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Critical media literacy through making media: A key to participation for young migrants?

Abstract: Young migrants – particularly refugees – are commonly the object of stereotypical visual media representations and often have no choice but to position themselves in response to them. This article explores whether making young migrants aware of the politics of representation through media literacy education contributes to strengthening their participation and resilience. We reflect on a media literacy program developed with teachers and 100 students at a Dutch "International Transition Classes" school. The educational program focuses on visual media production using smartphones, raising critical consciousness and promoting civic engagement. Ethnographic data analyzed include field notes, a focus group with teachers, in-depth and informal interviews, student-produced footage, and a 10-minute ethnographic film. In our increasingly polarized mediatized world, better recognition of how the needs of certain young people diverge depending on how they are situated in racialized, gendered, and classed structures of power is needed to work towards inclusive media literacy education.

Keywords: media literacy education; young migrants; visual culture; media production; critical consciousness; civic engagement

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1 Introduction

"We refugees need to get a better reputation, and I have to set the good example." This statement made by 14-year-old Maya, who fled from Aleppo, Syria and arrived in the Netherlands two years ago, illustrates that young migrants are conscious of being represented as a societal problem or danger. Politicians and journalists generally speak on their behalf, and frame them as dependent, dangerous, at risk, immature or in need of help. Like many Islamic migrants, Maya is made to feel she has to respond to dominant perceptions "which are assumed to be in contrast with Dutch culture" (Ghorashi, 2014, p. 102). She feels she has to present herself as an exemplary 'good refugee'. Because young migrants are commonly the object of stereotypical media representations, they often have no choice but to relate to them and thus become politically active (Hall, 2013). In this article we explore how critical media literacy education may contribute to strengthening their participation, resilience and socio-cultural inclusion. More specifically, we chart to what extent critical media literacy education centered on visual media production skills, civic engagement and critical consciousness may empower young people like Maya in becoming more confident to represent themselves differently.

Opinions about migrants and particularly refugees are commonly formed on the basis of visual representations. Through consuming stereotypical news images "most of us have a strong visual sense of what 'a refugee' looks like" (Malkki, 1995, p. 10). Dominant visual culture, however, often emphasizes refugees as others and "objectifies them, dismissing their historical, cultural and political circumstances" (Wright, 2002, pp. 53, 64). In their coverage of the so-called European refugee crisis, news media also give primacy to vision over text. News stories do not commonly feature the point-of-view of migrants but focus on "fear and securitization" (Georgiou and Zabarowski, 2017, p. 8). The situation is worse on anti-immigration social media pages. This hostile visual culture may have implications both for how young migrants relate to their country of origin and for developing a sense of belonging with their peers and the larger society in their new home country.

Maya, for example, made the five-minute YouTube video *Safe Aleppo* together with her classmates (Ithaka ISK, 2016). The video supports their fundraiser for children living in war-torn Aleppo. "I was one of those people who slept in the streets for a week", she recounts in the video. By wearing t-shirts showing the hashtag #SafeAleppo they connect their action to the international grassroots social media campaign in response to the Syrian civil war and, in particular, the massacres in Aleppo. In the video we also learn more about how young newcomers represent themselves vis-à-vis Dutch society. Souzan, a 15-year-old girl from

Qamishli, Syria, who had come to live in the Netherlands one and a half years ago, states, "Dutch people can learn from us to avoid starting a war" and "we learn from you to love one another". Ranim, a 14-year-old from Damascus, who had been in the Netherlands for two years, notes, "I want to become an engineer and build many buildings. The first building I would like to build is a mosque. Next to it there will be a big church. This means we are all one human and there is no difference between us" (Ithaka ISK, 2016). We hypothesize there may be strong potential for critical media literacy to further stimulate such already existing aspirations towards civic engagement. With greater awareness of the politics of representation and confidence in their own abilities and creativity, they may produce media, assert themselves on their own terms and diversify visual discourses on migration.

In 2016, Maya's school, Ithaka ISK, approached us to collaborate in developing a critical media literacy curriculum. With around 775 students (as of July 2018), the school is one of the largest 'International Transition Classes' (Internationale Schakel Klassen, ISK) course providers in the Netherlands. In two to three years, the course prepares young newcomers aged between 12 and 18 years to enroll in regular Dutch secondary education or vocational training. Refugees currently represent the majority of students in the school, alongside children from parents who migrated to the Netherlands as guest-laborers, expatriates or children from parents who migrated for marriage. According to a school staff member, the school is concerned with offering a sanctuary to allow students to "learn again to be a child", and to be "appreciated as a human being". The school is committed to acknowledging the autonomy, interests, talents and vulnerabilities of their pupils. School staff are wary of general educational training packages that do not accommodate the specific evolving needs and capabilities of their students. They consider media literacy training schemes available in the Netherlands unfit for their students, either because they are too patronizing and focused on risk prevention or because they are too linear and performance-based.

The school invited us to develop a customized program in co-creation with staff and students that could contribute to sustaining a safe space for learning and a sanctuary for self-development. We entitled the program *Media literacy through making media* (MMM). Inspired by a participatory action research perspective and pedagogy we seek to foreground the "humane viewpoint" of young migrants, which is a vital way to offer counterpoints to dominant representations: "in which the agency and subjectivity of the refugee is emphasized rather than her/his inescapable victimhood and despair" (Smets, 2018, p. 116). Empirically, the argument is grounded in a corpus of ethnographic data including interviews with teachers and students, student-produced footage, field notes and a 10-minute ethnographic film. This study adds conceptual reflection and empirical evidence about an under-

studied population within media literacy education and research. On an empirical level, we present data reflective of diverse societies, which is important as "most research on children, adolescents, and media (CAM) has been conducted with young people from WEIRD families – that is, Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic" (Alper, Katz, and Schofield-Clark, 2016, p. 107). For example, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) champions an approach to media literacy which "equips people to be more discerning and probing of the world around, thereby becoming more self-aware and better able to appropriate the offerings of media and information for intercultural exchange, dialogue and self-identity" (Grizzle and Torras Calvo, 2013, p. 156). Whether, how and for whom this works can only be assessed when empirical insights into majority and minority groups' attitudes and experiences are available for comparison.

On a conceptual level, our case study illustrates how researchers might embrace a plural concept of media literacy based on visual media production, civic engagement and critical consciousness:

I.) "Media literacy must necessarily entail both the interpretation and production of media" in the form of written texts and visual media texts (Buckingham, 2003, p. 49). Media production serves several functions: engagement, motivation, it offers important "21st century skills" not typically taught in "traditional classrooms", and it may empower "disadvantaged youth" to express their voice about social issues to both peers and adults (Friezem, 2014, pp. 44–45).

II.) A commitment to strengthening "civic engagement" through media literacy – Berger, Hobbs, McDougall and Mihailidis (2014) note – may strengthen the "mandate" for the future of media literacy. It allows media literacy scholars to find much-needed common ground to move beyond media literacy "fault lines, silos and paradigm wars" (pp. 5–6).

III.) Likewise, as De Abreu, Mihailidis, Lee, Melki and McDougall (2017) argue, a critical focus is another "unifying common ground for all the (media, digital, information, and other) literacies" (p. 12). Critical reflexivity is imperative to think differently, to avoid mediated misperceptions and work towards "better conditions for social justice, economic parity and human emancipation" (p. 12).

By bringing these three perspectives together, we seek to offer new insights into the purposes of media literacy education for migrant youth in particular.

This article is structured as follows: First, we discuss the history, development and operationalization of the project, our methodological stance and the vision of critical media literacy that emerged from discussions with teachers.

Secondly, we situate the bottom-up approach to media literacy in scholarly and policy approaches to media literacy education. Thirdly, the extensive empirical section details impressions from training young migrants in critical media literacy. In the conclusions, we reflect on how inclusive media literacy education may balance attention for the needs and experiences of specifically situated groups with shared aims beneficial to all young people.

2 Critical media literacy for young migrants: A bottom up-approach

In this section, we sketch the history, context, rationale and bottom-up approach of the 'Media literacy through making media' project. MMM emerged from a long partnership. In 2012–2013, article co-author Sanne Sprenger, together with Femke Stroomer, collaborated with the school in the participatory ethnographic documentary film project *Ik ben hier* ('I Am Here'). Over the course of one year, 30 young people – aged between 15 and 20 and coming from Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Chile and elsewhere – were trained in filmmaking, collaborating, and narrating their stories.

Figure 1 shows Anis, a 16-year-old Moroccan-born young man, reviewing a video-letter addressed to his mom, who was living in the Moroccan Rif Mountains. He wanted to find a way to narrate his difficulties in coping with living in the Netherlands. For over two years, he had been separated from his mom who had not been allowed to move to the Netherlands after failing to meet legal requirements. In documenting how Anis and his schoolmates searched for ways to belong to their city of residence, Utrecht, these young people learned to present themselves as complex human beings with ambitions and inspirations. In 2016, the school wanted to collaborate again to develop a media literacy program in line with the participatory and social-justice oriented approach they knew. The first year of developing and running the media literacy program was made financially possible through school funding. After receiving funding from the Dutch National Research Agenda, we are able to extend our collaboration for two years until 2019.

The four initiators and authors of this article combine interdisciplinary expertise: Sanne Sprenger is a filmmaker and lecturer in film practice and community arts. Ena Omerović is a filmmaker and media scholar who shares experiences with participants: She herself felt misrepresented by the media 25 years ago when she fled from the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and arrived in the Netherlands as a refugee. There was a one-sided stereotypical depiction of masses of

Figure 1: Anis evaluating his self-made video during the 2012–2013 participatory film workshop *I Am Here* with Sanne Sprenger and Femke Stroomer. Photo: Sanne Sprenger.

poor people fleeing and a dominant focus on religious markers, which strongly affected her. Hemmo Bruinenberg is an anthropological filmmaker who had been involved in film classes at the school. Initiating a film festival at the school, he is committed to facilitating students to take ownership over their own learning and media production. Koen Leurs, a media and migration researcher, actively seeks to involve informants as co-researchers through participatory, creative and digital approaches.

Our endeavor of engaged inquiry and pedagogy is inspired by the work of Paolo Freire. In *Pedagogy of the oppressed* he elaborated on the higher aim of transformational education aimed at enabling under-privileged members of Brazilian society to become active agents. One way he envisioned changing unjust societies was through "*conscientização*", which can be translated as raising critical consciousness (1970/2000). Freire's approach was key in the development of participatory action research (PAR). We take cues from the following PAR principles: We are committed to community partnerships and meaningful knowledge production for empowerment, social justice and societal change; we strive towards hands-on collaborative research 'with' teachers and students instead of conducting research 'on' them; we take an open-ended perspective amending

the curricula based on experimentation and processual learning; and finally, we value process as important output (Bradbury, 2015).

Gathered empirical data includes field notes on running the program with six classes and 100 students in total, a focus group discussion with four teachers, informal interviews with students and staff, seven formal in-depth interviews and a 10-minute ethnographic film documenting the educational program. The film consists of recordings made during instructions and assignments, as well as audio-visual footage produced by students and shared with us. In line with staff instructions and Dutch law at the time of the research, oral consent was obtained from those appearing in the film after screening an early edit of the film. Teachers participating in the focus group also provided oral consent. Formal written consent was obtained from the seven students (Soufiane, Jacky, Jack, Ela, Sousou, Patrica and Lara) who participated in in-depth interviews. The in-depth interviews were transcribed verbatim. In our attempt to ground theories on media literacy, the whole corpus of empirical data was analyzed thematically in search of emergent patterns (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). All student names included in this paper are pseudonyms.

The authors met with staff from Ithaka ISK and Mira Media (a Dutch NGO which seeks to mobilize media as a tool for social cohesion and intercultural dialogue) for a half-day teach-the-teachers workshop. We conducted a focus group brainstorm discussion to work towards shared principles of what media literacy could entail in the particular context of working with young migrants. In pairs, workshop participants wrote down their media-literacy related keywords on five post-its, which were collected, thematically grouped and discussed. The following five shared themes emerged:

- A realistic awareness of safety concerns, including personal conceptions of privacy and legal frameworks.
- A realistic awareness of opportunities, including strategic self-presentation such as in video blogs (vlogs) and Video CVs and generating a financial income through making media.
- Developing a skillset to confidently and creatively produce visual-oriented media using the devices students own. This way they may better be able to "share one's own opinion", "to have one's voice matter" and to develop one's "digital identity".
- "Critical consciousness" of media technologies as instruments to search, gather and assess information, to "understand media manipulation" and to learn to respond.
- "Sharing of expertise" and "collaboration": Students can learn from teachers, and teachers can learn from students.

The need to balance the specific needs of young migrants and interests they have in common with fellow Dutch teenagers runs as a red thread through these themes. On the one hand, teachers recognize their cohort of students come of age in a knowledge economy, are avid digital media users and are socialized in a global and national youth culture which revolves around rap/hip-hop, taking selfies and vlogging. On the other hand, they plea for greater awareness of the distinct impact the national and transnational media landscape has on their daily lives. However, one teacher observed in her classroom that particularly Syrian-Dutch youth receive a near-constant stream of news on bombings, atrocities and violence from places they have fled. In the case of the ongoing civil war in Syria, there is a proliferation of fake news. Teachers discussed the urgency of training students as critical news consumers in order for them to assess violent and traumatizing content they receive, which is often undated and circulated by unconfirmed sources. As evolving language learners, it was also decided we were to focus on audiovisual media making rather than focusing on written text-based media production. Finally, as Maya's quote in the introduction illustrates, young migrants are extremely conscious of how they are dominantly represented in mainstream visual news media, and may desire to respond to that image. In the next section, we seek to bring these interpretations of critical media literacy as co-created with teachers into dialogue with the vast and varied body of literature on media literacy education research.

3 Theorizing critical media literacy education for young migrants

The principles of media literacy education for young migrants emerged from a distinctly situated context. Nevertheless, they also do raise questions about the broader purposes of media literacy education. In this section we seek to situate these principles in the long and on-going debate on the definition and purposes of media literacy. We draw both on academic research as well as on approaches to media literacy employed in global, European and Dutch policy discourse. As a starting point, we draw on established definitions of media literacy education such as the ones offered by Livingstone (2004) – the "ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create messages across a variety of contexts" (p. 3) – or Buckingham (2003), who saw "representation", "language", "production" and "audiences" as four main conceptual foci. However, we are particularly concerned with fostering participation through media literacy.

    In the last two decades we have seen a proliferation of media literacy education related terms and approaches including media and information literacy

(MIL), new media literacies, digital learning, digital literacy and social media literacy. Disciplines including media, cultural and communication studies, journalism, education and psychology have developed distinct media literacy paradigms. Conceptions not only evolve as a result of the introduction of new technologies, they are also deeply embedded in specific contexts including national, social, political, pedagogical, economic and cultural contexts, labor market expectations and school curricula (Livingstone, Van Couvering, and Thumim, 2008). The various approaches can be placed in a continuum ranging from a more functionalist, neo-liberal "technological paradigm" and "skills-based" approaches geared towards employability, to those based on broader "culturalist" and "holistic definitions" of media literacy geared towards promoting inclusive citizenship (Trültzsch-Wijnen, Murru, and Papaioannou, 2017, pp. 100, 107). In their cross-country comparison of European Union policy discourses on media literacies, Drotner et al. (2017) found a similar divergence between conceiving media literacy as "a tool for increased neo-liberalism, individualism and marketization" and an "opportunity for collective critical citizenship" (Drotner et al., 2017, p. 269). We align ourselves with the latter holistic approach.

The conception of critical media literacy underpins our approach. According to Kellner and Share (2007), "this involves a multiperspectival critical inquiry of popular culture and the cultural industries, that addresses issues of class, race, gender, sexuality, and power and also promotes the production of alternative counter-hegemonic media" (p. 62). In recognizing the grassroots potential of media literacy to contest power relations, this perspective draws from feminism, critical race and cultural studies and centers on critical consciousness. However, for us, being critical is not the goal, but the means to an end. Another means is the focus on critical media making. Media makers not only learn new skills to express their voices and gain confidence in their creativity, they also engage creatively with their social worlds, and make new connections in collaborating (Buckingham, 2003; Friezem, 2014; Gauntlett, 2018).

We particularly focus on the broader purposes of media literacy to promote participation. Participation as a purpose of media literacy revolves around 1) being able to choose to participate in the knowledge economy, 2) meaningful participation in democracy and citizenship as well as 3) participating in lifelong learning, cultural expressivity and personal fulfillment (Livingstone et al., 2008; Literat et al., 2018). Participation, in our view, balances "youthful agency" as well as a critical "awareness" (Livingstone, 2011, p. 9) of the institutions and systems that shape young migrants' lives (national and local government, national media, anti-immigrant politics and sentiments, schools, parents, markets). This focus has also been recognized in public policy discourse. On the global level, UNESCO draws on human and children's rights frameworks and advocates for media liter-

acy that sustains intercultural dialogue and inclusion (Grizzle and Torras Calvo, 2013). Core values in more culturalist and holistic-oriented EU media literacy policies revolve around the integration of visual culture, arts and media literacy and information management skills that enhance employability, the promotion of civic and political participation, consumer protection and technical production skills (Trültzsch-Wijnen et al., 2017, pp. 105–107).

In the Netherlands, the media literacy education debate was initiated by the Council for Culture 2005 statement on achieving 'media wisdom' (in Dutch: *mediawijsheid*) as essential for full participation in a mediated society. The Council defined media literacy as: "the whole of knowledge, skills and mentality with which citizens can consciously, critically and actively engage in a complex, changeable and fundamentally mediatized world" (Council for Culture, 2005, p. 18, our translation). This broad definition comprises various media forms and literacies and puts emphasis on active engagement from the side of citizens. Of particular relevance to our argument, the "notion of media wisdom acknowledges that the kind of skills that are required to engage critically and actively with the mediatized world change according to the specific mind-sets, needs and desires of various social groups" (Trültzsch-Wijnen et al., 2017, p. 102). However, instead of tailoring to specific social groups, Dutch media literacy education programs mainly target children and young people as an unspecified homogeneous category.

As a result, "little attention is given to migrant and socially excluded families", writes Mira Media (2017, p. 5). They report: "Educational and media literacy professionals indicate they have little knowledge about the educational situation and specific needs of these groups and they have difficulties in reaching out to them" (ibid.). Most likely, this knowledge gap is not unique to the situation in the Netherlands. It deserves greater attention, particularly as media literacy scholars have highlighted the importance of "respecting young students' subjective media experiences and social backgrounds" (De Abreu et al., 2017, p. 1). Additionally, as our point of departure we recognize young migrants are "connected migrants" (Diminescu, 2008), who keep in contact with family and friends from their countries of origin as well as using digital technologies to establish connections in their new social settings. Research confirms two-thirds of young refugees living in urban areas have access to smartphones (UNHCR, 2016).

The question arises as to how to promote young migrant students to "produce media from their everyday life perspective" (De Abreu et al., 2017, p. 1). The emerging body of literature on media production programs specifically developed with black, minority, migrant, refugee and marginalized communities offers us important reference points. These programs may be beneficial for professional development, amplifying voices otherwise not heard in society, producing counter-representations, cultural identification, therapeutic memory making and

preserving cultural heritage (Blum-Ross, 2015). For example, "positive identity development" and the discovery of personal "competences" were documented in a project with African-American youth in US urban lower-income families (Anderson and Mack, 2017, p. 1). Other benefits noted include "narrative health promotion" such as increased self-esteem and social support as found among Puerto-Rican Latinas (DiFulvio et al., 2016, p. 157). De Leeuw and Rydin (2007) report that producing self-representations increased "self-empowerment" and "pleasure" and taught refugee and migrant children to combine their variously located subject positions and orientations towards the past, present and future (p. 461). Learning to make media may also be beneficial to "dislodge other's gazes": In a project with marginalized girls in Canada the participants created and circulated oppositional frames of young people as "creative, thoughtful, engaged, and articulate" (Gonick, 2017, p. 92). The EU RefugeesIN project promotes social inclusion by training adult refugees to shoot short documentaries "portraying actual and inspiring life stories of well-included former refugees" (RefugeesIN, 2017). Finally, the European Youth News Exchange Network trains youth in mobile journalism (MoJo) to increase youth participation that includes "well-being, inclusion and employability" (Y-Nex, 2018). They note MoJo aims to

> "teach young people different ways in which they can use mobile phones to tell newsworthy stories. A smartphone is often compared to a Swiss knife – it has multiple purposes, but for each one should be taught about its potential –, first the basic and then other creative ways of using it; in this case, for telling stories" (Y-Nex, 2018, p. 8).

Participatory media production projects commonly introduce new and advanced external technologies. We find inspiration in MoJo principles, not only because we are aware of limited budgets in secondary education but also because MoJo allows for bridging media literacy education with everyday media practices youth engage with inside and outside the institutionalized space of schools. The projects discussed here suggest that more inclusive media literacy could benefit strongly from acknowledging better the situatedness of distinctive communities. There are also serious challenges and obstacles we should recognize. De Jager and colleagues in their review of 25 projects emphasize that advantages outweigh disadvantages. They mention that careful attention is needed for possible traumatizing effects of revisiting past experiences, implications of limited budgets, technological resources and short timespans of projects, and possible risks of further stigmatization upon circulation of produced media content (De Jager, Fogarty, Tewson, Lenette, and Boydell, 2017, p. 2572). In the section below we attend to these concerns and seek to further ground the bottom-up principles and conceptual discussions in empirical data.

4 Training young migrants in critical media literacy: Impressions from the field

Between January and April 2017, one hundred 16- to 18-year-old students joined the weekly sessions of our 10-week program. The media literacy program was incorporated into an existing year-long module called '*Learning 2: Social skills*', which offers general Dutch-language training in knowledge and skills necessary for self-presentation, communication, planning and organizing, information seeking and usage, and collaboration. No formal tests are included, and sessions typically engage with topics, questions and concerns which students share. The media literacy program was designed to offer students a chance to document their personal trajectories by adding audiovisual material to their personal portfolio. The portfolios form the basis for the two bi-annual discussion meetings where students are invited to make a case on their personal development, determining whether they are 'beginner', 'advanced' or 'expert'. Lesson plans were devised as outlines that would facilitate participation from students by having them bring in examples, interests and experiences. Flexibility and feedback loops were built into the program. With sessions lasting for four hours, we sought to touch upon a number of theories, balanced with hands-on critical-making assignments (see Table 1).

Table 1: Overview of theories and practices of the media literacy course.

Week	Theory	Practice and assignments
1	Mise-en-scène and cinematography	Name game: Operating a camera
2	Narrative	Creating a storyboard; creating a story from selection of photos from smartphone archive
3	Journalism and framing	Interviewing and creating a news report
4	Fact and fiction	Creating a commercial or propaganda video
5	Identity	Creating a video blog
6	Communication and self-presentation	Creating a new social media profile
7	Privacy, cyber bullying, sexting	Googling your teacher; digital footprint quiz; privacy experiments such as handing over one's smartphone to explore what content and apps feel private and which ones one does not mind sharing
8	Rhetoric, self-representation	Creating a video curriculum vitae
9	Media landscape	Visiting the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision
10	Archiving	Archiving and screening student materials and showing video report

4.1 Representing difference

The program started with the Name Game, a 30-minute participatory video exercise described by Lunch and Lunch (2006). Students, facilitators and teachers joined in a circle. A handheld camera we brought was given to the students. Students were invited to try to switch it on and experiment with how to use it, recording audio and video. They were invited to interview a classmate that sat at the other side of the circle, asking them to introduce themselves and questioning them about their dreams. After each turn, the camera was shut down, and a next pair would repeat the exercise. In our classes, the Name Game functioned well as an ice-breaker to establish new relations among groups but also as a form of "experiential learning" (Lunch and Lunch, 2006, p. 22). It is also a way to work towards equalizing power relations between instructors and students, overcoming fear over shooting film by establishing autonomy and control over technologies and stories. The Name Game was embraced by most and led to conversations that went into personal details that we rarely witnessed in the classes thereafter. Students were actively sharing why they were in the Netherlands, what was going on in their respective home countries (Syria, Afghanistan, Romania, Eritrea, Somalia, among others), where they were living now and with whom. But they were also forward-looking as they recounted their dreams, for example, Mukhtar described his dream of owning "his own house, having his own business and having a good future". Shabanah said, "I would like to live in Turkey, again together with my family. That is my dream", and Faireh recounted, "I have not seen my family for over two years now. Hopefully, before I die I see them again, that is my dream." During these sessions it immediately became evident that these young people did not want to be silent. They strongly cared for the process of representation, they enjoyed being able to direct the camera themselves and hearing their peers speak as a way of representing their own "fantasies, desires and imaginings" (Hall, 2013, p. 45).

Students found themselves in a position of power in experimenting with shooting from a higher or lower angle and re-doing takes. They also experimented with filmic techniques such as varying framing their subject, adjusting light-sources, changing their modes of address, asking questions jokingly or seriously, giving additional prompts and compliments. Students experienced the power of the gaze and were actively seeking to manage their impression through changing facial expressions, avoiding or exaggerating laughter, looking into or away from the camera and changing the volume and tone of their voice. The assignment also confronted them with pressure and challenges, including how to cope with difficult personal questions and formulating answers (in Dutch, a language that they were learning). The exercise worked well for us facilitators,

too – as adult newcomers in their classes –, to present ourselves on a personal level as human beings and to get an impression of their personal backgrounds and motivations. Indeed, through the Name Game "we all get to feel what it's like to be in front of the camera, so we all become more sensitive", as Lunch and Lunch (2006, p. 25) argue. For the students it worked well to create footage at the very beginning of the course. After everyone who wanted to had had a say, tech-savvy students assisted with plugging the camera into our laptop computer and connecting it with the smartboard in the room. Students were commonly eager to get a chance to demonstrate their skills and assistance. Allowing students to take charge in situations like these, challenges hierarchies over expertise. The Name Game became a baseline. Subsequent exercises helped students to later consider additional dimensions in their critical media-production work.

4.2 Participation

At other moments, we were confronted with the challenge of preventing privileging white, western media maker practices. We envisioned a field trip to the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision to have students participate in the interactive exhibition "Let's YouTube". We cancelled this trip when we realized that the exhibition was almost entirely centered on white, middle-class Dutch and American vloggers. It seemed this exhibition was not something for them, and students confirmed our thoughts. Because non-white media makers and diverse content were relatively absent, migrant youth could be made to feel "deficient" and in need of catching up with the perceived norms of white mainstream Dutch representational practice (Alper et al., 2016, pp. 108–109). This instance also reminded us of the importance of being more attentive to privilege and discrimination as emerging from living at specific crossroads of structures of power. The concept of "intersectionality", developed, amongst others, by the anti-racist feminist theorist Crenshaw (1991), allows us to recognize how divisions like age, generation, gender, race, class, and religion operate simultaneously and co-construct each other. For youth experiencing migration and displacement, questions pertaining to developing a sense of self and group identification including 'who am I' and 'where do I belong', charged with age, generation, sexuality and youth culture are additionally loaded with interrelated dynamics of culture, language, history, parental expectations, nation, race, class, and religion, among others.

We realize it is impossible to accommodate all situated experiences and perspectives, and the intersectional identity markers of us facilitators and the standpoints from theories and assignments used will converge at some points but also diverge at others. However, establishing a space that embraces various

standpoints and differences among groups as "assets" (Alper et al., 2016, p. 171) is crucial. For example, in one classroom in a session on romance and sexuality we were happy to see students embrace a discussion about trends, technological possibilities and paradoxical and painful consequences. The discussion turned to sexting, and students initially seemed to agree they found it mostly a Western thing. For example, Soufiane from "Iraqi-Kurdistan" noted, "it is more normal here", and Ghalib, who is from Syria, said sexting "is something happening in the US". However, after a productive silence, students started to laugh after which they dared to sketch a more complicated picture. Samija, also from Syria, noted: "It is happening in the Middle-East, too. Because Arab culture is more closed, we are more secretive." Soufiane agreed by stating, "there it also creates new dangers for women when fathers find out". He said that before going to bed he deleted the browsing history from his smartphone, so his mother could not check which sites he had visited. Fellow classmates confirmed using similar strategies to experiment with dating and romantic relationships. Here, the safe-space of their classroom was appreciated by differently positioned young people to discuss personal, difficult topics, which is important for increasing self-esteem (DiFulvio et al., 2016) and establishing social support across differences (Alper et al., 2016).

Critical media training and making commonly results in unforeseen dynamics and unintended footage. For example, we facilitators felt welcomed when we were enthusiastically invited into the WhatsApp group of classes we were working with. However, a couple of weeks into the project, one of us received the following notice: "You can't send messages to this group because you're no longer a participant." It turned out that the atmosphere in the group had swiftly deteriorated when one group of students lost interest, and they took charge over the communicative space.

During the session on propaganda and fake news, students were instructed to make a propaganda video about their school. Students were free to choose between putting the school in a positive or negative light. A group of three students decided to opt for the latter, aiming to depict the school as a "dirty" place with "bad and angry teachers". We, the facilitators of the media literacy project, had instructed students that the hallways, among other places, could be used for video recording. In their enthusiasm about their plans, the group of three turned over trash bins in the hallways to create a desired setting with the required props. Unaware of the project the students were involved in, the school director told the small group to stop recording because they disturbed her and other classes. The group recorded their exchange of words with the director and included it in their video to unfavorably frame the teaching staff. This video went viral in the school, triggered gossip and also led to heated discussions between us, teachers and the school director.

Although creating some negative sentiment in the school, this act of student rebellion is also an expression of the participants' media literacy. This "boundary performance" (Livingstone, 2011, p. 6) not only allowed them to experiment with breaking rules and transgressing adult norms, it also enabled them to experiment with making selective, one-sided detrimental media representations. Normally, these young people are the objects of one-dimensional and often negative visual representations, now they felt what it was like to be in charge of symbolic power. In addition, this presented a good opportunity to engage in discussion with teachers and students on the topic of permission, copyright, fake news and privacy, and the wider ideological battles over shared meaning that make up any "representational system" (Hall, 2013, p. xvii). In sum, these dynamics also prompted us to reflect on what forms of participation we sought to enable through our program: Was it to "provide resources by which youth can generate their own agendas and pursue their own interests – or by which they can achieve [our] pre-given adult goals or messages?" (Livingstone, 2011, p. 9, see also Literat et al., 2018).

4.3 Storytelling

In the second week, we discussed storytelling in line with classic Aristotelean narrative structure. We discussed examples of scenes where characters were introduced, their lives, examples of the conflicts and climaxes in films and the resolutions (for example, drawing from films like *Shawshank Redemption* and *Armageddon*). Students were asked to tell us about their favorite films in order to analyze its structure. Examples given by girls and boys ranged from Hollywood action films and comics like *Spiderman*, *Batman* as well as Bollywood, Nollywood, Syrian and Irani movies. They realized that among this diversity of examples a common narrative structure can be discerned in our global media landscape. The shared structure is an important departure point to making media and relating to the politics of representation.

However, as the media propaganda and persuasion session already illustrated, student participation might also have unanticipated consequences. In dialogue with teachers at the school we realized that discussing topics such as journalism, propaganda and persuasion could trigger memories and traumata related to violence and the media strategies of Islamic State violence (or Daesh, which was their favored Arabic-language acronym). Anti-radicalization is now high on the agenda of European government policy makers (Sharma and Nijjar, 2018). With this aim, regular Dutch media literacy courses, for example, include the analysis of photos of the strategically mediatized execution of British journalists in terms of conventions in mise-en-scène, location and iconography. We

agreed not to include such examples as they could be traumatic, particularly for students from Syria. In the classroom, students with a Syrian background themselves commonly brought in Daesh when learning about media strategies, and they reflected upon how they felt these strategies were mobilized. Others strongly opposed it. For example, although Jack expressed to us that his favorite subject is world orientation, and he proudly said, "Syria is my country", he did not want to think about, or search for, information about Syria. He spoke up about coming across "a video of a bombing taking place in my city Damascus", which caused him to "immediately start to cry". As an extension of the school space, the smartphone also functioned as a sanctuary. For some, browsing photo and message archives seemed to offer reassurance and to trigger happy feelings. Phones were also used more instrumentally, for example, to use applications to translate Arabic speech and text into Dutch. For youth who were forced to flee from war and conflict, being transnationally connected means they may receive news messages about atrocities, bombings, and deaths in their hometown at any given moment. Because of this, according to Jack, "many Syrian kids are in a difficult position", and the phone in their pocket might become a source of possible anxiety. In sharp contrast, Soufiane is an activist and uses social media to rally for the recognition and greater autonomy of his homeland, Iraqi Kurdistan. He posts news updates and uploads photos on social media to promote the autonomy of Iraqi Kurdistan. Young migrants hold very paradoxical transnationally mediated relationships to their countries of origin, and this ambiguity demands careful attention in media literacy education.

In another assignment, participants were asked to select one photograph from their smartphone. In two minutes, they had to make a selection, without knowing what would happen with the selected photograph. After everyone had made a selection, participants were instructed they would have to line up their phones with others. As such they were asked to create a new collective narrative on the basis of their individual photos. Stories narrated ranged from love scenarios between students' family members shown in the photographs to a mafia boss who is unsuccessful in escaping from the police (see Figure 2).

This critical-making assignment drew attention to issues around technology ownership, archiving, privacy and self-representation: It offered a means to reflect on which pictures students wanted others to see, and how peers perceived them. It also proved to be a source of contention. Although smartphone ownership is widespread, recent and advanced phone models were seen as status symbols. Those with earlier models were initially reluctant to line up their phones, or they mentioned they were about to update their phones to a newer model soon. With a big smile, Soufiane, during our in-depth interview, showed us his brand new smartphone: "I just want to have a new phone, so I can show off a little bit. I

Figure 2: Creating new stories from personal mobile phone pocket archives; screenshot taken from our ethnographic film impression (MMM, 2017).

fear someone might laugh at me for having an old iPhone". In his classroom, one in every three students showed a similarly shiny device. As status symbols, new smart phones create hierarchies, as they are not impartial in constructing imaginaries of normality and abnormality in classrooms and peer groups.

All students taking part in this media literacy program were in their final year of their International Transition Classes course. They were applying for colleges and vocational training. Participating students' personal interests became particularly evident from their work on individual 'Video CVs'. Students developed these by writing a script, and drawing up a storyboard, before planning and recording it at a location of their choice, and editing it themselves. Figure 3 shows a still taken from the video CV done by Syrian-Dutch Rifat, who was considering pursuing further training in the field of media production. The caption reads: "What are my qualities?" Rather than statically addressing the viewer and explaining his skills, which include an "independent" attitude and his interests, which include "watching series", Abdullah chose to describe himself only through captions or by remixing footage inserted from other sources. Jacky – who grew up in Aleppo, Syria – mentioned during the Name Game assignment that her dream was to become "an interior designer". She sought to showcase her creativity and recorded herself working on a painting in her bedroom. She edited it in a short clip which also included a short interview with one of us facilitators to include feedback on her character. In evaluating the course, Jacky stated she

Figure 3: Video curriculum vitae of Rifat; screenshot taken from our ethnographic film impression (MMM, 2017).

enjoyed having "gotten experience" in technical skills, she found it "quite fun to be able to achieve a result quickly in editing" but also most notably expressed her desire to "make a difference with a video during interviews" in her attempt to be accepted by a college of her choice. Eventually, towards last summer we learned from Jacky it indeed played a role in getting accepted for college.

4.4 Self-development and contingencies

The discovery and acquisition of visual media production and self-representation competencies may increase the resilience of young newcomers (Blum-Ross, 2015; De Leeuw and Rydin, 2007). We were moved to learn participants had successfully enrolled in media production and journalism-oriented courses. Beyond formal development trajectories, and in line with our more holistic conception of the purposes of critical media literacy education, we also acknowledge how theoretical and practical insights into storytelling are important across various domains of life. For example, towards the end of our course, Sousou from Guinea enthusiastically showed his classmates and facilitators a video: He documented in a video how his family learned from the local municipality they would be moving to a new apartment on the 12th floor of a social housing unit. In the video he toured what he described as his new "penthouse" and proudly commented

upon all the rooms of his new home. These narratives of agency and self-empowerment may seem trivial when seen in a larger context of almost insurmountable challenges young newcomers are facing, however, these micro-steps of "positive identity development" (Anderson and Mack, 2017, p. 1) are crucial in their personal journeys of self-development.

Particularly with this vulnerable group of students, long-term commitment is key. For this purpose, we are currently preparing with teachers a program which builds upon experiences discussed here. In aiming to make ourselves as external researchers and practitioners obsolete, school staff will take the lead in teaching the course this time around. However, we foresee several challenges. Most importantly, at the institutional level, the school environment is subject to constant change. Teachers and students face the consequences of ever-changing policies and border control. The school had rapidly expanded at the height of the so-called 'European refugee crisis'. Most refugee students now migrate to Europe through family reunion schemes, commonly joining their parents only after long periods of separation. In the midst of teaching the media literacy program, student numbers dropped, and two of the classes involved faced the difficult news of having to split up to join others. These external large-scale dynamics have severe impact at the local and embodied level of school, class and individual student life. Critical media literacy will not help young migrant students to overcome their precarious situation, but it might offer means to imagine and work towards alternative futures.

5 Conclusions

Inclusive media literacy demands a careful balancing between similarities and difference: Attention is needed for the demands and interests that apply to all young people and those that are important to specifically situated groups. In the last decades, research on children, adolescents and the media as well as media literacy education "has largely echoed the concerns of the middle-class and majority culture" (Alper et al., 2016, p. 107) of white youth in the West. This article seeks to offer a corrective by exploring which forms of media literacy may promote the participation, resilience and belonging of young migrants and refugees. We draw from the ongoing participatory action research project 'Media literacy through making media' (MMM) and focus on the distinctive situated context of International Transition Classes in the Netherlands. After moving to the Netherlands, migrant youth (between 12 and 18 years old) follow these two to three-years courses in preparation to entering regular secondary education, college or the

labor market. At Ithaka ISK, an International Transition Classes course provider, we developed and ran a media literacy education program in collaboration with teachers and students. Young migrants and refugees are increasingly "connected migrants" (Diminescu, 2008) and commonly have access to smartphones. Therefore, we took their usage and experiences of smartphones as a starting point to engage in a discussion about the "politics of representation" (Hall, 2013).

Today's media landscape operates as an important battleground for inclusion and exclusion. With an eye on strengthening the sense of participation of young migrants, we propose a plural conception of media literacy education based on visual media production, civic engagement and critical consciousness. We focus, firstly, on audiovisual media production because receiving societies predominantly construct concepts of 'the refugee' and 'the migrant' through visual images (Wright, 2002). Through visual representations migrants are commonly "stripped of the specificity of culture, place, and history" while they themselves have no say in this process (Malkki, 1995, p. 12). To foster meaningful participation, "before being heard, young adult immigrants must be seen: not as dangerous 'visible minorities', but as potential 'active citizens'" (Romaní, Feixa, and Latorre, 2012, p. 169). The 21st century competences of visual media making are particularly crucial for young migrants also because they are commonly painfully aware of how they are dominantly represented (Friezem, 2014). Secondly, we embrace media literacy education as a "political project for democratic social change" (Kellner and Share, 2007, p. 62), which can contribute to raising critical consciousness. Through making media young migrants may learn to re-value their creativity, read against the grain and assert themselves differently. Thirdly, instead of being represented as faceless, voiceless and helpless masses, by choosing how to represent themselves they can appear as individual human beings with specific dreams and aspirations. Although we should not generalize media power (im)balances – as access to mainstream content production is very hierarchical – making media and showing it to peers can become an act of civic engagement, agency and empowerment, which is important for self-development, identity and belonging.

Although we focus on media literacy education for young people who find themselves at a particular intersection of nationality, ethnicity/race and religion, the question "What migrant students can teach us about media literacy" (Lam, 2013, p. 62) yields important and broadly applicable insights. Developing media-literacy education for young migrant students from the perspective of teachers and students offers new means of establishing needed common grounds between diverging strands of media literacy research (Berger et al., 2014). Additional research is needed on the understudied purposes of media literacy education outside the Global North. Also, little is known about the potential impact

of media literacy education on the lives of other vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalized groups, including youth from working class families and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans- and intersex minorities. Charting distinctly situated purposes of media literacy education will allow us to work towards transformative and culturally responsive theories, practices and pedagogies fostering inclusive participation, which is particularly relevant in today's increasingly polarized mediatized world.

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