, 2012), while qualitative researchers have examined the mechanisms via which parental advantage engenders distinct educational possibilities, documenting the strategies parents put in action in order to achieve a head-start for their offspring and cultivate class distinction (Allatt, 1993; Ball, 2003; Devine, 2004; Gewirtz et al, 1995; Lareau, 2002; 2003; Reay 1998; Sriprakash et al. 2016; Vincent and Ball, 2007).

Based on a qualitative study conducted in austerity-stricken Greece, the paper seeks to contribute to this scholarship by providing a fine-grained and contextualized account of the family, youth and education nexus. The specificities of educational *field*, in which educational opportunities are heavily dependent on parental legacies (Fragoudaki, 1985; Papakonstantinou 2003), render Greece a case par excellence of *parentocracy* (Brown, 1990) and therefore a singularly fertile ground for the inquiry into the linkages between family and education. The paper thus offers a micro-level exploration of the workings of intergenerational transmission of (dis)advantage, drawing upon in-depth interviews with Greek young people differentially positioned in social space. It qualitatively examines familial practices, in the form of mobilisation of resources, inculcation of dispositions and shaping of expectations, through the lens of young people's perceptions and experiences.

The section that follows details the study's theoretical approach and the socio-cultural specificities of the Greek educational field. Next, the methodological approach is outlined, before proceeding to the analysis of selected young people's narratives of family capital mobilisation and educational and professional expectations.

### **Capitals, habitus and field in the Greek case of parentocracy**

The study utilises the Bourdieusian conceptual triad of *field*, *capitals*, *habitus* as tools 'put into practice' (Reay,2004) to conceptualise and empirically examine the processes of intergenerational transmission of (dis)advantage taking place in the Greek context. Analytical attention is paid to the manifold *capitals* social agents possess; the *economic capital*, all the wealth that can be ultimately converted into money; the *cultural capital* in its three states a) the *embodied*, as in the form of knowledge, taste, modes of presentation such as speech, competence, social etiquette b) the *objectified*, as in goods and objects, and c) the *institutionalized cultural capital*, in the form of educational qualifications; and lastly the *social capital*, the resources accrued by virtue of membership in groups and social networks (Bourdieu, 1986).

What is also of interest in the present article is the interplay between capital, habitus and field - mapped graphically in the formula '(Habitus X Capital) + Field=Practice' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 101) - at the core of which lies the genesis of social practices. Capital in whatever guise, as

Bourdieu (1986, p.56) has argued, ‘presupposes the intervention of the habitus, as a socially constituted capacity’. Habitus is the matrix of embodied, long-lasting dispositions and inclinations the formation of which takes place via a long-running process of inculcation and osmosis (Bourdieu,1990). This however is not argue that habitus remains immutable to change; rather, any dimension of habitus may be subject to change through a ‘process of awareness and pedagogic effort’ (Bourdieu, 2002, p.29). Habitus, as Bourdieu (2002, p.31) reminds us, cannot be sufficiently understood and examined but in relation to the notion of field, which, being ‘a space of forces’, of tensions and contradictions, of struggles and competitions, contains its own dynamics for change.

While placing the analytical focus on family and education nexus, it is important to examine both concepts separately and in their interactions. In his essay *Family Spirit* (1998, pp.68-69) Bourdieu has conceptualized family as a discursive construction with no ontological essence yet with real effects on social agents’ actions and interactions. Further, family, he maintained ‘tends to function as a *field*, with its physical, economic and, above all, symbolic power relations (linked for example, to the volume and structure of the capital possessed by each member), and its struggles to hold on to and transform these relations’. It is precisely in the *familial field* that social agents start to form their habitus, which nevertheless continues to be reformulated by the pedagogic work of other institutions, the most influential of which is arguably education. Habitus, as Bourdieu (2002, p.29) has argued, ‘being a product of history, that is of social experience and education, it may be changed by history, that is by new experiences, education or training’.

Arguably, education can also be seen as a *field* in which ‘academic success is directly dependent upon cultural capital and on the inclination to invest in the academic market’ (Bourdieu, 1973, p.96). With respect to cultural capital, the process of its acquisition and accumulation covers the entire socialization period and depends ‘on the cultural capital embodied in the whole family’ (Bourdieu, 1986, p.49). In relation to the inclination towards educational investments, *habitus*, operating as a cognitive filter of perception, shapes the proclivity for further capital acquisition and attitudes towards academic institutions (Bourdieu, 1976). *Habitus* interacts with the *capitals* of variable volume and composition that families possess, and the specificities of certain

educational *fields*, resulting in certain propensity to invest time, money, effort and zeal in the educational cause (Bourdieu, 1976). The outcome of the habitus~ capital~ field interplay is a system of familial practices that is part of a wider set of reproduction strategies (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979). Notably, as other studies have indicated (Bathmaker *et al.* 2016; Bathmaker *et al.* 2013, Lareau, 2011) central to these reproduction strategies is not only the transmission of resources but also the active mobilisation and further accumulation of valued capitals by young people, in ways that cement their advantageous socio-economic position in education and labour markets.

In this paper, strategies of reproduction- the outcome of the interplay between capital and habitus- are examined in the Greek educational *field*, the institutional and socio-cultural features of which underpin and shape the contours of familial practices and young people's academic trajectories and future expectations. More specifically, the Greek educational system is characterised by a high degree of centralisation and standardisation, while it is corroded by a quasi-privatisation at the core of which lies a parallel system of private supplementary provision. This type of 'shadow' provision has been argued to spread and constitute 'a hidden form of privatisation in many education systems' (Bray and Kwo, 2013, p.481). In the Greek context the 'shadow' system consists of a network of private supplementary schools, operating in parallel and providing support to those young people mainly, but not exclusively, preparing for the nation-wide examinations (*Panhellenics*). Performance in these highly competitive examinations determines the much-hoped for admission in Higher Education (HE) restricted by a 'numerus clausus' policy (Gouvias, 1998). At a sociocultural level, the deeply-held norm and long-established practice of 'worshipping education' (Tsoukalas, 1987), along with the widely circulated discourse that constructs education as the ultimate fulcrum of social mobility (Fragoudaki, 1985), contribute to its fetishisation and feed into the particularly high demand for academic credentials. Parents are positioned as strategic actors in the ever-competitive social mobility-through-education project, with several studies documenting the fundamental role that familial background plays in facilitating HE admission through the intensive mobilisation of economic, cultural and social resources (Gouvias *et al.* 2012; Sianou-Kyrgiou 2008; Benincasa, 1998). Before proceeding to the analysis of selected youth narratives that unpack further parental involvement, the section that follows sketches the study's methodological approach.

## **Methodology**

The study upon which this paper is based was conducted in two state-funded, post-secondary educational institutions in Thessaloniki, the second biggest city of Greece located in the country's Northern region. Aligned with the study's objective to qualitatively examine the interactions among youth identities, families, education and migration, the selection of schools was based on the diversity of the student population and in consultation with the Local Education Authority. The research participants 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 gender, socio-economic and migration background. The qualitative design included observations, three focus groups, informal conversations with teachers and head-teachers and forty-six in-depth interviews with students of Greek, Albanian, Georgian and Palestinian self-identified ethnicities. The research process was developed according to ethical frameworks for working with young people (Heath *et al*, 2009). Pseudonyms were also given to research participants to protect their confidentiality and anonymity.

Given the paper's scope, the material presented here draws on the twenty-two in-depth interviews conducted with Greek young people. The interview guide was organized around four main topics; the participants' sense and narration of self, their experiences in the educational context, the role of family and parental involvement and their aspirations and imagined futures, with the paper focusing on the latter two. The interviews lasted from one to two and a half hours, they were conducted in Greek, they were audio-recorded, fully transcribed and then translated to English.

The study followed a narrative methodological approach as this places the epistemological emphasis on social agents' perceptions and sense-making processes (Lawler, 2002). The analytic method involved the identification of key themes that clustered around recurrent content, a

central tool in narrative research (Phoenix, 2013). The material reported in the following sections is organized around the unpacking of the key themes emerging out of Greek young people's interviews.

### **Mobilisation of capitals in the Greek educational field**

One of the key themes running through young people's narratives is the parental mobilisation of economic capital for buying-in private tutorial services and financing their participation in supplementary education, activities aimed at boosting educational attainment levels and maximising chances for University admission. It is worth noting that in the Greek context private investment in education takes up a substantial fraction of households' budget, outnumbering public expenditure (Psacharopoulos and Papakonstantinou 2005). Additionally, considerable amounts of economic capital are invested by parents in extra-curricular activities, with this study's participants referring to private tuition in foreign languages (mainly in English, French and German), music instruments (guitar, flute, violin etc.), dance lessons (ballet, traditional dances) and athletic activities (football, basketball, water sports and martial arts). The following account from 17-year-old George, whose parents are both middle-class self-employed professionals, sets the tone in graphically capturing family as the *sine qua non* requirement for successfully navigating the Greek educational field:

I do not believe that there are individuals who are not clever and capable, for the family can lay the foundations for ascending higher in the ladder. Financial support is needed, for you must take the examinations for University and the knowledge and preparation you get in school are not enough; you need tutorial lessons which they will reinforce your knowledge. Psychological support is also needed especially in our age, for you might divert from your goals. My parents spend so much money for me and my sister; private lessons, foreign languages, English and German; my sister's ballet classes; for my equipment in water ski they spent 1100 euros while other people hardly get by. (George,17-year-old)

This account resonates with the 'concerted cultivation', observed by Lareau (2003) in her ethnographic study of white and black American middle-class families, as this primarily involves intensive participation in structured extra-curricular activities perceived to equip children with the right knowledges, skills, attitudes and dispositions to succeed in life. In reflecting on his privileged positionality George discursively constructs family as the fundamental source of economic and emotional support. Further, the young man emphatically states the indispensability

of familial legacy to the extent that is deemed to outweigh merit and intellectual ability. This strongly resonates with Brown's thesis (1990) on *parentocracy*, portrayed as a regime wherein the resources and wishes of parents are the single most important determinant of their children's academic success. In the Greek context, parents struggle to equip their children with the skills and knowledge that the underfunded educational system does not provide, yet demands from all. Economic capital is invested by families in securing a place at selective private tutorial schools and in hiring highly qualified and experienced tutors so as to enhance their offspring's chances of entering into HE (Sianou-Kyrgiou 2008; see also Vryonides, 2007 and Symeou, 2007 on the Greek-Cypriot context).

Notably, investment in private tutoring and participation in supplementary education emerges as a strategy deployed by families with limited economic capital available at their disposal. Moreover, Greek students of lower socioeconomic background have been identified to 'spend a higher share of their family income on education than richer families' (Psacharopoulos and Papakonstantinou, 2005, p.107). The present study echoes this finding and further indicates that for less privileged students and their families mobilising considerable amounts of economic capital into the educational cause is seen as an investment necessary for enabling access to specialist and subject-specific academic knowledge, along with valuable information in regards to national examinations, the application process and the wider Higher Education landscape. This well-illustrated in Irene's case whose parents although facing financial strain invest a considerable amount of their scarce economic capital in private tutoring:

I certainly attend a private tutorial school and take private lessons especially in the subjects of my [theoretical] stream. I really trust the tutor I have there; she tells me which Universities and Schools are good to apply for, we talk about these academic stuff and I feel more secure. My parents spend quite a lot of money; I see how much they struggle to make ends meet, especially my father, but they do not have a problem spending it for my education.

In Irene's narrative is evident the strategic exercise of agency, with family economic capital, albeit in short supply, tactically mobilised to fund participation in 'shadow education' and private lessons. As other young participants like Irene have narrated this form of family



economic capital mobilisation constitutes a vital strategy for improving academic attainment and future educational chances. In addition, investment in preparatory lessons and private tutoring functions as a compensating act for endemic deficiencies in the Greek educational system and for family cultural capital that is in short supply, both in its *institutionalised* form, as exemplified by the lack of University credentials, and in its *embodied* form, manifested in the limited knowledge of tertiary education.

However, in the austerity-stricken context of Greek society investments in the educational market can be afforded by an ever-decreasing number of households. It is useful to borrow here the distinction made by Vincent *et al.* (2008) between working-class parents that ‘manage to cope’, as illustrated in Irene’s case, as opposed to those who ‘struggle to cope’. While the former exercise ‘agency strategically in their lives’ the latter are using ‘all their agency in dealing with the demands of daily lives’(pp.70-71). For young people whose parents ‘struggle to cope’, their precarious economic state coupled with spells of unemployment hinder the exercise of agency due to ‘limited economic and social resources’ (Vincent *et al.*, 2008, p.72). These participants invariably speak of their parents’ inclination to invest in the academic market as running against the limitations of their socio-economic position that ultimately obstruct the materialization of educationally facilitating strategies. Further, parental wishes are often buffered by young people themselves who, after pragmatically taking into consideration the fundamental financial constraints their parents operate within, deem the potential investment of the family’s scarce economic capital into their own academic career as a financially burdensome strategy. This narrative line is evident in the case of John, whose mother is a housewife and his father works irregularly as a waiter after having lost his job as a miner:

My parents were telling me ‘go to tutorial school; they will help you’ but I told them that even if I go there is no way I will sit down and study; I told them that I am not going for it will be waste of money. Whatever I can achieve I will do it on my own; if not, it is fine. Alright, we are not the family that has got pots of money. My father does not have a stable job; he gets some money but not enough. Therefore I did not want to overburden them. They were willing to pay but I did not want that. (John,17)

What is worth-highlighting in this narrative extract is the discursive construction of educational investments as too risky to be afforded. The financial struggles faced by young people like John and their families render the channelling of scarce economic resources into education infeasible.

Arguably, investment in the educational cause is perceived, experienced and narrated with varied degrees of taken-for-granted-ness, a corollary to the distinct *distances from necessity* (Bourdieu, 1984) young people and their families face. The varied distances from necessity are manifested on one hand in the natural and nonchalant manner in which young people from capital-rich families refer to parental investments, and on the other hand in the adjustments that capital-poor young people and their parents are forced to make in the face of intensifying financial worries and acute job insecurity afflicting large segments of Greek society.

Along with the mobilisation of economic capital, another theme featuring centrally in the participants' narratives is the mobilisation of emotional capital. Nowotny (1981) defined emotional capital as both cultural and social resources used in the frame of affective relationships. This form of capital has been argued to include the 'emotional valued assets and skills, love and affection' along with the 'expenditure of time, attention, care and concern' (Allatt, 1993, p.143). The mobilisation of emotional capital is particularly manifested in active parental involvement in the form of *within-household* and *extra-household activities*, geared towards bolstering and steering their children's educational careers. While the *within-household* involve the provision of support with homework and supervision of study time, the *extra-household activities*, located at the interface between families and educational institutions, pertain to the more formal patterns of communication with educators and head-teachers, participation in Parents' Associations and school activities.

Although the young participants of this study recounted that both of their parents were involved in their education, a gendered division of responsibilities and roles was also highlighted. Notably, mothers have long been identified as playing a key role in the 'domestic transmission of cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986, p.48; see also Reay, 1998) but also of emotional capital (Gillies,2006; Reay, 2000; Allatt, 1993; Nowotny,1981). This pattern was certainly echoed this study's participants, with mothers being portrayed as intensely involved in *within-household activities* that included tracking academic progress, encouraging study habits and casting a close eye on all education-related matters. Moreover, as argued elsewhere (author,2014) the vigilant and pressurizing parenting style, rhetorically captured by the oft-quoted phrase '*study and study and study*' enunciated in all its emphatic repetitiveness the significance these young people's

mothers attached to academic work. Paternal involvement, on the other hand, did not have the element of day-to-day direct monitoring and primarily involved *extra-household activities*, such as visiting schools to enquire about progress, attending school meetings and participating in Parents' and Guardians' Association. As Helen, whose mother is a housewife and her father runs a small business, characteristically recounted:

We always discuss with my parents about school and these sorts of matters. In the past my mother, who was at home, was helping me in primary school. In Gymnasium I used to study on my own unless I wanted to ask something specific. Yet they have been asking all the time-especially my mother- 'what happened today, did the teacher ask you anything?' and now they usually ask me how did I perform in the tests. My father was a member of the Parents and Guardians Association in Primary [school]; in Gymnasium and Lyceum he has been coming very often to school because he was really very interested in the opinion my teachers held of my progress.(Helen, 17)

Further, in the cases of young people whose parents possess limited cultural capital, a gendered division of education-related labour is also evident across their accounts of parental involvement. More specifically, mothers are narrated as expending considerable amounts of time in supporting and supervising homework, while paternal involvement takes the form of regular discussions about the young people's future professional plans and pathways. This is well illustrated in Paul's case who comes from an economic-capital rich family owning a small family business yet with limited cultural capital:

Until two years ago I used to sit along with my mother and we were doing everything together; whatever she knew; she was helping me so much, especially if I had any particular problem. Now I have tutorial lessons; my mother just says 'sit down and study; do the work for school and for tutorial lessons'; she still puts pressure on me. Whereas my father talks to me about what I am going to do in the future; he therefore with indirect manner tells me that I have to sit down and study, that it is not easy to enter University. Both of my parents now work, so they do not come to school so often, but they send their friends on their behalf, who are teachers themselves and my tutors, to ask about my progress. (Paul,17)

This case is indicative of how economic, emotional and social capital are synergistically marshalled to serve the educational cause. Not only is economic capital invested in private tutoring, but also the most educated members of familial social networks are mobilised to provide their expertise and act as *brokers* in the regular contact with schools and educators. What is noteworthy in Paul's narrative is that in addition to economic and social capital, maternal

emotional capital in the form of time, care, attention and guidance, is also activated, converted to scholastic resources conducive to academic success (see also Allatt,1993). Linked to that, a key thread running through the narratives of this study's participants involves the parental expectations and exhortations echoing and instilling the widely-shared and deeply-embedded discourse of highly valuing education that will be addressed in the following section.

### **Narratives of expectations**

On a general note, for the young participants of this study accumulating institutionalised cultural capital (Bourdieu,1986) in the form of the much-desired HE degree is constructed as the ultimate future goal, integral to their narratives of becoming educated and getting ahead. For 17-year-old *Ariadni*, with her mother being a self-employed accountant and her father a computer scientist, the Higher Education features as the unquestioningly natural path to follow:

My parents do not have a specific dream of what I will do; they want me to reach high, not to be stagnant- insofar as I have shown that I can do many things- to get ahead as much as possible, to enter University and finish a School, to find a good job. I think of becoming a teacher in Secondary schools or in Primary. I like Economics too; my mother works in this field and I would also like to follow that. (Ariadni, 17)

The pursuit of University studies and continuous self-improvement are narrated as the normative signposts guiding the young woman's prescribed way forward. Parental expectations set a generic goal frame that consists of aiming *high*, getting ahead and constantly improving oneself. Further, studying economics in her maternal footsteps can be seen to constitute part of her 'normal or banal future' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979, p.226).

Arguably, parental influence features saliently in young people's narratives of educational expectations and career plans. This is evident in the case of Panos, whose father's career as a chief executive in a large-scale engineering company functions as the archetype based on which the young man envisages his professional future in the same field. Notably, his narrative is crucially about *distinction*, working for the most prominent companies in the engineering sector,

climbing up the professional ladder and acquiring a managerial position at the top of corporate hierarchy. As he narrates:

From the first grade of Gymnasium this idea of becoming an engineer crossed my mind because my father is an engineer, graduate of the National Metsoveio Polytechnic, and I liked his job, I admired my father and I also wanted to become an engineer. My parents want me to study; to enter anywhere in a School of Engineering. They discuss about it with several specialists and they search themselves; for example my father tells me 'there is demand for this profession' or 'you should take this module, it is easier'. It is logical since they care about me to try to find the best solution for their child. In the case I don't enter here, I will go and study abroad and I am not that excited with the idea. I will consider myself successful if I take a good position and be productive in that job so as to climb up and become Chief Executive or even President. Otherwise, if I do not find this position in Greece I do not despond, in this case I will go abroad. I would not like just having a satisfactory salary and a good family. I would like to be distinguished; I always pursue that. (Panos, 17)

For the young man parental involvement is experienced and narrated as a rational quest for his best possible educational and professional pathway. Following an engineering career appears to be an enactment of his deeply ingrained *habitus*, almost a professional destiny not to be compromised at any rate. Notably, in the event of not securing a place in a Greek Higher Education Institution, an alternative course of action has already been considered that involves studying abroad. This is a well-trodden route taken by a significant number of Greek young people (Psacharopoulos, 2003) whose families possess the necessary economic resources. The pursuit of HE studies abroad is arguably one of the key family strategies (Ball, 2003) mobilised for reproducing and defending class distinction in the Greek context. Against the backdrop of deep economic recession and dwindling opportunities, in addition to studying abroad the scenario of working abroad is envisaged as integral to the pursuit of *distinction*, contrasted the latter with the mediocrity of a life marked by average achievements.

Young people from capital-rich families, being reflexively aware of their families' advantageous socio-economic position, imagine their future with a sense of control and optimism (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979). Their narratives tend to involve a strong element of continuity of their familial legacies. This is evident in the case of George, for whom athletic activities have been a vital part of his everyday life due to the fact of his father being a physical educator and owner of

a water sports academy. It is not surprising that in this familial context studies in sports science, as the young man recites, become the taken-for-granted academic path:

I thought about the profession I would like to exercise when I was thirteen and I decided to follow it in my fifteens. I have been learning about it through the job of my father and because I do sports intensively. My mother and my father told me that if I want take up my father's job it is better to study sports at University. My uncle also studied physical education and we have discussed about the University School and the profession and I liked it; I would like to work in that. (George,17)

This narrative account illustrates how parental educational and professional expectations are communicated through regular discussions about employment prospects, with persuasive tactics and expert knowledge strategically mobilised. This narrative is indicative of the alignment between young people's educational and professional expectations and parents' expectations and professional careers. This strategic alignment constitutes one of the 'many instances of the specification of the effects of class by the doxic expectations generated by a constructed family history' (Atkinson, 2011, p.341). The force of familial expectations is also starkly evident in the cases of young people with no history of University education in their family:

The profession I would like more follow is civil engineering. My family owns a construction company and I would like to get a degree in that field. My parents tell me 'do in life what you love, what you like'; they want me to enter into University; I think that every parent wants to see their child at University; and my parents want to see someone from my family so they can be proud of that [...] I do not think I could ever be anything without my parents' help. I believe that each one of us needs our parents' help who are closer to us compared to other people. (Stephen, 17)

In this young man's narrative the goal to study civil engineering is attuned with the family's construction business and deeply-rooted in the discourse that values education and the obtainment of academic credentials. Through Stephen's account becomes evident the centrality of family, with the almost umbilical bond connecting his own academic future with familial expectations. More than that, the pursuit of HE studies is narrated as a family enterprise, operating as a prime motivational engine spurring him on to strive towards University admission. A deep sense of indebtedness is felt towards his parents for the substantial efforts they make in investing and steering his academic trajectory which, if successful, is deemed to bestow pride and status upon the whole family.

The discursive construction of education as conferring honour and prestige is a recurrent trope, particularly prominent in the narratives of those participants without familial history of HE attendance. In the case of 17-year-old *Alexandra*, with her mother working as a supermarket cashier and her father being seasonally employed in the Fire Service, an intensely narrated gratitude for her parents' vital support permeates her account:

My parents want me to enter University, whichever School that is; they want to see me at University wherever that is. My mother, and my father, but mostly my mother says that 'I believe that you can make it and reach very high'. They do not tell me what to do; they do not tell me for example to become doctor; they tell me to become what I want, but to enter University, to try and make it not to stay at home and become a housewife. They would not like me getting married, like other girls do, neither just stay at home. I feel proud of my parents[pause] I feel deep inside me that for everything they have offered me I must do something better, I must have a better professional future than they had in order to avoid the same things happening to me as well. Someone needs to have a good job, to be educated- for those who are non-educated, as things have come to be, cannot do anything and are not respected at all. (*Alexandra*, 17)

Familial expectations in this young woman's account, although not steering towards a specific educational and career path, are perceived to be founded on the contrast between the professional employment prospects that University studies grant access and the circumscribed life of housework. The presence of maternal figure features saliently in *Alexandra*'s narrative echoing the findings of other studies that document the all-valuable emotional capital mothers invest in their children's education (Allatt,1993; Gillies, 2006; Nowotny, 1981; Reay,2000). In this study's participants the mobilisation of emotional capital, in the form resources of time, support and care, along with pro-educational values and high aspirations were woven into maternal practices geared at the advancement of their children. For young women like *Alexandra* obtaining a degree is not only a vital requirement for financial independence but also for social advancement and for *becoming respectable* (Skeggs,1997). Improving one's circumstances and standing, escaping the everyday financial strains and lack of respectability are thought to be achieved through educational success, indicating how the *social mobility-through-education project* in the Greek socio-cultural context where social esteem is the prerogative of the educated has the struggle for recognition threaded through it.

These narratives richly illustrated the tight interweaving of familial legacies and investments with young people's academic and professional expectations. The preceding analysis further indicated how deeply internalised the high value of education is for this study's participants whose 'centre of gravity and sense of self is rooted in education' (Ball *et al*, 1999, p.210; Ball *et al*, 2000). Getting a University degree is discursively constructed by young people from capital-rich families as a lever to defend their advantage and pursue distinction, while in the case of less advantaged participants as a collective familial project for gaining respectability and achieving upward social mobility. To conclude, young people's academic and professional expectations can be seen as the situated products of the educational and familial fields, the constellation of capitals and habitus and the opportunities and constraints that these afford.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The paper illuminated the workings of intergenerational transmission of (dis)advantage occurring at the interface between family and education through young people's narratives. In the Greek educational field, systemic deficiencies along with the established and ever-expanding 'shadow education' sector, have long laid the foundations for positioning parents as key and proficient players in the academic game. Further, the widely circulated and deeply-embedded discourse that idolises education and constructs it as the ultimate fulcrum for social mobility further feeds into the high social demand for academic credentials. In this context, the young participants of this study invariably narrated their parents as intensely involved in their studies, voicing high expectations and attaching great value to education. Arguably, this involvement can be seen as part of the long-running inculcation of habitus that seemed to weave a normative frame conducive to the cultivation of young people's pro-educational attitudes and high occupational expectations. For the participants of middle-class professional background following certain educational and professional career paths was enveloped with a cloak of certainty and naturalness, as much the constituent parts as the structuring effects of habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) that involves striving, strategically yet naturally, for the continuity of familial legacy and often for professional distinction. Young people from families with limited cultural capital graphically narrated the all-important parental investments in the education cause, the mobilisation of economic, social but also emotional resources, and the familial expectations for social mobility



and respectability. These practices can be seen as concerted pedagogic efforts of families and young people to transform habitus (Bourdieu, 2002; see also David *et al*, 2003), and potentially their socioeconomic trajectories via education. Further, these young people's narratives illustrated that although the 'inclination to invest in the academic market' (Bourdieu, 1973, p.96) - one of the requirements for success in the educational field along with cultural capital- seems to be evident across the socio-economic spectrum, it is ultimately the material affordances and constraints that determine the extent to which this inclination can be translated into educationally facilitating practices. These practices, part of the wider *social mobility-through-education* strategies, are the outcome of the disparate volume and composition of capitals mobilised and activated to steer young people towards the highly desirable path of HE studies.

On a summarising note, although the presented material cannot be used as a basis of universal conclusions, yet it facilitates a deeper understanding of the multi-layered and contextualised workings of reproduction. Young people are indeed crucially situated 'at the crossroads of social reproduction' (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007, p.2), which is not however to argue that they perform, like social pawns, in a teleological manner their social destinies. Rather, this study's participants provided glimpses into the agonising attempts of young people and their families to accumulate capitals, modify habitus and potentially resist reproduction. This adds credence to the argument that calls for analytically approaching reproduction not as a monolithic but as a dynamic and highly contested process (see also Lareau and Horvat, 1999) with manifold, culturally-loaded and temporally-specific manifestations that need to be interrogated and grounded in certain fields, in certain national and socio-cultural contexts. These young people's narratives illustrated the strategic role that familial capitals play in shaping educational opportunities in the Greek context, where the austerity-induced ever-shrinking of resources renders the competitive project of social mobility-through-education even more fraught with struggles and antagonisms.

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