



**Learning to navigate ‘unsettlement’:
young refugees’ (re-)engagement with post-15 education in Greece**

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We don't know how it's
going in the future. We
don't know after two
days how it's going...

Maybe school will
help me one day.
We don't know.



Jilwan*, 25

*all names of participants
and organisations have
been pseudonymised in
this thesis

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study provides an ethnographic exploration of the experiences of young refugees¹ (aged 15-25) in Greece as they engage with education, amid and despite their uncertain and precarious conditions – here theorised as (manufactured) conditions of ‘unsettlement’. Instead of focusing only on their deficits – as in much refugee education research – it asks: *How do young refugees in Greece experience and navigate ‘unsettlement’ in/via education?* This question was iteratively investigated through individual and pair semi-structured interviews with refugee and asylum-seeking youth in Thessaloniki (involving creative tasks), as well as other educational ‘stakeholders’ (such as parents, teachers and non-governmental organisation (NGO) staff). This interview data was triangulated with findings from document analysis and field notes from my participant observation as a volunteer teacher and assistant at four NGOs in the city, including one migrant women’s centre.

The findings are presented via a collection of four papers which have either been published in or are under review at four international, peer-reviewed journals, across disciplines. The papers aim to highlight the limited supports and educational opportunities available for refugee youth aged 15+, and the ways in which ‘unsettlement’ shapes their everyday lives and (educational) decision-making – with one paper dedicated to young women’s experiences. At the same time, the papers explore how youth respond to and navigate these challenges both within and outside of education, and the role of educational actors and other relationships in this process. As such, the papers contribute to important discussions of young refugees’ (educational) agency and its relational and collective nature – as well as its gendered dimensions. In addition, throughout the thesis, I touch on the potential of arts-based approaches for

¹ In this thesis, for brevity, the term ‘refugee’ refers to both those who have been granted protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention and those who have applied for protection (i.e. asylum seekers or applicants).

better understanding and disseminating young refugees' perspectives, and the role of arts education in their navigation of precarity.

In the individual papers, the thesis uses conceptual lenses from different disciplines to explore and elucidate the nature of the inequality and precarity refugee youth face in Greece, and how they negotiate and chart a path through it. Paper 1 draws from politics and border studies, for example, in analysing how bordering practices permeate their everyday lives; Paper 3 borrows the language of 'encounters' from human geography and 'counterspaces' from youth, leisure and critical race studies, to conceptualise their interactions in non-formal educational spaces; and Paper 4 dives deeper into the concept of 'crisis'. In the Discussion, the thesis ties all of these theoretical threads together to provide an overarching account of their 'unsettlement' – i.e. the layered forms of (arguably manufactured) uncertainty and precarity which shape their experiences of displacement. To conceptualise how they negotiate, and indeed constantly renegotiate, a way through this unsettlement, the thesis employs the term 'navigation' throughout – drawing from anthropology, and specifically the work of Henrik Vigh (2009, 2010). This lens is particularly fitting for movement through a socio-political environment which, as for displaced communities in Greece, is constantly shifting.

ACRONYMS

EU	European Union
IGO	Inter-governmental organisation
NFE	Non-formal education
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund
REC	Refugee Education Coordinator
RIC	Reception and Identification Center

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview of this chapter

This introductory chapter provides definitions of the key terms used throughout this thesis and establishes its conceptual framing. It summarises the research on forced displacement and precarity, and uses this as a basis to introduce the concept of 'unsettlement'. It addresses how 'unsettlement' can be experienced in highly individual ways – to highlight how dynamics such as race and gender can come into play – and the role of education, and its potential to both contribute to and provide a way out of conditions of instability and uncertainty. Following this, my understanding of the concept of 'navigation' is explored. Vigh's analytical lens of 'social navigation' is defined and discussed, alongside critiques of other means of defining and analysing young refugees' agency. This is followed by an explanation of the 'relational' approach to understanding agency which underpins this thesis, and which extends Vigh's 'social navigation' lens.

This chapter also situates the research empirically, geographically and politically. I summarise the current research landscape on the role of education for young refugees and migrants in contexts of precarity, before providing detail on the context of Greece. This covers the nature of its financial, migration and health 'crises' – with particular attention to the period from 2015 to the time of the study – and what is known about the forms of precarity (young) refugees experience in the country. This includes a review of educational initiatives and provision for refugees, and the barriers to (post-15) education identified in previous research.

After this conceptual and contextual information, the empirical and theoretical research gaps identified in this literature are discussed, along with how the thesis contributes to filling them – and the research questions used to do so. The overarching

research question and its sub-questions are then presented and justified with reference to the literature review, conceptual framing and the knowledge gaps identified.

1.1.1. Writing the ‘European’ ‘refugee’ ‘crisis’: defining key terms

Before proceeding, it is necessary to define the key terms used throughout this thesis – and particularly in light of the ongoing debate surrounding the nomenclature used in ‘European’ ‘refugee’ ‘crisis’ research (Hamlin, 2022). For example, the terms ‘forced migrant’, ‘refugee’, ‘asylum seeker’ and ‘immigrant’ are used interchangeably by European media outlets (Eberl et al., 2018). However, these terms have very important differences. In brief, a ‘forced migrant’ is someone who has been displaced due to a threat to their life from either natural (e.g. environmental) or man-made (e.g. conflict) causes, and may be either ‘internally displaced persons’ within their state or forced to flee across international borders (IOM, 2018). If they cross a border, they may apply for asylum (if the state they enter has ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention) making them an ‘asylum seeker’ (McBrien, 2017). If this application is successful, they gain ‘refugee’ status, meaning that they receive protection under states’ obligations from the Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. An ‘immigrant’ is any longer-term migrant to the country, and must adhere to their immigration procedures and laws. This project focuses on both those who have been granted refugee status and those who have applied for it, but uses the catch-all term ‘refugees’ for brevity and to align with both the international literature and how participants referred to themselves; while recognising that terminology does not necessarily reflect experience.

‘Crisis’, for its part, is a much-discussed term in the academic literature and beyond – particularly due to its frequent deployment in Europe in the 2000s by states and the media to sensationalise socio-political events. Specifically, there have been three major ‘crises’ in Europe in recent years: the economic downturn of 2008;

increased migration flows into the continent which peaked in 2015; and the COVID-19 pandemic. These ‘crises’ have particularly impacted Greece, as we will see in Section 1.4. The construction and reception of crisis narratives in the country – and the ways in which they justify particular policy responses and prompt hostility or solidarity from more established residents – has serious and far-reaching impacts for refugees arriving. Therefore, as (the discourse of) crisis permeates their lives, so too does the term permeate this thesis.

In terms of the recent migratory movements into Europe which are central to this research, these have been variously labelled as either a ‘refugee crisis’ or ‘migrant crisis’ in political and media texts (Kowalczyk, 2018), conflating voluntary and involuntary migration. However, various commentators have problematised whether it constitutes a ‘crisis’ at all; and if so, whose ‘crisis’ it is. Some believe that this state of ‘crisis’ was manufactured to serve political purposes (Rodriguez, 2018), and that it is not a sudden ‘influx’ of newcomers but the result of modern migration management policies (Ansems de Vries & Guild, 2018; see also Menjívar et al., 2019). This is because the numbers of asylum-seekers and other migrants reaching Europe in recent years are not unprecedented: as while arrivals peaked at just over a million in 2015 (the majority of whom arrived in Greece), this is a fraction of the 11 million people in Germany alone who were displaced following World War II (Goździak & Main, 2020a). Ansems de Vries and Guild (2018) argue that it cannot be a ‘European’ crisis at all, when the “longest and most dangerous part of people’s journeys often takes place outside of Europe” (p. 1).

What is clear is that all of the recent ‘crises’ – despite etymologically denoting critical, decisive moments – have resulted in an enduring state of risk and uncertainty (Kowalczyk, 2018). This project recognises that the last decade has seen a larger and ongoing wave of migration across the continent, but joins researchers such as Ansems de Vries and Guild in problematising the term ‘crisis’ and its contribution to the political

sensationalisation of current flows. The thesis also proceeds with an understanding that the recent ‘crises’ are, primarily, crises for vulnerable groups such as youth, refugees and those of a lower socioeconomic status – factors which often overlap (JDCFD et al., 2020; Rosen et al., 2023).

‘Young refugees’ in this project refers to refugees (including those who are unaccompanied or separated) aged 15-25 in Greece. However, it should be noted that ‘youth’ could refer to as broad an age range as 15-35 in Greek policies and literature (Perovic, 2017). ‘Learning’ refers to the development of skills and knowledge which takes place in accrediting institutions such as schools (i.e. formal education) and in community settings such as NGOs (i.e. non-formal education, or NFE) (CoE, 2019). I use the term ‘(re-)engagement’ in education, rather than simply ‘engagement’, to emphasise that young refugees are likely to have substantial formal or non-formal learning histories which started in the home country (and/or en route to Greece). This fact is often forgotten in research and practice.

1.2. Conceptual framing: navigating ‘unsettlement’

This project conceptualises young refugees as multi-dimensional individuals situated within webs of interacting social relationships, institutions and resources, which all have the potential to influence their educational decision-making. At the same time, it is understood that the nature of refugeehood in Greece means that they are living in a context of enduring uncertainty and instability (see Section 1.4), which shapes all of these relationships and processes. These contextual factors – “the often chaotic experiences and levels of adversity experienced by adolescents seeking refuge” – are, according to Wong and Schweitzer (2017, p. 757), “pivotal” in understanding young refugees’ engagement with education. Contextual approaches are increasingly being employed in refugee education research (e.g. Correa-Velez et al., 2010; Dryden-

Peterson et al., 2017; Hamilton & Moore, 2004; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018; UNHCR, 2017; Uzelac et al., 2018; Wells, 2011). They acknowledge that young refugees' educational experiences "cannot be understood by only focusing on student-teacher-school relationships; also the way in which larger social, cultural and political contexts act as mediators, need to be considered" (Pastoor, 2015, p. 252).

In this project, the (educational) challenges for young refugees and their construction of a pathway through them are framed using two key concepts: namely, 'unsettlement' and 'navigation'. In what follows, I will first discuss the concept of 'unsettlement' – drawing from the literature on precarity, and especially as it relates to forced displacement – and how it contributes to young refugees' unstable everyday living conditions and uncertain futures. Secondly, I will explain how agency is understood in the thesis – taking into account its individual, collective and relational qualities – and how Vigh's (2009, 2010) term 'social navigation' can serve as a useful lens for analysing expressions of agency in precarious contexts.

1.2.1. 'Unsettlement': the (manufactured) precarity and uncertainty of displacement

Across the literature, it is understood that young migrants' and refugees' contexts are characterised by "everyday precarity" (Johnson & Gilligan, 2021, p. 145): meaning the multiple, overlapping forms of instability which may be legal, financial, social, spatial or informational (Eberle & Holliday, 2011; Fernando et al., 2010; Ilcan et al., 2018; Janmyr, 2016; Johnson & Gilligan, 2021; Lobo, 2020; Mann, 2010; Oner et al., 2020; Standing, 2011; Wall et al., 2017). In terms of legal precarity, they may be stateless, living in wait for the regularisation of their status, in fear of deportation, and with only temporary protection or otherwise suffering from having few rights and privileges. In terms of financial precarity, refugees and other migrants may be living in poverty, be un- or underemployed or have limited rights to work – as well as being more likely to be

engaged in low-waged, irregular and informalised labour. Alongside this financial precarity, they may also have to endure social precarity: meaning abuse, harassment, harsh treatment, marginalisation, social stigmas, family and community tensions, a lack of social support and a lack of access to education, healthcare and other state services.

In terms of spatial precarity, refugees can also be homeless, living in unstable accommodation arrangements or restricted in their movement, with the ongoing threat of being raided or evicted. This has been referred to as both 'precarity of space' and movement (Ilcan et al., 2018), and as 'precarity of place' (Banki, 2013a; 2013b): meaning the constant risk of being detained, deported or otherwise coming into contact with the police. This impacts how refugees engage with public spaces such as the market, friends' homes, places of worship and health centres (Johnson & Gilligan, 2021). Finally, researchers have highlighted how refugees also experience 'information precarity': meaning a lack of technological and social access to information, a lack of ability to control their own representation and the prevalence of misinformation (Wall et al., 2017). This became especially acute after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, when life moved online and the 'digital divide' widened – limiting refugees' access to social and educational opportunities (Berg, 2022).

With all of these factors taken into account, it becomes clear that precarity is "not a one-dimensional category of analysis" but rather refers to varied, intersecting forms of instability (Ilcan et al., 2018, p. 53). Alongside this instability, various scholars have noted that uncertainty – meaning the unpredictability and 'unknowing' of the immediate and long-term future – is central to the experience of (forced) migration (Biehl, 2015; Brun, 2015; El-Shaarawi, 2015; Griffiths, 2013; Horst & Grabska, 2015; Williams & Baláž, 2011).

Instability therefore goes hand-in-hand with uncertainty to produce what this thesis, building on Vera Espinoza (2018) and Tang (2015), calls 'unsettlement'. For

Vera Espinoza, it refers to “the condition by which refugees’ feelings of uncertainty and instability, resulting from experiences of displacement, extend and normalize into resettlement” (p. 225). Similarly, Tang (2015) uses the term to refer to the fact that refugees’ journeys may remain ‘unfinished’ after many years – because, even after fleeing genocide and imprisonment and being offered ‘resettlement’ in countries such as the United States, they can still end up being resettled in areas marked by severe poverty and racialised isolation. Here too, I use the concept of ‘unsettlement’ as an antithesis to the technical term ‘resettlement’, while also attempting to capture the impacts and nervous energy of living in and enduring continuous precarity – even after refugees have officially been ‘resettled’. Indeed, in this way, ‘unsettlement’ can be considered an existential state for many young refugees.

This takes us to its links with the *unheimlich* – a term notably applied by Freud and Heidegger, which also appears in the forced migration literature. Freud's use of *unheimlich* (itself inspired by Jentsch, and mostly translated as the ‘uncanny’) refers to a state of psychic unsettling, such as when the familiar is made unfamiliar (Freud, [1919] 1953). This Freudian idea of the ‘making-unfamiliar’ has been used in forced migration studies to discuss how home can become unfamiliar or lost, due to conflict or natural disasters – which draws from the term’s more literal translation as ‘un-homely’. This follows Heidegger’s interpretation of *unheimlich*, which is often used to describe the experience of dislocation (Ashcroft et al., 2000). This dislocation, it is argued, leads to strangeness and rupture: with not only physical, but also sensory and psychic dimensions (Cabot & Ramsay, 2022). For Heidegger (1971), these psychic dimensions stem from the fact that to *be* in the world is to *dwell* in space – and so if the space in which one dwells is lost, this leads to a pathological state of generalised ‘anxiety’ in which one cannot see oneself projected into the future and, consequently, no longer feels ‘at home’ in the world. In other words, “the world has become strange, hostile, inhospitable, and alien, no longer able to offer a framework of intelligibility of the sort

that previously made being possible" (French, 2015, p. 365). In this way, for both Heidegger and Arendt, refugees' experiences of displacement can undermine their very existence (Mahrdt, 2017).

This is not to say, however, that I intend 'unsettlement' to be synonymous with 'making-unfamiliar' – rather, that the latter is one aspect or consequence of the experience of unsettlement. Furthermore, while Heidegger's 'un-homeliness' is existentially bleak, my conceptualisation contains a seed of hopefulness – a potential for regeneration and recreation – as in Bhabha's (1994) argument that estrangement requires a relocation, rather than a loss, of home and familiarity. While this 'relocation' still involves having to renegotiate the meaning of home, and to create homeliness in an unfamiliar context (even if only as a means of survival), for Bhabha, "anything that is, or has become, unfamiliar can, with time and effort, become familiar again" (Aman & Dahlstedt, 2023 p. 728). This aligns with Kohli (2011, p. 313), who talks of "recovering *an ordinary way of life*" (emphasis added), and not one particular 'way of life' or one's familiar old one, necessarily; and with Malkki (1995, p. 509), who argues that not only one's homeland or country of origin should be considered "the ideal habitat for any person, the place where one fits in, lives in peace, and has an unproblematic culture and identity". Rather, both the new society can become familiar for refugees, and refugees can become familiar for the new society.

Elsewhere in the refugee studies literature, we commonly see the terms 'limbo' or 'liminality' used to conceptualise this unsettling 'in-betweenness' and uncertainty of displacement (e.g. Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2022; Hartonen et al, 2022), and mostly in their anthropological senses (drawing from Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1969). They are often used to describe forced migrants' legal condition: being outside the law and the 'national order of things' (Malkki, 1995), in a 'state of exception' without basic rights and in which they are reduced to 'bare life' (Agamben, 1998). However, the concept of 'unsettlement' as I use it in this thesis has distinct differences from these terms. Firstly,

I would argue that 'limbo' suggests being suspended in time or stuck, whereas 'unsettlement' implies movement: and particularly the perpetually shifting and unstable nature of refugees' socio-political environment. Secondly, both 'limbo' and 'liminality' – meaning being in transition or at a threshold, as in a rite of passage – have a neutral quality, as they describe the condition without giving a sense of its socially or psychologically negative consequences. The 'unsettlement' I suggest here encapsulates not only the *state* of in-betweenness, but also its logics and impacts: i.e. its implicit refusal of (true) resettlement, and the (deeply existential) feelings of instability and precarity it creates. In this way, my unsettlement is at once infrastructural and intimate; social and emotional; political and personal.

In terms of its political dimensions, we can pull further on its semantic threads to note that the term 'unsettled' can also signify 1) the fact that a matter has not been settled (resolved), which is the case for the many thousands of asylum cases in Greece which remain undecided after several years; and 2) the fact that European countries' 'bills' remain unsettled, as they argue over how many refugees they are willing to take and in exchange for how much funding – using displaced individuals as bargaining chips and forcing them to wait as they negotiate.

To capture these dimensions, here I would extend Vera Espinoza's (2018) definition of 'unsettlement' by adding the potential for the condition to be *manufactured* – following Walia's (2021, p. 137) use of the term to describe the "manufactured vulnerability" of migrant workers. This is because while uncertainty and precarity may be inherent to the condition of refugeehood (and indeed to certain other forms of migranthood), it is not inevitable. Rather, it can be argued that refugees are kept in an intentionally 'unsettled' condition – i.e. a manufactured state of precarity and uncertainty – as a mechanism of migration governance (Horst & Grabska, 2015). This has been argued in the context of the recent 'refugee crisis' in Europe. Ilcan et al. (2018, p. 55) refer to it as "the ambiguous architecture of precarity". They explain:

Diverse actors, policies and practices produce and govern precarity and these interventions foster further complexities and ambiguities, which in turn influence the condition of precarity. This changing notion of precarity occurs through different domains (cultural, political and social), within and across scales (international, regional, national and local), [and] in distinct spaces and living conditions (neighbourhoods, cities and territories).

This is the case both in states where either no support or recognition is provided to refugees, and where, on paper, various forms of support or ‘integration’ policies have been established or are slowly being neglected or dismantled.

In Europe, the case is increasingly the latter. Karlsen (2021), for example, describes how in Norway, ‘irregular’ migrants’ access to welfare services has become increasingly limited – arguing that this functions as a means of migration control. Karlsen describes this not as outright exclusion, but as ‘precarious inclusion’. This results in a paradox – of states simultaneously demanding integration while at the same time denying it. This paradox has been noted by other scholars (Galgócz, 2021; Ilcan et al., 2018; Inhorn & Volk, 2021; Nimführ et al., 2020). Cantat (2020, p. 190), for example, observes how alongside the highly mediatised, hypervisible border ‘spectacle’ in Europe, “a series of measures of neglect and destitution becomes authorised and normalised”. This has been termed a ‘double politics’ of ‘spectacularisation’ alongside diverse forms of quiet marginalisation and neglect (Cantat, 2020; Fiddian-Qasmiyah, 2016; Stel, 2021); and also as a ‘politics of (dis)integration’ (Hinger & Schweitzer, 2020). This double politics works to break down refugees’ social standing and keep them in the above-mentioned conditions of precarity – making them feel unwelcome and unable to establish a life in the new context, and overall more likely to leave.

It is important to note, too, that the impacts of such manufactured precarity have been proven to be highly individual: being shaped by factors such as gendered and race-based dynamics. For example, both in the new context and on their journeys, girls

and women are at greater risk of sexual and gender-based violence, kidnapping and marginalisation (WWI, 2022), while having less access to social protection (Di Matteo & Scaramuzzino, 2022). Women who are undocumented or have a precarious immigration status can also be exploited more often by employers via substandard working conditions, forced marriage, human trafficking and withholding pay (Canefe, 2018). Refugees' experiences are also impacted by racism at local and national levels: including, as Masoud et al. (2023) argue, in the very nature of 'racialising' integration processes themselves. Indeed, it has been argued that race has been central to the construction of the 'European migrant crisis' as a crisis (Georgi, 2019). Race-based inequality, abuse and discrimination towards refugees were amplified as the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, resulting in increased exclusion from formal employment, healthcare, education, housing and social welfare (Fouskas et al., 2022).

When stitched together, these philosophical and political underpinnings and connections create a rich picture of 'unsettlement' as I wish to convey it here: as a concept which captures how refugees' inner and outer worlds are thoroughly shaken to their roots by displacement and maltreatment in the country of asylum, with their very existence undermined; while at the same time new lifeworlds, identities and meanings (of home and time, for example) are born from this existential rupture and renegotiation. The concept is especially fitting for the Greek context, as both the state (and indeed many newcomers) only ever intended it to be a temporary location for refugees – and as such, it offers only reluctant and limited attempts at fostering inclusion and stability (see Section 1.4).

Returning to the topic at hand: in such unstable social contexts, education has a key role to play. It may be precarious in itself – as refugees may face racism and discrimination in learning settings – while also being considered a solution to unsettlement. That is to say that education is often perceived by youth as a means of navigating their way out of unsettlement, and particularly financial and legal precarity

(Evans et al., 2013; Johnson & Gilligan, 2021, Mann, 2010). This is discussed in greater depth in Section 1.3 below.

1.2.2. Conceptualising (educational) agency: the ‘social navigation’ lens

As mentioned above, this thesis aims to contribute to the literature on how ‘unsettled’ youth navigate instability and uncertainty. This is a growing body of research which demonstrates how (young) refugees and other migrants exercise their agency within the confines of their precarious conditions (e.g. Tervonen & Enache, 2017). It counters popular media representations of refugees as passive victims of circumstance, by instead depicting the ways in which they simultaneously negotiate everyday challenges and long-term planning.

This thesis builds on this scholarship on young refugees’ agency by focusing on the ways in which they respond to and navigate ‘unsettlement’ in/via education. As such, instead of asking ‘why are young refugees failing?’ – which is common in the refugee education literature – it asks instead, ‘why do they keep attending?’ This is based on an understanding that youth take an “active role in their own development”, alongside the “broader social and cultural forces” which co-construct it (Tudge & Hogan, 2005, p. 106). Strategic decision-making in such precarious contexts is often neglected in the research on refugee education, but it is necessary to counteract perceptions of refugees as patients whose interests must be looked after (Zeus, 2011).

This project therefore avoids employing standardised benchmarks typically used to define ‘success’. These can include, for example, focusing on outcomes such as academic ‘achievement’ or ‘performance’; failing ‘less often’; the percentage of students achieving a high school diploma; having fewer behavioural, emotional or psychological problems; and having a lower incidence of PTSD symptoms (Wong & Schweitzer, 2017). This list, from a meta-analysis of the factors promoting refugees’

academic success, demonstrates the dominance of individualised, normative approaches which often stem from Western psychology and its conception of trauma (Wilkinson et al., 2017). They also rely on standardised, pre-coded questionnaires which neglect youth perspectives on how and why they may construct alternative educational pathways (Chatty, 2009). Some refugee education researchers have attempted to address this imbalance by studying academic resilience (Ungar et al., 2014), adjustment (Birman & Tran, 2017) and access and persistence (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2017) as successful outcomes in themselves, using social-ecological approaches. This moves refugee education research beyond merely documenting learning barriers (Keddie & Niesche, 2012), or indeed trying to 'fix' the individual's 'insides' (Miller & Rasco, 2004) by measuring their achievement against the benchmarks and expectations of their (potentially temporary) host society. This project aims to build on the work of these authors.

An agentic approach must also recognise that education can take various forms, and that young refugees may take alternative routes based on their locality, subjective ideas of 'success', social and societal influences, and their preparation for multiple possible futures (Bellino, 2018; Brenick & Titzmann, 2015; Chatty, 2009; Dryden-Peterson, 2017a; Kohli, 2011; Wessels, 2018). Their decisions may be stigmatised if they fall outside of the status quo (Bellino, 2018), for example, and even before acting, they may suffer from a "brittle horizon of aspirations" (Appadurai, 2004, p. 69) due to violence, discrimination, financial insecurity or their gender (Chatty, 2009; Dryden-Peterson & Reddick, 2017). The ways in which their subsequent educational decision-making (and agency) is socially and contextually shaped constitutes a significant gap in the literature. This project aims to fill that gap, and in doing so, answer calls for the reconceptualisation of the young refugee as not merely a contingent of displacement, but as an individual who "possesses a certain agency for change and progress" (Sen, 2018, p. x).

Making agency central, then, is necessary; but first, there are two issues to address. Firstly, while agency, resilience, and self-reliance among refugees are increasingly promoted, these concepts have been criticised for being ideological ‘buzzwords’ (Olick, 2016) and neoliberal constructs which deflect attention from the responsibilities of states to support refugees; instead placing the burden of recovery and integration on affected individuals (Easton-Calabria & Omata, 2018; Ilcan & Rygiel, 2015; Joseph, 2013). Secondly, they may play into binary narratives of refugees as vulnerable/resilient or passive/active (O’Higgins, 2012), or indeed as demonised/idealised (El Sheikh, 2017).

Therefore, a more nuanced and relational conceptualisation of agency underpins this project. Rather than understanding agency as something determined and exercised by isolated individuals, a relational perspective views agency as “acquired in and through social relationships” and mediated by “relational, social and political conditions” (Gateley, 2014, p. 6) – which include often-ignored power dynamics (Balcioglu, 2018). In terms of social relationships, it recognises that “socio-cultural ideas, expectations and assumptions” can have a strong impact on young people’s educational decision-making, and especially for women in the Global South (Okkolin & Ramamoorthi, 2017, p. 39). In terms of context, it acknowledges that agency cannot be separated from economic and political arrangements, and that it may be constrained or enabled by the range and adequacy of options available – which are themselves determined by racial and gendered hierarchies (Rajaram, 2016; Wilson-Strydom, 2017; Zeus, 2011). Even in countries which, on paper, offer ‘lifelong’ settlement, young migrants still require the knowledge, skills and commitment of ‘helpers’ (such as guardians) to support their physical, temporal and psychological movements: meaning their readjustments in terms of place, what ‘home’ means, who they are and what they might become (Kohli, 2014). This project therefore proceeds with an understanding that deciding upon and constructing one’s educational career is not an isolated, individual

project, but “a complex social phenomenon par excellence” (Okkolin & Ramamoorthi, 2017, p. 39). As such, an analytical lens is needed which takes into account these complex social conditions.

This is where Vigh’s (2009, 2010) concept of ‘social navigation’ can be of use. The concept is Vigh’s interpretation of the term *dubriagem*, used by young would-be migrants in Guinea-Bissau to talk about ‘managing oneself’ or ‘getting by’. It refers to the ways in which migrants navigate their way through and out of adversity: simultaneously negotiating everyday challenges and long-term planning towards what they perceive to be beneficial outcomes. It was developed in response to theories of praxis which, according to Vigh (2009, p. 426), “often forget, for some reason, to take the movement of the social environment into consideration”. In particular, Vigh refers to Bourdieu’s work on practice and social forces:

The concept departs from Bourdieu’s body of theory in relation to … the speed and acceleration of change and his idea of socio-cultural fields and formations. In fact, Bourdieu’s work builds on an underlying idea of relatively stable class-structured states: he shows how people are constituted and positioned and how they move within their social environment, but he does so primarily with stable grounds as an implicit premise … In Bourdieu’s perspective, people may move and act vertically in the social topography of a field, competing for position and capital, and thus act strategically in relation to each other as competitors, but they generally do so without having to worry about the movement of the field itself. (pp. 426-7)

In a context of conflict and political turmoil, such as Vigh’s field site, he found that the social environment was experienced by youth as an “unfolding process” (p. 424), rather than something stable. This led him to exchange the metaphor of the static social landscape or ‘field’ for that of a ‘seascape’: as the social worlds of the young men in his research were “more akin to a choppy sea” (p. 429) which had to be navigated.

The analytical lens of ‘social navigation’ is therefore especially applicable to environments marked by uncertainty and precarity, in which agents must battle various

conflicting and constantly shifting social forces in order to “look for one’s life” (Vigh, 2010, p. 31) and discern a clear route to an envisioned future – while simultaneously tackling immediate dangers. It suggests a flexibility in young people’s strategising for the future when faced with an uncertain social ‘seascape’ and questionable resources to cross it. Furthermore, it takes into account the importance of time in young people’s demonstrations of agency, and recognises the dialogue between their “movement through both the socially *immediate* and the socially *imagined* (Vigh, 2009, p. 425; emphasis original). As such, it captures how they have both short- and long-term goals.

Vigh describes this process of navigation as one of ‘motion within motion’, or the constant re-adaptation of praxis to ‘get by’ in contexts of insecurity, where social formations are in flux. As an analytical optic, it brings to light how migrants’ ‘tactics’ and movements are decided upon, realised and renegotiated in line with emerging opportunities, barriers and evaluations of the socio-political environment – requiring a flexible navigation of social relations and a possible manipulation of rules. As such, other forms and theorisations of refugees’ and migrants’ agency – such as resistance (Renkens et al., 2022; Saunders & Al-Om, 2022), negotiation (Miellet, 2021) and ‘situated agency’ (Torok & Ball, 2021) – can arguably be subsumed within the concept of ‘social navigation’. Other researchers have also applied the social navigation lens in research with refugees (e.g. Daniel et al., 2020; Denov & Bryan, 2012), noting how its focus on deliberate and calculated decisions can contradict the image of the “powerless, passive, and/or pathological” forced migrant (Denov & Bryan, 2012, p. 16).

It should be noted here, however, that while there is a great deal of discussion of transitions and navigations in the literature on displacement and migration, much of this scholarship suggests that these acts have end points which are fixed and certain – or indeed outcomes which all migrants aspire to. The difference with the concept of ‘social navigation’ is that it does not suggest such a neat resolution to ‘unsettlement’ offered by young refugees’ own agency; rather, Vigh (2009) encapsulates within this

theory the fact that future aspirations can continually shift. For Vigh, there is a constant dialogue between the future and the present, with both everyday decisions and longer-term ambitions being continuously shaped by ever-shifting social forces and opportunities.

By using the lens of ‘social navigation’, this thesis therefore aims to add to the literature which counteracts prevailing representations of refugee youth – and particularly young women – as vulnerable and passive (Freedman, 2016; Johnson, 2011; Trilling, 2019); instead highlighting their agency (e.g. Asaf, 2017; Greene, 2020; Johnson & Gilligan, 2020; Vuilleumier, 2021), and their educational agency in particular (e.g. Ibesh et al., 2021; Ingvars, 2021; Rezaian et al., 2019). However, in this thesis, it is acknowledged that a) youth do face considerable physical and psychological threats, as well as diminishing state-level support and opportunities; b) their ambitions can shift, or remain unachieved; and c) as mentioned above, their agency is often relationally shaped, as it is influenced by relationships with family and society and exercised collectively. As such, it also aims to add nuance to individualistic and de-contextualised conceptualisations of agency, in recognising that navigational acts may be highly relational or even collective feats.

1.3. Literature review: ‘unsettlement’ and young refugees’ education

Research suggests that education can be central to both the initial decision to migrate (i.e. in seeking out opportunities elsewhere) (e.g. Triandafyllidou, 2019), and to people’s navigation of uncertainty after migrating (e.g. Dånge, 2023). For Syrians, for example, the lack of educational opportunities caused by the conflict was reportedly “a driving force of displacement” (Ferris & Kirişci, 2016, p. 26). It is a common finding that refugee youth across emergencies consider education a high priority (Essomba, 2017,

p. 209) – and when asked why, their responses are often that it can “help them make a future” (Dryden-Peterson, 2017b).

Education, including learning languages, has been found to be central to young refugees’ aspirations amid uncertainty – alongside employment, social inclusion and gaining a sense of stability and safety (Dånge, 2023). This is because it provides a future-oriented activity to focus on, instead of political issues and the uncertainty of one’s temporary residence, while also offering meaningful stability and routine (Kristensen & Christensen, 2021; Shin, 2022). This can be especially important when youth find themselves ‘stuck’ in what are supposed to be transit contexts, but where closed borders and a lack of relocation options force them to wait indefinitely (Jovanović et al., 2023). In the longer term, particularly in resettlement contexts, education is said to offer opportunities for financial independence, personal freedom and overall, as Dånge (2023) reports, ‘emancipation’ from integration systems. Language learning in particular, for Dånge, provides the key to gaining access to and a pathway through “education, employment, social networks and medical services” – as well as knowledge of national bureaucracy, norms and culture (p. 660). Kohli (2011, p. 313) describes this as gaining “an initial stabilising hold” in the new context, after the shock of arrival.

The literature on refugee education also notes that the social aspect of education can be a motivating factor for youth to participate. For example, Pangestu (2018) speaks of how non-formal education settings can become somewhere for young refugees to keep busy, find friends and feel ‘at home’, which is especially important in a period of their lives often riddled with feelings of isolation, loneliness and a lack of social activities and trustworthy connections (especially with ‘local’ youth) (Dånge, 2023). Dånge (2023, p. 660) found that the friendships refugee youth made via education were believed to be “fundamental to distract from worries, improve their

immediate well-being, build language skills and gain knowledge of societal laws and norms”.

However, to obtain any of these above-mentioned benefits of education, this does not necessarily mean (only) attending state institutions to learn – as in Pangestu’s study. Rather, it can mean engaging in various forms of learning, and indeed taking routes which may seem illogical to some observers – but which youth perceive as having beneficial outcomes. For example, Pozzo and Evers (2016, p. 475) reported on young refugees in the Netherlands who chose to learn Dutch instead of English, despite the possibility of being sent to another country. They made this choice, they explained, to gain access to work and learning opportunities in the short term and to keep “mentally stable”: which they claimed they would still benefit from if they left.

Despite having such motivation and aspirations, and indeed likely more opportunities in the new society, the conditions of unsettlement very often make it challenging to continue participating in education, or to access learning in the first place (Nunn et al., 2017). For example, the need of an income and lack of legal rights to undertake regular employment can see young asylum-seeking men in particular engaging in unskilled work with irregular hours, which makes it difficult for them to follow school or language classes (Shapiro & Egaa Jørgensen, 2021). Once over the age of 18, in countries such as the Netherlands, refugee youth have no statutory right to education; and access is more difficult if they do not speak Dutch or English (Pozzo & Evers, 2016). This, Pozzo and Evers found, can hamper their agency and cause a lost sense of self-determination. Overall, as Nunn et al. (2017, p. 51) explain in the case of Australia:

Settlement is not the safe, predictable, and welcoming experience of starting a ‘new’ life ... as commonly portrayed. On the contrary, although opportunities for secure housing, education, and employment are on offer, violence, racism, discrimination, family separation, and conflict ... continue.

Further, Nunn et al. remind us that settlement involves both short- and long-term processes, which may not be aligned. For example, young refugees may divert their resources towards supporting family members abroad, rather than securing safe housing for themselves for the here-and-now – meaning that they are left without the fundamental condition for pursuing education and employment (i.e. secure accommodation). In the time spent waiting for asylum decisions, life also happens: meaning that youth may find themselves dealing with the loss of family members abroad, having to support children of their own, and changing political and social dynamics in the new country. Still, despite these challenges, the motivation to learn often remains constant.

1.3.1. The conditional benefits of education – in all its forms

This project agrees with young refugees that participating in education can be of substantial benefit. It can offer the chance for social cohesion, positive psychosocial impacts and mitigation of delinquency and crime (Bonfiglio, 2010; Burde et al., 2015; Camfield et al., 2010; Wahby & Chatty, 2014; Nilsson & Bunar, 2016; UNHCR, 2016a), while also promoting optimism for the future, self-realisation, independence, self-worth, a sense of accomplishment and feelings of safety (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Klasen & Fleurbaey, 2018; Mosselson, 2007). It can also have a positive impact on relational inclusion and widen friendship circles (Palaiologou & Prekate, 2023). These factors have a positive impact on well-being, resilience and settlement experiences, even beyond school completion (Brenner & Kia-Keating, 2016; Mosselson, 2007; Pastoor, 2015). From an instrumentalist point of view, education leads to greater human capital, more employment opportunities and reduced social inequalities, leading to economic growth and well-being (Kapoor et al., 2018; Klasen & Fleurbaey, 2018). From a human development point of view, it is crucial for developing key capabilities such as self-

expression and reasoning (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 78). It also provides stability in protracted emergency contexts (Dryden-Peterson, 2017a) and reduces the chances of being recruited into conflict (Bonfiglio, 2010); while also assisting with the “reintegration of identity in exile” (Mosselson, 2007, p. 98) by providing a student identity, future goals and an opportunity to understand the new society’s cultural norms.

However, these benefits come with multiple caveats. The sense of safety identified as important by Kia-Keating and Ellis (2007), for example, stems from building trusting relationships with members of the school community such as teachers and peers. Conversely, negative interactions may damage well-being, which is a critical factor in ensuring educational progress (Nilsson & Bunar, 2016). Social relations should avoid being those of subordination or dependence which result in exclusion, discrimination, stigmatisation, humiliation or ostracism (Klasen & Fleurbaey, 2018). The close relationship between well-being and school experiences makes it crucial to support refugee youth in such settings (Hek, 2005), but such support may be lacking, and particularly where resources are limited. Similarly, teachers and other school staff may not be sufficiently trained in how to conduct supportive interactions (Pastoor, 2015).

Outside of schools and formal education, activities organised by NGOs, after-school clubs, faith groups and other organisations in the ‘third space’ of civil society (Bhabha, 1994) can create important “non-formal spaces of socio-cultural accompaniment” (Batsleer et al., 2017, p. 305), or “small spaces close to home” which “symbolically reconstitute refugees as hosts” (p. 306) and allow newcomers to retreat from the potential hostility created by national immigration discourse. However, the insistence of international development organisations on integration into national education systems typically results in non-formal provision being seen as ‘second-best’ (Rose, 2009). While the refugees and local and international volunteers organising these spaces may also be guilty of ‘othering’ (Lyons et al., 2012; Theodorou, 2011), the

possibilities they provide for refugees to shape new forms of learning, teach one another, and better understand their new society cannot be neglected (Andersson & Andersson, 2005). This project thus joins researchers such as Wilkinson et al. (2017) in attempting to deepen our understanding of the role that non-formal learning plays in young people's construction of their educational trajectories. This, as well as the impacts of the formal education dynamics described above, needs to be explored in greater detail in Greece – where literature in this area is very limited.

1.4. Context of the study: 'unsettlement' and young refugees' education in Greece

1.4.1. 'Unsettlement' in Greece: from a 'refugee crisis' to a 'reception crisis'

Since 2015, up to a million migrants have entered Greece (MoERR, 2017; OECD, 2018; Ziomas et al., 2017). In the early days of the 'crisis', when 4,000 asylum applications were being submitted per month (Asylum Service, 2017), the government's strategy was to facilitate transfers from the Eastern Aegean islands to the northern border as quickly as possible, so migrants could continue their journeys to Northern and Western Europe; sometimes passing through in less than 48 hours (Afouzenidis et al., 2017; Deardorff Miller, 2017; Delaney, 2017; OECD, 2018; UNICEF & REACH, 2017b; Veikou, 2017). This led to Greece being termed a 'transit country' (Stathopoulou, 2019) on the Eastern Mediterranean Route into Europe. However, due to various controversial international migration management strategies (detailed in Appendix A), 147,420 refugees – a third of whom were children – are currently trapped in abject conditions² (AIDA, 2021; UNHCR, 2022a). For Dimitriadi (2020), deterrence

² It is important to note here that current commentary suggests that procedures have been much faster and more accessible for Ukrainians fleeing the Russian war of 2022, compared to those arriving from Asia and Africa (Pawson, 2022). As the situation is still unfolding and up-to-date asylum statistics from Greece were not available at the time of writing, the particular treatment of Ukrainian refugees in the country – and their involvement in educational support programmes – falls beyond the scope of this thesis.

and “legislative changes, interdiction practices, and an overall harsher treatment of asylum seekers and recognised refugees” have now become “the new normal”.

As relocation options are now severely limited or impossible, and asylum processing is taking years, Greece has come to be understood as a context of protracted displacement (Roman et al., 2021). Despite this, there is a pervasive sense that Greece still considers refugees’ presence in the country impermanent, and so does not invest in their long-term inclusion. Nagy (2018) describes this as a general approach of playing with time, or of enforced waiting, which leaves refugees living in uncertainty. Even after several years, it holds true that this constitutes not so much a ‘refugee crisis’ as a ‘reception crisis’ (e.g. RSA, 2018; Spyropoulou & Christopoulos, 2016). The large amount of initial physical (i.e. volunteer) and financial assistance has fallen away since 2015, but a substantial need remains – not least because Greece is still recovering from a major economic crisis which caused a collapse in GDP (see Figure 1), a rise in unemployment (UN Data, 2018), and struggles to provide quality public services for the entire population – including education.

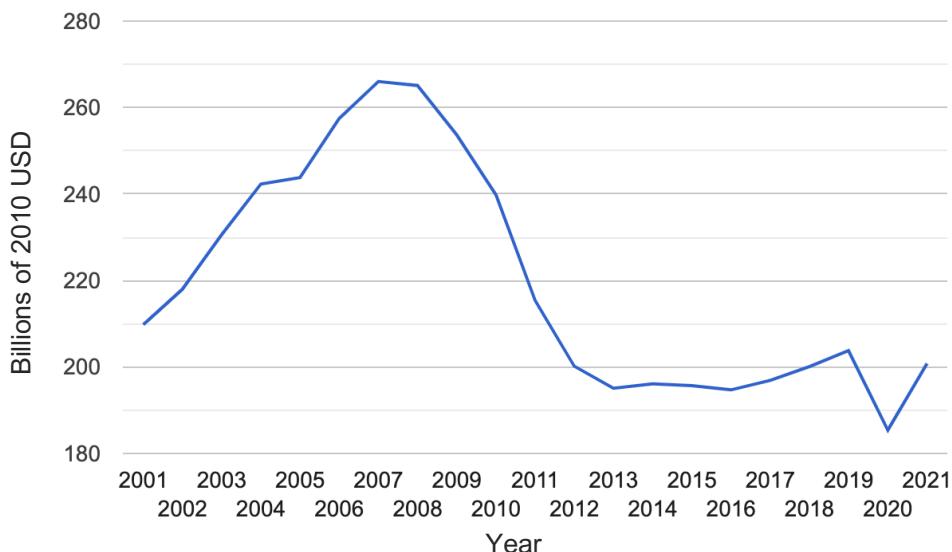


Figure 1. Gross Domestic Product of Greece, 2001-2021. Source: World Bank data via theglobaleconomy.com

Berry et al. (2015, pp. 4-5) summarise how the related issues of austerity, migration flows, visibility and political agendas have worked together to catalyse conditions of hostility towards refugees in countries such as Greece. They claim that public attitudes have “hardened” due to austerity policies and an increase in the visibility of migrants in recent years, which have both “fed feelings of economic and social insecurity [and] encouraged the growth of far-right anti-immigrant parties and movements”. However, they argue,

it is impossible to ignore the role of the mass media in influencing public and elite political attitudes towards asylum and migration ... They provide the information which citizens use to make sense of the world and their place within it.

In Greece, there has been a proliferation of images of disorder and decay associated with ‘crisis’ – as was also the case following the economic downturn of 2008. Basea (2016, p. 62), for example, claims that the Greek financial crisis could not be separated from the ‘spectacle’ surrounding it: an “inexhaustible reservoir of images of suffering” involving the recurring motifs of poverty, homelessness, deterioration and protest (Hope, 2012; Kalantzis, 2016). When 2015 and the ‘refugee crisis’ then came – with its 24/7 coverage of boat arrivals in particular (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015) – graphic accounts of border events were easily accessible to a wider public in Greece and beyond (Carastathis & Tsilimpounidi, 2020). This made the ‘refugee crisis’ one of the most heavily mediatised events of recent years (Trilling, 2019): being referred to as a ‘mediatized spectacle’ (Carastathis & Tsilimpounidi, 2020) or a ‘border spectacle’ (De Genova, 2015; 2017).

These highly visual narrative devices have led to strict and multiple forms of exclusion in the country – leaving refugees in what Spathopoulou and Carastathis (2020) describe as a ‘bordered reality’. The harsher treatment at the physical border,

under the guise of ‘border management’, includes human rights violations in the detention, deportation, surveillance and denial of entry of asylum seekers; for which there is limited accountability and a lack of remedies to challenge these operations (Drakopoulou et al., 2020). The Greek authorities have also been said to be installing floating borders to prevent boat arrivals (Euronews, 2020). For Christodoulou et al. (2016, p. 325), “the EU and its member states use theatrical tricks, invent tactics and employ *deus ex machina*, such as the selective filtering of refugee populations”. These authors argue that the ability to construct and deploy these devices is made possible “exactly because of the multiple Greek ‘crises’ and the weakening of Greek sovereignty” (p. 325).

With the above taken into account, it can be argued that the ‘refugee crisis’ has been discursively constructed to serve nation-states’ political goals (Rodriguez, 2018). Indeed, it has been suggested that the ‘refugee crisis’ has become short-hand for the fusing-together of various migration routes, which have been impacted by European asylum policies and have proved fatal for more than 20 years (Cantat, 2016; Župarić-Iljić & Valenta, 2018). This makes it a ‘crisis of protection’, according to Almustafa (2021), in which international protection structures have been reconstituted to serve containment and deterrence goals.

However, according to Chouliarakis and Georgiou (2020, p. 25), migrants’ mobility has also been regulated *within* countries such as Greece via “the symbolic border – through the public narratives of press and broadcast news or social media commentary that shape social imaginaries, public opinion and policy debates around migration”. These acts of discursive and symbolic bordering were heightened in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which overlapped with the economic and migrant reception challenges Greece was already facing. Beyond their urgent physical health issues, refugees then had to deal with increased “racial and ethnic inequalities”, hostile anti-migrant rhetoric, and precarity – which intensified their vulnerability by perpetuating

exclusion in the employment, housing and social care and protection sectors (Fouskas et al., 2022). This led to negative psychological impacts (Marchi et al., 2022). Such discrimination was based on misinformation that refugees (and indeed other migrants) were conduits of the virus. In addition, physical borders and bordering processes hardened as a strategy to prevent the spread of COVID-19, even in supposedly 'borderless' areas of Europe – demonstrating "how strong and durable territorial borders still are and how rapidly the idea of a borderless Europe might change" (Opiłowska, 2021, p. S589). Overall – as discussed further in Paper 4 of this thesis – the pandemic significantly multiplied the uncertainty, precarity and immobility refugees were already facing in Greece.

1.4.2. Young refugees in Greece

As of the end of 2022, there were an estimated 147,420 registered refugees in the country (UNHCR, 2022a). Since 2015, approximately a third of all refugees in Greece have consistently been children (UNICEF, 2020). Steady numbers continue to arrive; with land crossings in particular increasing from 2019 (ANSA 2019a; Mixed Migration Centre, 2018; UNHCR, 2018a; UNHCR, 2019). Recent figures suggest that most arrivals originate from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, with Syrians constituting 25-50% of the total number depending on the source (UNHCR, 2019; UNHCR, 2018a). While 12.5% of the total number of minors are unaccompanied – being mostly teenage boys aged 16-17 – the majority of young refugees arrive with families, are of all ages, are fairly gender-balanced, and are accommodated on the mainland (Deardorff Miller, 2017; UNICEF, 2019a; UNICEF & REACH, 2017b).

As of 2020, 31% of children were accommodated in hotels and apartments for families; 28% in 'open sites' (i.e. camps); 24% in Reception and Identification Centers (RICs); and the remainder were in shelters, hotels or 'safe zones' for unaccompanied

youth, or had ‘informal arrangements’ (UNICEF, 2020). Two thirds of unaccompanied youth were still in need of long-term accommodation. While the majority were indeed on the mainland, in a somewhat better situation than those left behind in the notorious conditions of the island ‘hotspots’, many were still in overcrowded camp conditions which the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs (2017) has previously admitted are “horrendous” (p. 14). Camps and RICs are often in remote locations, with little infrastructure and insufficient resources and management expertise to handle the number of residents (UNHCR, 2018d). Those around Thessaloniki have been described as not meeting international standards, and are “located at significant distances from urban centres, within industrial zones where residential use is not permitted” (Tsavdaroglou & Lalenis, 2020, p. 163).

Of these young new arrivals, most took the decision with their families to leave their home countries due to conflict and insecurity, as well as the opportunity to access work and education opportunities (UNHCR, 2018a; UNICEF & REACH, 2017b). Indeed, through small-scale surveys, education has been found to be a priority in Greece (Delaney, 2017; ESWG, 2018a; UNICEF & REACH, 2017b), including for 15 to 24-year-olds (Kousiakis et al., 2016). Now, however, they are faced with a wait of several years for asylum decisions, insufficient facilities and support, and even risks of detention, incarceration and exploitation by traffickers (Mishra, 2019; Póczik & Sárik, 2018; Velissariou, 2018) – all of which can lead to serious mental health and well-being issues (Afouxenidis et al., 2017; Baster & Merminod, 2019; Bjertrup et al., 2018; MSF, 2019; Save the Children, 2017; UNHCR, 2018a). This can also prevent them from accessing education potentially for years (HRW, 2018; Lovett et al., 2017; Póczik & Sárik, 2018).

1.4.3. Educational policy and provision

Despite the challenges cited above, in line with global educational integration initiatives (see Appendix B), some efforts began in 2016 to integrate primary-age newcomers into the national education system. Schooling was made compulsory for 6 to 15-year-olds, on the same basis as local children (AIDA, 2020; Delaney, 2017; OECD, 2018; Skleparis, 2017); afternoon reception classes (or DYEP³) were established in schools near camps on the mainland; and promises were made of vague “educational actions for adolescent refugees” to follow (Tzoraki, 2019, p.6). However, it was not until the 2018-2019 academic year that the DYEP scheme was extended to include lower- and upper-secondary education (i.e. in gymnasiums and general and vocational lyceums) (MoERR, 2018; OECD, 2018). In theory, students aged 15+ can now follow a ‘core curriculum’ of language and mathematics to gain the Greek skills required to access formal education opportunities and study alongside local youth, or take advantage of Second Chance Schools organised for adult learners (ESWG, 2018a). These offer a two-year programme, taught in Greek, which leads to the equivalent of a junior high school (*gymnasio*) certificate.

However, in September 2018 – when the secondary-level DYEP scheme was due to start – local NGOs were reporting unclear enrolment procedures and severe application delays (ESWG, 2018a). In addition, various funding and organisational issues have prevented access to lifelong learning opportunities (Georgiopoulou, 2019). Local and international NGOs aim to support integration into the public schooling system with ‘catch-up’ courses, in-school support, transport and other logistical activities (ESWG, 2018b; ESWG, 2018c; FRA, 2017; Tzoraki, 2019), as well as running non-formal education (NFE) activities in 95% of the camps in the country (UNHCR,

³ Δομές Υποδοχής για την Εκπαίδευση Προσφύγων [Reception Facilities for Refugee Education]

2017, cited in OECD, 2018; Ziomas et al., 2017). While these have been positively assessed by young refugees and their parents (UNICEF & REACH, 2017c) – and often more so than formal schooling – such provision has been described by educationalists as ad hoc, serving more to “keep the children occupied than provide them with a real education” (Nagy, 2018, p. 385).

During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, when schools and other places of learning closed to prevent the spread of the virus, some online education was *theoretically* available for refugee students enrolled in public high schools – alongside distance programmes organised by non-formal providers (see Paper 4 of this thesis). However, beyond the challenges refugee youth were already facing, the health crisis then amplified their precarity and the barriers to their participation.

1.4.4. Multi-level challenges for young refugees’ education in Greece

In addition to the challenges of provision mentioned above, reports and studies from across Greece – mostly based on limited government data, media reporting and small-scale evaluations relating to youth of all ages – have suggested multiple other factors which constrain or enable young refugees’ (re-)engagement with post-15 education. At the macro level, Greek, European and global education and asylum policies all have an influence. While international integration drives and European reception directives pressured Greece to open up secondary-level reception classes (MoERR, 2018), issues with funding, implementation delays and learning gaps persist (ESWG, 2018a; 2018c; Georgiopoulou, 2019; Simopoulos & Alexandridis, 2019). Alongside this, youth have been living with the uncertainty of their asylum and accommodation status due to prolonged and complex bureaucratic procedures (Póczik & Sárik, 2018; Velissariou, 2018).

At the meso level, schools lack appropriate resources and may choose not to enrol refugees (Simopoulos & Alexandridis, 2019), while local parents and communities (particularly on the Aegean islands and around Athens) have resisted the integration of younger refugee children into local schools. Public responses to the large numbers of newcomers have ranged from strong solidarity movements to far-right rhetoric demanding detention and expulsion of all illegal migrants. The latter perspective has gained traction among local residents, which some link partly to the resurgence of Golden Dawn: the far-right political party who overtly call for all Muslim asylum seekers to be detained or returned (Paraskeva-Gkizi, 2017). However, these strong oppositional views are by no means representative of the Greek population. Myriad local and national solidarity initiatives evolved during 2015-16, led by both new and existing organisations, in what Oikonomakis (2018) refers to as the 'Refugee Solidarity Movement': described by Velissariou (2018) as "a resolute and indefatigable volunteer movement" (p. 293). However, there were concerns about how long this philanthropy would last. In general, public responses have been positive, empathetic and hospitable; even if in private, individuals may express their concerns about security threats (Skleparis, 2017) or Muslim newcomers corrupting European values (Kirtsoglou & Tsimouris, 2018). Given the combination of cuts to public sector funding following the economic crisis in 2008 and high numbers of new arrivals in recent years – in a 'refugee reception crisis' now entering its eighth year – their hospitality has been tested.

Parents in areas where refugee children have been integrated into schools appear divided on the issue. While there has been resistance in predominantly poorer areas – resulting in parents keeping their children home in protest – there have also been welcome ceremonies (ANSA, 2019b; Baboulias, 2017; Lazaratou et al., 2017; Nagy, 2018; OECD, 2018; Simopoulos & Alexandridis, 2019). Some local parents on the island of Samos even went so far as to file a lawsuit against a teacher who was

defending refugee children's right to education (3pointmagazine, 2019). The main arguments against their integration are based on resource concerns – especially given that education has already suffered as a result of funding cuts following the financial crisis – as well as religious intolerance and xenophobia: for example, in the idea that children from camps are violent and represent a 'public health hazard' (*Al Jazeera*, 2019; ANSA, 2019b; Lazaratou et al., 2017; Nagy, 2018; Psaropoulos, 2016).

These reactions cause refugee parents to be wary of sending their children to school, for fear that they will suffer racism (*Al Jazeera*, 2019; UNICEF & REACH, 2017a). Despite mediators such as NGOs, IGOs and the state's Refugee Education Coordinators (RECs) attempting to engage refugee parents through question-and-answer sessions (ESWG, 2018b) and even coercion (Nagy, 2018), enrolment deadlines are still missed due to factors such as a lack of information or applications not being sent, as families believe their stay in Greece is only temporary. Reports have also suggested that refugee families may push their children to work both inside and outside the home (NCR, 2018).

For the young person, language constitutes the most significant barrier to learning, along with the psychosocial effects of living with an uncertain status, other health issues, and the lack of a learning culture due to potentially years of missed schooling (Delaney, 2017; ESWG, 2018a; HRW, 2018; Palaiologou et al., 2018; Tzoraki, 2019). It has been found that teachers may be encouraging and resourceful (making them trusted and admired by younger children in particular), but can also lack the intercultural knowledge and training necessary to support learning across language barriers – and especially at the secondary level (Nagy, 2018; OECD, 2018; Palaiologou et al., 2018). In terms of their social inclusion among their peers, Palaiologou et al. found that students of the same linguistic or cultural background tended to keep to themselves and help one another, and that it took a great deal of time for classes to overcome their initial 'reservedness' with interacting.

As the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, and lockdowns prevented all children and youth from attending in-person learning activities, young refugees' challenges then multiplied. For example, while some distance options were available, their participation was limited by issues such as a lack of access to the internet or mobile devices, and especially for those residing in camp contexts. As such, they were "disproportionately" unable to participate in formal education (Fischer, 2021) – resulting in what RSA (2021) have described as 'record levels' of educational exclusion during the 2019-2020 academic year. Other contributing factors included prolonged and controversial camp lockdowns; the even more limited availability of transportation and educational staff; and hesitation among refugees to attend (Caritas Hellas, 2021; Greek Ombudsman, 2021; Theirworld, 2020b).

Even prior to the pandemic, young refugees' challenges were having a significant impact on their educational access and progression after the age of 15. Despite the efforts of state and non-state actors to provide and support learning opportunities, UNICEF (2019a) found that in the 2018-19 school year, only 65% of school-age refugee youth (aged 4-17) across Greece were engaged in some form of education; with estimated enrolment rates in formal education ranging from 40-45% (AIDA, 2020; Tzoraki, 2019; UNHCR, 2018c). In high schools, the enrolment rate is also claimed to be 40% on average, but can be as low as 22% among youth accommodated outside camps; with this issue particularly affecting Northern Greece (ESWG, 2018a; UNHCR, 2018a; UNICEF & REACH, 2017b; 2017c). Even if they do enrol, there is said to be a 'leakage range' from high schools of 45-56% (MoERR, 2017). According to a report by the NGO Terre des hommes, the issues surrounding transportation, enrolment, attendance, community hostility and having adequate and timely staffing were still present in the 2021-2022 school year – some five years after educational 'integration' measures were first introduced (Pasia et al., 2022). This

means that many refugee youth in Greece have been out of school, or not supported to progress with their education, for a significant proportion of their young lives.

1.5. Research gap and rationale for this project

These figures on young refugees' (educational) challenges expose numerous knowledge gaps. Little is known about the individual and social factors helping or hindering their (re-)engagement with post-15 education in Greece, apart from limited surveys which cite common educational barriers for refugee students such as language, the relevance of curricula, and practicalities such as transport (e.g. UNICEF & REACH, 2017a). In particular, the connection between their wider conditions of 'unsettlement' and the impact these have on their experiences of education remain direly understudied. Furthermore, reports often focus on Athens or the 'hotspots' of the Aegean islands, rather than the northern borderlands – and very few explore the barriers and opportunities surrounding Greek and international integration initiatives targeting older youth. Around the world, refugee education studies tend to focus on compulsory schooling, and neglect the importance of different forms of learning (Anselme et al., 2019).

As such, more research is needed to deepen our understanding of the extent to which the 'unsettled' conditions in Greece limit young refugees' progression towards their educational goals, and especially once they become institutionally 'adult' and their educational opportunities consequently become much more limited (ESWG, 2018a). There is also a need to examine how education fits into their wider aspirations, as a means rather than an end. This is because there is no information on the specific educational outcomes young refugees in Greece value and why, other than vague survey categories such as "cultural understanding, engagement and integration, employment and overall well-being" (UNICEF & REACH, 2017b, p. 12). Other research

from around the world often focuses on young refugees' specifically educational aspirations – such as gaining a higher degree – and the ways in which social and/or contextual constraints limit their ability to imagine and pursue them (e.g. Appadurai, 2004; Bellino, 2018; Dryden-Peterson & Reddick, 2017; Schneider, 2018). However, less often is young refugees' perception of the *role of education* in achieving other life goals included – such as strategically learning a language for later relocation in Europe. This project aims to fill this gap by viewing education – in all its forms – as both a means and an end, to create a fuller picture of the (perceived) role it plays in their lives and how they subjectively define success.

On a theoretical level, the thesis aims to flesh out the concept of 'unsettlement', to form a picture of how it impacts young refugees who have arrived in Greece in recent years – both in terms of their day-to-day lives, and their longer-term (imagined) educational trajectories. This includes the impacts of state responses to the recent financial, migration and health 'crises', such as austerity measures, poor refugee reception conditions and prolonged COVID-19 lockdowns in camps. Furthermore, while several studies have used the 'social navigation' lens to discuss migrants' strategies in resettlement contexts (mostly in Scandinavia and Australia), education is often only briefly discussed as one aspect of their navigational process. None have yet used this lens to focus solely on learning, in its many forms – as in this thesis.

The aim is to produce findings which allow policymakers and education stakeholders to leverage the relationships and resources which best promote young refugees' engagement with education. At the same time, taking a 'bottom-up' approach – exploring individuals' strategic decision-making – provides a much-needed picture of refugee youth as agentic individuals who respond to, and perhaps resist, dominant integration policies. This is intended to build on wider conversations in the literature on youth, refugeehood and agency, as discussed in Section 1.2.2. This attention to agency departs from the fact that while 55-60% of the young refugees in Greece who

are eligible for senior high school have not enrolled, 40-45% have (Tzoraki, 2019); and of this number, approximately half attend consistently (at least they were, up until the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic). A number of youth aged 15-25 also engage in NFE activities across Northern Greece, where available (UNHCR, 2018b), which signals a motivation and some ability to navigate the intersecting forms of precarity which might otherwise keep them out. This thesis seeks to understand how and why they did so, and with what forms of support.

1.6. Research questions

To better understand the difficulties faced by refugee youth in Greece and what supports them to continue learning, this project explored the overarching question: *How do young refugees in Greece experience and navigate ‘unsettlement’ in/via education?* This overarching question was broken down into four sub-questions (see Table 1).

Overarching research question	
How do young refugees in Greece experience and navigate ‘unsettlement’ in/via education?	
Sub-questions	
RQ1	How do young refugees (aged 15-25) who have arrived in Greece since 2015 experience ‘unsettlement’, and how has this impacted their (re-)engagement with post-15 education?
RQ2	How do individual factors such as gender, age, accommodation and legal status shape their experiences?
RQ3	How do youth navigate these conditions of unsettlement in/via education?
RQ4	Which key (educational) actors and factors support them in their process of educational navigation?

Table 1. Overarching research question and sub-questions

These questions allowed for a thorough exploration of the contextual and social factors hindering young refugees’ engagement with post-15 education (RQ1), while also addressing the individual qualities of their experiences (RQ2) and their expressions of agency (RQ3). To adhere to the relational understanding of agency which forms the

conceptual foundation of this project, RQ4 pays attention to the influences of young refugees' relationships with people and other non-social factors which may shape their decision-making, both inside and outside of education.

2. METHODOLOGY

The following chapter details how the research questions were addressed in practice and reflects on how the initial design was refined and developed in the field. The chapter begins by providing a description and rationale of the approach used in the study – namely, critical ethnography – which I situate within the social constructivist paradigm. Following this, the decisions behind and practicalities of conducting an ethnography are explained; as well as the specific methods of participant observation, individual and pair semi-structured interviews (involving creative tasks for youth) and document analysis. I also introduce and justify the observation sites – being various non-formal educational spaces and organisations around Thessaloniki – as well as the participants involved in the study. After this, I detail the procedural ethical considerations involved, reflect on my positionality and identity, explain how the research (and my research relationships) changed as a result of the pandemic, and finally describe how the findings of this work have been/are being disseminated. This chapter is intended to not only document what was decided and done, but also to offer thoughts on what was a long-term, ever-shifting process – especially in terms of the adaptations required due to COVID-19. Ethical lessons are further developed in the standalone mini-chapter which follows.

The chapter argues that ethnographic approaches are the best means of understanding young refugees' relationship with their environment – something especially important in a study which pays so much attention to the precarious nature of their socio-political context. Such "ethnographic attention", according to Lems (2020, p. 117), can reveal what may be the "unspoken ... thresholds of belonging" between those inside and outside both physical and symbolic borders. In addition, the chapter argues for an understanding of data collection as data 'generation', given the social constructivist underpinnings of the methodology. Issues of positionality, in this case,

were also especially important to address; along with the need to disseminate findings back to participants and the wider community appropriately, with a view to fostering trusting relationships and social change.

2.1. Approaching the research: social constructivism

First of all, before detailing the ‘mechanics’ and practicalities of the research – and my experience of conducting it – it is necessary to describe the approach underpinning the study and my methodological decisions. This takes us to the starting point of the project: its aim. The study aimed to gain insight into young refugees’ educational experiences and relationships. Therefore, rather than attempting to test hypotheses, it investigated the lived experiences (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003) of refugee youth in Greece; aiming at ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973a) of their social realities to foster *verstehen* (interpretive understanding) rather than *erklären* (causal explanation) (Dilthey, [1927] 1977; Lindlof, 2008). It acknowledges, in doing so, that there are as many social realities as individuals (Robson & McCartan, 2016), and that these realities are dependent upon the meanings which people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). By recognising that social phenomena cannot be disentangled from human interpretation or their context, and indeed are shaped by both, this research sits within an interpretivist (Crotty, 2015) and social constructivist paradigm (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). According to the epistemological assumptions of the constructivist paradigm, understandings are co-created between the researcher and participant (Geertz, 1973b). This also informs my decision to refer to data ‘generation’ rather than ‘collection’ throughout this thesis.

2.2. Overview of the research design

With this approach noted, I will now give an overview of the (genesis of the) research design. Given the fact that the study was centred around young people's everyday experiences, qualitative methods were chosen. This is because they are "designed to capture the educational reality as participants experience it", through "exploratory research questions, inductive reasoning, an orientation to the social context of educational activities and a focus on human subjectivity" (Check & Schutt, 2012, p. 189). For Tudge and Hogan (2005), ethnographic methods such as participant observation and interviews are the most appropriate for exploring young people's relationships with their social context and the ways in which meanings are produced through them. Therefore, I decided to carry out a critical ethnography: involving immersion in the field, focus groups and interviewing.

The 'critical' element meant that I critiqued and aimed at changing aspects of society, rather than purely explaining it; I examined power relations; and I took a clear position as an advocate for refugee youth and their education, exposing the impacts of marginalisation and offering alternatives (Madison, 2011). This approach stems from a "dissatisfaction with the atheoretical stance of traditional ethnography, which ignored social structures such as class, patriarchy, and racism", and the "power-laden social and cultural processes within particular social sites" (Cook, 2008, p. 149). The ideas on which critical ethnography is based – i.e. that "inequality exists in society, mainstream practices often produce inequalities, oppression occurs in many forms and is most forceful when it involves hegemonic learning, and [that] critical research should engage in social criticism to support efforts for change" (Cook, 2008, p. 148) – underpinned the development, execution and analysis stages of this project.

In terms of data generation, I held individual and pair semi-structured interviews with refugee and asylum-seeking youth aged 15-25, involving creative tasks;

interviewed people close to them, such as parents, educators, social workers and cultural mediators; and engaged in everyday, non-formal educational life (i.e. participation observation) as a volunteer English teacher and assistant for four different NGOs in the city, while keeping field notes. This combination of different methods and data sources permitted the desired ‘thick description’ and deeper understanding of the situation, while also triangulating my findings and thus improving the validity and reliability of the study (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Long & Johnson, 2000).

Data was generated and analysed in an iterative, “cyclical” process (Litosseliti, 2003) over the course of the fieldwork. This flexible, reflexive approach was chosen due to the fact that the humanitarian (policy) environment is prone to constant change. This means that a sequential design is implausible, and concepts and theories are “working” matters” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2014, p. 36). This does not mean that the process was not carefully considered, however; rather, it was acknowledged that analytic inspiration comes *during* the process of research, providing a ‘roadmap’ of how to proceed. The analysis involved coding in NVivo, with later categorisation of descriptive codes into more abstract themes (see Section 2.4 for more details on this process).

As noted in the timeline provided in Appendix C, and my ‘pandemic research diary’ in Section 2.7, the nature of the fieldwork changed as a result of COVID-19. With all in-person educational activities suspended from March 2020, interviews and teaching activities between March and June 2020 took place online via Zoom, Skype, WhatsApp and Viber. The impact on the data generated, and the ethical considerations involved in these changes, are discussed in the relevant sections below.

2.2.1. The pilot study

The research design was informed by findings from a pilot study completed in August 2019 in Thessaloniki, in the north of mainland Greece (the same city in which further fieldwork took place; see Figure 2). The pilot study consisted of six interviews with education stakeholders – namely, one NGO director, two NFE programme coordinators and three teachers (two in NFE, and one in formal education) – as well as participant observation of non-formal arts workshops for young refugees. At that stage, it did not feel appropriate to request to interview youth themselves, as the pilot was a brief exercise with insufficient time to build relationships with them. Instead, the focus was on gaining initial feedback from key stakeholders (some of whom I already knew) on the main issues, and my planned research methods for learning about them; as well as establishing relationships with organisations with whom to volunteer and conduct the participant observation.

The key learning points from the pilot study were that the context was constantly evolving politically, socially and administratively, in terms of educational programmes' staffing and funding. NGOs who work with refugee youth tend to operate on very short-term funding cycles and volunteer commitments. This emphasised the need for my own longer-term commitment as a volunteer (to achieve genuine reciprocity); while reminding me that having a placement in only one organisation could have proven problematic, due to funding being cut and thus programmes being discontinued. To (pre-emptively) address these issues in my research design, I established relationships with additional NGOs offering language lessons around Thessaloniki and made long-term commitments with each, to enable me to access a wider sample of youth over a longer period of time. For contingency, I also made contact with other potential host organisations in the region who required support on a rolling basis.

2.3. Generating the data

2.3.1. *Preparing for the field: document analysis*

Before commencing the main period of fieldwork in October 2019, I immersed myself in the academic and grey literature on the refugee response in the region. This involved (re-)familiarising myself with relevant international instruments and commitments on education for refugees and asylum-seekers (see Appendix B), and national and local municipal documents on asylum and educational access procedures for this age group (i.e. 15-25). To do so, I searched academic databases for relevant literature (such as Google Scholar and Oxford's SOLO); practitioner-focused archives such as UNHCR's repository (for reports on educational participation rates in camps, for example); and the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs' website for policy documents, reports and press releases. This process enabled me to gain a better understanding of the context, the actors in the field and the educational opportunities available, while also reiterating that the 15+ age group was still the least likely to participate in education. Furthermore, new reports suggested that even when they did enrol, they often dropped out within a matter of days or months. However, there was still little in-depth understanding of this phenomenon, either in the academic or grey literature. This confirmed the need to proceed with fieldwork in this area and with this population. While doing so, the iterative nature of the data generation and analysis meant that I continually engaged with previous and emerging literature, and used it to shape my developing understanding of the situation and my conversations with actors in the field.



Figure 2. Map of Greece with fieldwork site highlighted. Source: UN Geospatial (2020)

2.3.2. The field and observation sites

The city. As mentioned above, data generation took place in Thessaloniki, Northern Greece (see Figure 2). The city was selected for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is anecdotally known for being a city of ‘hospitality’, and I was curious to see how this played out in education for refugees – especially seeing as in reports, participation rates were still very low. This is particularly intriguing given its reputation for supportive, local-level integration policies and solidarity networks (e.g. Sabchev, 2021a). Secondly, these solidarity networks have resulted in a number of community centres, NGOs and other non-formal educational settings being established which complement the reception classes in schools; meaning that there were also several options for

observation sites. Thirdly, I chose to complete fieldwork in the city because I had several connections with stakeholders in the region involved in the refugee response, due to previous work and study. This initially alerted me to some of the issues youth were facing in the area, and facilitated access so that I could explore them further in my doctoral research.

Fourthly, Thessaloniki is the country's second-largest city, and as such accommodates a large number of refugees – meaning that access was possible without necessitating fieldwork in the arguably over-researched city of Athens. This avoided approaching organisations and refugees who have been receiving many research requests since 2015, leading to research fatigue. Finally, the city is close to Greece's borders with Turkey, Bulgaria, North Macedonia and Albania, which were infamously and decisively closed in late 2015 and 2016 (see Appendix A). As such, refugees became trapped, and many congregated in Thessaloniki as the nearest large city to the northern borders. Therefore, the city represents a true geographical and metaphorical borderland: being next to four international borders, and acting as a holding site between many refugees' country of first asylum in Europe (i.e. Greece) and their often-desired countries of resettlement further north-west in Europe.

The observation sites. My decisions when choosing volunteering/observation sites were guided by a desire to a) engage with a variety of non-formal learning offers; b) meet young people aged 15-25 in particular; and c) be able to contribute my skills as a qualified language teacher. My eventual engagement was also, of course, shaped by organisations' needs at the time, and their requirements regarding the length of commitment. These conditions led me to volunteer as both a teacher and educational assistant at three sites, as well as observing one further programme. Details are provided in Table 2 below, with all organisations' names pseudonymised. All

educational activities were offered free of charge for the refugee and wider community, and were predominantly carried out in English.

Site	Description	Educational offer	Researcher engagement
Óli Mazi ⁴	Long-established Greek NGO offering legal, educational and other social support for all those in need. Several centres across Thessaloniki, including one youth-only	English and Greek lessons run on a rolling basis; homework clubs; youth conversation clubs; employability/CV training; teacher training; parenting skills workshops	Teaching English 1 afternoon per week
Filia ⁵ Centre	Community centre with dedicated support for women and girls in the centre of Thessaloniki. Funded and managed by an international NGO with various projects for refugees around the world	English and Greek lessons for all ages, run in 3-6 month cycles; workshops and peer-teaching in arts and crafts, cooking and tailoring	Teaching English 3 mornings per week
OurFuture	Educational programme for refugees designed by an international NGO; set up and run by local staff and volunteers in another organisation's free space	English lessons focusing on social entrepreneurship, run in 3-month cycles	Assisting with English lessons 1 afternoon per week
Hearts and Minds	Thessaloniki branch of an international NGO which provides educational and other support for refugees based on psychosocial healing principles. Run in various available spaces	Arts workshops and sports sessions with therapeutic elements	Observing/ participating in arts workshops as an assistant 1-3 afternoons per week

Table 2: Details of data generation sites and researcher engagement

⁴ Greek for 'All Together'

⁵ Greek for 'Friendship'

2.3.3. *Participant observation*

I was therefore immersed in the above settings as a volunteer English teacher, assistant and participant over the course of the fieldwork. This ethnographic method of 'participant observation' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) involves gathering data by "developing a sustained relationship with people while they go about their normal activities" (Check & Schutt, 2012, p. 188). It allows the researcher to explore the context and nature of social relationships from the 'inside' and gain a sense of what participants experience and how they interpret the world (Wolcott, 1995). It also enables the researcher to view or participate in unscheduled events; identify nonverbal expressions of feelings; witness who interacts with whom; check how much time is spent on various activities; and overall, gain a holistic understanding of the research site, its situated relationships and its organisation and priorities (Kawulich, 2005). It is a good fit for a 'contextualist' approach which considers that young people cannot be separated from their context (Tudge & Hogan, 2005). Ethnographic approaches such as participant observation have also been proposed as the most appropriate way to analyse how young refugees navigate their conditions and exercise agency (Sen & Pace, 2018). The purpose of observation in this project was also to triangulate findings from interviews and the initial document analysis, to bring different aspects to the foreground via various methods (Flick, 2014) and to ensure rigour and validity (Long & Johnson, 2000). It also increased validity by allowing me to become familiar to the community, which increased my involvement in further activities; over time, it reduced the likelihood of people acting differently while being observed; and it helped me to develop more relevant questions (Kawulich, 2005).

However, these advantages come with certain caveats: namely, that observation should fit the research questions; there should be suitable methods for recording data; the participants being observed should be representative of the target

population; and researchers should reflexively consider and mitigate the impacts of their personal biases on their interpretation of events (Kawulich, 2005). I adhered to these principles, and ensured that I took detailed field notes as soon as possible after each activity – including not only factual accounts of what had been witnessed, but also my initial interpretations of these events and their connections to other findings. To mitigate the bias that can arise from relying solely on observation (for example, in failing to report negative aspects of community members), as mentioned above, I combined this approach with other methods. Overall, this triangulation led to a richer data set and thus a more detailed description of the social context and the participants' experiences. (Issues related to the impacts of my own positionality and identity on the research process are discussed in more depth in Section 2.5 and Chapter 3.)

Therefore, the focus of the observation process was not only on building relationships, but also on gaining a holistic understanding of the environment and how it was organised, and on identifying themes and patterns among young refugees' experiences. While Kawulich (2005) describes participant observation as a 'beginning step' in ethnographic studies – and indeed I did spend time at the start of my fieldwork purely observing, for the above reasons – I continued my observation for the entire period, to gain more data on how people related to one another in educational environments. This involved active looking; writing and reviewing detailed field notes; and trying to show up to every opportunity offered (Check & Schutt, 2012; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Mills & Morton, 2013). I fully disclosed my student/researcher status to permit participants to withhold information in front of me if they wished, and to establish relationships in the field based on honesty. While this risked producing 'reactive effects', I was reassured by the many researchers who stated that their presence in the field had not had an obvious effect on behaviour – and especially when time was taken to build trust (Check & Schutt, 2012).

The excerpt from my field diary below demonstrates the relational potential of becoming fully immersed in the setting. I made a conscious effort to set my academic curiosity to one side and instead be as present, involved and natural as possible while engaging with youth and other participants, to avoid treating them as objects of my research. I joined in with many activities: such as going on field trips, drinking coffee with staff in the mornings, attending training sessions for volunteer teachers, going to meet-ups for humanitarians, attending social events I was invited to by youth organisations, and throwing myself – very literally – into dance workshops. All of this came quite naturally, given my background in teaching, and particularly with this age group. All of these activities helped to paint a broader and more detailed picture of what life is like for refugee youth, while also enabling me to recruit participants for interviews and laying the groundwork for having more comfortable and open conversations.

During the painting workshop today, a quiet teenager from Afghanistan was sitting next to me at the table. We were concentrating deeply on our task: colouring cardboard figures of ourselves which we had just constructed. Before today's session, he had mainly spoken to his brother, but over time had begun to interact more and more with the facilitator. He remained very shy, and at most would mumble "hello" to others in the group. I would compliment his creations and, at most, receive an awkward smile and nod in return. On this occasion, however, I complained to no-one in particular that I had made my face too red – and without taking his eyes off his project, he quietly joked: "but... your face *is* very red." I looked up at him, pleasantly surprised by his cheeky comment and growing confidence, and began laughing with him. Following this, our table started joking altogether about our cardboard figures and using them to enact slapstick scenes, which sparked conversations about various topics.

Field notes, November 2019

2.3.4. Participants

The participants who agreed to take part in interviews were recruited via convenience and snowball sampling, through connections made in the above sites. Information about the project was shared in advance in both its original and youth-friendly, visual formats, in a variety of languages (namely: English, Greek, Arabic, Farsi and French, with the option for additional translations). The process of recruiting youth was facilitated by staff and teachers, with whom they and their parents had longer-term relationships. Details on the ethical considerations involved in this recruitment process are provided below in Section 2.6.

In total, 50 participants took part in interviews, alongside our regular interactions and informal conversations in the observation sites over the course of the eight months of fieldwork. These participants included a 'core group' of 12 refugee and asylum-seeking youth (aged 15-25) and 38 educational stakeholders with first-hand knowledge of their experiences: such as parents, teachers, educational assistants, coordinators, social workers, 'caretakers'⁶ and cultural mediators. More information on the participants is given in Tables 3 and 4 below. The 'core group' of 12 were those who showed the most interest in participating in an in-depth interview, and were attending the learning centres from the beginning of my fieldwork. However, over the period of the fieldwork, I also had repeated daily or weekly interactions with other youth across the observation sites (during learning activities of 2-3 hours each, multiple times per week; see Table 2). Therefore, the full, multimodal corpus of my doctoral data – beyond the narrative data from interviews – also includes a rich range of everyday conversations and observations with a larger number of youth beyond the 'core group', and many other educational stakeholders, across the four sites. Many of these youth

⁶ In Greece, a 'caretaker' is a member of staff who provides pastoral care in a shelter for unaccompanied minors.

were attending formal education as well, at least to some extent, and so also had experiences to share from these contexts when we met. In addition, during my fieldwork, I continued reviewing documents (e.g. new policies, news articles and so on) and newly published and relevant literature, and took extensive field notes (and sketches) based on my observations around the city.

The majority of the youth in the 'core group' were young men (9 men, 3 women), whereas the majority of the 'stakeholders' were women (30 women, 8 men). This reflects the fact that the majority of learners attending lessons in the observation sites were indeed young men, and the fact that the teaching (and wider humanitarian) force were predominantly women. Of the 'young' participants, two did not disclose their age, but were aware of the age parameters of the research and confirmed that they fell within them (and that they were over the age of 18). The nationalities given in the table were provided by participants themselves. They had been in Greece for one to four years at the time of the fieldwork.

The criteria for inclusion of the young participants were that they fell within the 15-25 age range; had arrived in Greece during or since the peak of the 'refugee crisis' in 2015; and were attending at least one educational activity per week. The 15-25 age parameter was intended to align with that of NGOs and other educational initiatives in Greece offering non-formal activities which target youth. The arrival requirement meant that the study could investigate experiences of laws and policies implemented as a response to the 'refugee crisis', as well as the impact of the 'crisis' discourse among the public and media. The attendance requirement was set as the study sought to better understand young refugees' experiences of and supports for participating in educational activities.

The 'stakeholders' were working or volunteering for national and international NGOs, public educational and social care services, universities, local government departments, local volunteer networks and grassroots initiatives. The criteria for their

inclusion were that they had first-hand knowledge of young refugees' (educational) experiences. Those who took part identified mostly as Greek (28 out of 38), but also as British, American, Palestinian, Syrian and Albanian. One was interviewed as the parent of a young refugee. The plan, pre-COVID, was to conduct group interviews with more parents to better understand the role of family dynamics and other aspects of home life which affect young people's participation. They were to be recruited through a local NGO, with the findings also intended to inform the organisation's needs-based educational programming, in a mutually beneficial effort. These were scheduled for late March, but could not be completed due to pandemic-related restrictions and the NGO's staffing constraints.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Nationality
Hala	F	15	Syrian
Reza	M	16	Iranian
Augustin	M	16	Congolese (DRC)
Zainab	F	17	Iraqi
Hussein	M	19	Iraqi
Karvan	M	19	Iranian
Sayed	M	22	Iranian
Marwa	F	25	Syrian
Jilwan	M	25	Kurdish
Hasan	M	25	Kurdish
Hamid	M	<i>Undisclosed</i>	Kurdish
Serkar	M	<i>Undisclosed</i>	Kurdish

Table 3: Details of the young refugee participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Role	Affiliation
<i>Teachers and assistants</i>			
Fotini	F	Teacher	International NGO
Rhea	F	Teacher	International NGO
Youssef	M	Teacher	International NGO
Hailey	F	Teacher	International NGO
Claire	F	Teacher/coordinator	International NGO
Angeliki	F	Teacher	National NGO
Stefania	F	Teacher	National NGO
Alexandra	F	Teacher	National NGO
Faidra	F	Teacher	National NGO
Irina	F	Teacher	National NGO/Public high school
Charissa	F	Teacher	National NGO/Public high school
Melina	F	Teacher	(Inter)national NGO/Public high school
Yiorgios	M	Teacher	Public high school
Vasiliki	F	Teacher	Public high school
Maria	F	Teacher	Public high school
Vera	F	Teacher/REC ⁷	Public high school/Local volunteer group
Safaa	F	Teacher/parent	National NGO
Corina	F	Educational assistant	National NGO
<i>Coordinators</i>			
Sara	F	Coordinator	IGO ⁸
Elena	F	Coordinator	IGO
Katerina	F	Coordinator	IGO/Public university
Lydia	F	Coordinator	International NGO/Government
Dimitris	M	Coordinator	Government
Melissa	F	Coordinator	International NGO
Effie	F	Coordinator	International NGO

⁷ Refugee Education Coordinator

⁸ Intergovernmental organisation (e.g. a United Nations agency such as UNICEF)

Alex	M	Coordinator	International NGO
Alice	F	Coordinator	International NGO
Ourania	F	Coordinator	International NGO
Stavros	M	Coordinator	National NGO
Hana	F	Coordinator	National NGO
Zoe	F	Coordinator	National NGO
Shtatmira	F	Coordinator	National NGO
Eleftherios	M	Coordinator	Public high school
<i>Other roles</i>			
Cassie	F	Social worker	IGO
Justina	F	Caretaker	National NGO
Ali	M	Cultural mediator	IGO
Nadia	F	Cultural mediator	IGO/International NGO
Jawad	M	Interpreter	International NGO

Table 4: Details of 'stakeholder' participants

2.3.5. *Pair interviews with creative visual methods*

The intention, on beginning fieldwork, was to generate the majority of the data through focus group discussions (FGDs) with young refugees. This is because FGDs can provide in-depth data on participants' multiple views, beliefs, attitudes, experiences and feelings on a topic of interest, while also allowing illiterate communities to participate in research (Check & Schutt, 2012; Litosseliti, 2003; Stewart et al., 2007). Many researchers have argued for using FGDs with 'vulnerable' populations, as they emphasise local voices, shared experiences and understandings of the world, while being less intimidating than one-on-one interviews and reducing the power imbalance between the researcher and participants (Liamputpong, 2011). Particularly important for

young participants, FGDs can also be stimulating and fun; and even, according to some, empowering (Litosseliti, 2003; Stewart et al., 2007).

For this project, discussions were planned with groups of 6-8 young people (in line with recommendations from Hennessy & Heary, 2005, Litosseliti, 2003 and Wirsing, 2008), with recruitment primarily based on willingness to participate. However, following feedback from the participants in the pilot study and my Transfer of Status examiners, the number was reduced to 2-4 to permit more attention to those present. The question schedule was also simplified and transformed into a more open, general list of prompts and the creative element was given more structure (see Appendices D, E and F). The session timing was also reduced from 1.5-2 hours to 1-1.5 hours, to avoid fatigue and to reflect the smaller group size. The activities were designed to be age-appropriate in both their language and content, using my previous experience of teaching multilingual youth. I reminded participants that interpreters (trusted individuals such as NGO staff) could be invited for language support and cultural mediation, but they all decided to proceed in English (with occasional Greek and French translations, where I was able).

In practice, two pair interviews were conducted before COVID-19 broke out, due to the young participants' availability. These involved four refugee youth aged 16-18, and revolved around three creative tasks (namely, three drawings). These tasks were based on the idea of visual elicitation, which "involves using photographs, drawings, or diagrams ... to stimulate a response" (Prosser, 2011, p. 484). The rationale behind visual elicitation is that it can provide in-depth information, reduce barriers to understanding, allow children to express themselves more fully, stimulate discussion and permit the co-construction of knowledge (Kleine et al., 2016; Literat, 2013; Prosser & Burke, 2008; Stewart et al., 2007). It also shifts the focus onto "intermediary artefacts" (Prosser, 2011, p. 484), meaning that participants feel less pressured to speak directly. This is especially helpful when adults are the interviewers

and children the interviewees, due to differences in status and power. As young people were invited to draw during the session – which focused attention on the process of drawing, rather than the product – it also involved active participation, making the research process more engaging for young participants (Crivello et al., 2009). Similar methods have been used in ethnographies seeking children's perspectives on their education (e.g. Barley & Russell, 2018) and in studies exploring issues such as young refugees' well-being (e.g. Chase et al., 2019).

Specifically, participants in this project completed three drawing tasks and we discussed their educational experiences as they were completing them. An example of how one young participant responded can be found in Figure 3. The first task was to draw themselves in the present, showing the places where they learn and who they meet there; the second was to draw what they hoped they would be doing in the future, in around five years; and the third was to sketch out a pathway connecting the first two pictures and showing the steps to their aspired-to future, using different colours to show the supports and challenges they anticipated along the way. When they had finished, we taped their pieces of paper together and discussed their drawings as a whole. As is evident in the example given in Figure 3, the idea was not to have a complex or even necessarily complete artwork at the end of the session; and some participants still used a lot of text. The focus was instead on fostering a drawing-enabled process of communication. The sessions were audio-recorded, after gaining participants' consent, and took place in an educational setting which was familiar to them.

As a result of COVID-19, I had to leave Greece and so continued data generation activities online. The remaining youth participants, who were over the age of 18, were therefore interviewed individually (with the exception of one 15-year-old who took part in a pair interview with her mother). The remainder of the youth interviews did not involve the creative tasks, due to the practical difficulties of doing so virtually via

participants' limited mobile devices and internet connections. Instead, the semi-structured interview procedures below – which were initially designed just for stakeholders – were followed.

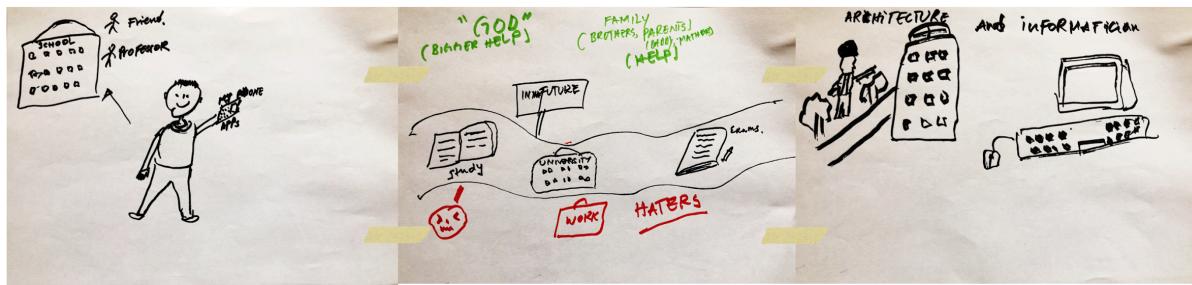


Figure 3. 16-year-old Augustin's response to the drawing tasks

2.3.6. *Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders*

For the 'stakeholders' detailed above (and the remaining eight youth participants), data was generated through semi-structured interviews. The iterative nature of data generation and analysis meant that the views of those interviewed, as well as my observations, informed later interviews. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a method as they "provide the opportunity to gain an account of the values and experiences of the respondent in terms meaningful to them" (Stephens, 2011, p. 293), and as such they are inherent to the interpretivist approach (Crotty, 2015). In practice, while I referred to a schedule, I also gave the interviewees space and time to bring up issues important to them. This resulted in "a deep, rich and textured picture" of their perspectives and understandings of the social phenomenon (Rapley, 2011, p. 192). The interviews lasted from 25 minutes to over one hour (averaging 40 minutes), and were based on the schedules in Appendix D. The number of questions was reduced following feedback from participants during the pilot study in August 2019. Issues

arising from the ‘cross-cultural’ nature of interviews and FGDs, as well as my identity, are addressed below in Section 2.6.

While in-country, interviews took place in public places such as NGO offices, which were mutually agreed upon by myself and the participant. After having to leave Greece due to COVID-19, they took place on online platforms such as Skype, Viber, WhatsApp and Zoom (depending on participants’ preferences). This change in approach was discussed and agreed upon with the relevant University Ethics Committee. Participants were also able to choose the time which suited them best, and were informed that they could speak for as little or as long as they liked, depending on their availability and how much they wished to share. Interviews were audio recorded and/or notes were taken, where participants gave permission.

2.4. Analysing the data

The ‘contextualist’ approach used here necessitated an analysis of both the making of the social situation (via education and asylum policies, socio-economic conditions, and so on) and individuals’ subjective experiences of navigating this social situation (Flick, 2014). This attempted to reconcile structuralist models with social theories of interaction and their focus on agency. In practice, this meant moving between different social levels throughout the data generation period, to identify how the context shaped and was shaped by individuals. To do so, data was simultaneously generated and analysed over eight months in an iterative, reflective process of data generation and thematic analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Tuckett, 2005). This allowed for conclusions to be refined so that they fit the empirical reality (Charmaz, 2006). To mitigate the impact of my identity during analysis, I kept in mind Flick’s (2014, p. 14) question: “how can the analysis do justice to the participants and their perspective?” I also checked the validity of my conclusions through additional interviews, immersion in the field and

continuous review of the literature, as well as through using a range of methods to compare both “produced and naturally occurring data” (p. 10).

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed as soon as possible – or notes were taken (depending on participants’ preferences and consent) – and field notes were taken during participant observation. (In the case of the pair interviews involving creative tasks, only the talk was analysed; but drawings are included in the thesis and publications as visual support to help communicate what young people shared during the sessions, with personal identifying information redacted.) All transcripts and notes were analysed according to the principles of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). In line with these principles, interview transcripts and field notes were immediately entered into NVivo and coded by the author using an open coding technique (based on participants’ own words). Following this, a process of axial coding explored the relationship between the initial codes, to create categories which were then organised into themes (see excerpt in Appendix G). New codes were compared with the existing codes, to refine the characteristics of each category, in a process of ‘constant comparison’. Therefore, these themes and patterns did not simply emerge, but were actively discovered and given meaning, based on both my assumptions and my knowledge of concepts from the literature (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). In addition, my analysis was guided by the critical ethnographic foundations of the research, which meant I paid attention to “documenting, understanding, and interpreting the interactions between actors within the site and their references and representations to broader societal structures [in order] to examine cultural forms of oppression and engage people to address them” (Cook, 2008, p. 151).

This process of data analysis and generation continued iteratively until theoretical saturation was reached. While saturation is very much dependent on an individual study’s research question, sample and context, the total number of interviews in this study aligns with the expected number for a study of a heterogeneous population

such as refugees in Greece (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). That is not to say, however, that there is nothing more to learn, or that after a certain number of interviews, an ‘absolute’ or ‘complete’ theoretical model is achieved. Rather, following Low’s (2019) pragmatic approach to saturation, we can say that saturation was reached at the point when I could answer the questions of *how* and *why*, as opposed to only offering descriptive accounts; and when the findings ‘made sense’ according to previous research.

2.5. Positionality

Viewing the texts produced through qualitative research as socially constructed has, historically, implicated questions of whose authority, style and voice are being represented (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This ‘crisis of representation’ has led to a greater sensitivity to researcher reflexivity and subjectivity, through a recognition that it is impossible to truly detach oneself from research and approach it objectively and without bias. This necessitates an examination of not only my identity, my claims to know the social world and the values which led me to this research, but also the foundations on which they are built, the strengths and weaknesses of different forms of knowledge, and the influence of my identity on the research process (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; May & Perry, 2014). This examination of position and power is also a requirement for a critical ethnography (Madison, 2011).

My background in teaching refugee communities in different contexts has undoubtedly led me to advocate for educational opportunities for young forced migrants, and to take the position that structural inequalities and failures in policy making and implementation have limited these opportunities – thus providing the impetus for this study. Furthermore, my experience of working with highly aspirational refugee youth has inspired the focus on how their agency is exercised and constrained. While I consider myself an advocate, my position as a young, white, British woman and

doctoral student from the University of Oxford puts me in a position of privilege which may have affected the answers participants gave. To mitigate bias, I engaged in constant, critical acknowledgement of the inevitable political positions I brought to the research process (Griffiths, 1998; Itani, 2019), and conducted a small pilot study before the main period of data generation to begin building trusting relationships in the field, enable access and gain as much understanding of the participants as possible (Gateley, 2014). The further ethical questions and lessons pertaining to my positionality and identity which arose in the field are discussed in depth below, in Section 2.6 and Chapter 3.

2.6. Procedural ethical considerations: risks and benefits

As the participants were predominantly young refugees – and as such constituted a ‘vulnerable group’ – a stringent ethical approach was required. Ethical considerations were negotiated as the research process inevitably shifted, guided by Best Practice Guidelines from the University, the British Sociological Association’s Statement of Ethical Practice (2017) and experts in the field (e.g. Trimble & Fisher, 2006); with participants’ well-being and the principle of ‘respect’ always at the forefront of decisions (Birch & Miller, 2005; Block et al., 2013). Consideration of the above informed a full CUREC 2 application. The key ethical issues considered prior to entering the field are summarised in Table 5 below, along with how I (would have) addressed them in practice. Further questions, dilemmas and lessons which arose in practice, during my fieldwork, are discussed in more detail in a separate ethical mini-chapter (Chapter 3).

Potential risk	Mitigation
<i>For refugee participants</i>	
Discussing education or, in the case of parents, their children's future, may evoke traumatic memories or information on their asylum status, causing distress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring conversations back to the question schedule if going off-topic • Assure participants that they can skip any questions or topics they do not wish to discuss • Make efforts to make the research process a positive experience for all: e.g. by employing creative visual methods with young participants
Conflict may arise during pair interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid controversial topics • Seek the advice of local staff on suitable groupings • Set a positive and collaborative tone
Learning time may be lost due to participating in interviews or focus groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange youth interviews and focus groups to not clash with lessons
<i>For adult stakeholder participants</i>	
Having me present as an observer may cause stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the project clearly • Build relationships • Ensure they know why I am there • Do not discuss other staff members' work practices (unless someone's safety is at risk)
Participants may fear that their critiques of their organisations' practices will jeopardise their employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind participants that their data will be pseudonymised, they can skip any questions they do not feel comfortable answering, and they can withdraw from the interview or study at any time until thesis submission
Working time may be lost due to participating in interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow participants to choose the time of their interview • Schedule interviews for 30 minutes (but allow participants to continue talking for as long as they wish to) • Ask participants how long they can spend before starting • Be flexible about cancelling or rescheduling
<i>Language and culture</i>	
The majority of interviews are 'cross-cultural' (Ryen, 2001), involving participants from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This is because as well as the "striking"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Consent:</i> Ask participants in which language they prefer to receive information and give consent; prepare oral scripts; give younger participants (under 18) age-appropriate, pictorial versions of the forms,

<p>number of languages and ethnicities among the refugee population in Greece (Ghandour-Demiri, 2017), the humanitarian response also involves both Greek and international staff from across Europe and beyond (Witcher, 2019). This could cause issues with gaining informed consent and creating an interview environment in which all participants feel comfortable and able to express themselves fully</p>	<p>as used by researchers at Oxford's Rees Centre; obtain informed consent with the support of trusted local staff who can give verbal explanations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Self-expression:</i> Engage interpreters in the process (chosen by participants) to translate and avoid (cultural) misunderstandings
<p><i>Power imbalances</i></p>	
<p>Using the help of 'gatekeepers' in learning spaces means that attention has to be paid to power imbalances, as they are an additional adult providing services for the refugee community. As such, participants may feel coerced into taking part, or alter their responses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress at each stage that participation is entirely voluntary, and that participants are free to withdraw at any time until thesis submission, without giving a reason
<p>The power imbalance between participants and myself as a European researcher coming to conduct interviews may lead to feelings of coercion, or hesitation to give critical responses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress that I am independent from the asylum system, and that nothing said in interviews will have any bearing on participants' asylum status or ability to access the NGO's services or my lessons • Do as much as possible to build trusting relationships with participants through my role as a volunteer, while establishing relationship boundaries and understanding the limits of my responsibilities (Witcher, 2019) • Stress at each stage that participation is entirely voluntary, and that participants are free to withdraw at any time until thesis submission, without giving a reason

Table 5: Mitigating potential risks and burdens

2.6.1. Contribution to the participants and organisations

The aim of this study was to enable NGOs and other stakeholders to better understand the actors and factors shaping young refugees' engagement with post-15 education. In this way, it is hoped that supports can be leveraged – at least in this region of Northern

Greece, and among an age group which is often neglected. Alongside this, another contribution during the period of fieldwork was to provide English classes as a volunteer. While the popularity of the English language is not unproblematic, and indeed warrants analysis in its own right, being able to speak it is currently a highly valued skill among refugees in Greece. As such, my ability to provide classes as a qualified language teacher and to offer language support to organisations offered some form of reciprocity and tangible benefit for participants' time and input (Dantas & Gower, 2021). Other potential benefits for those who took part in the study included young people being able to share their own wishes and experiences, rather than being talked about in research and reporting on refugees and their education; and other stakeholders having the opportunity to share and feed back their concerns and suggestions to organisations and wider audiences. Beyond this, I was also able to offer support to organisations with designing youth-centred and creative research methods for needs analyses and programme evaluations.

2.7. The impact of COVID-19 on the research

Note: The impact of lockdowns on participants and their education is discussed in depth in Paper 4 of this thesis. This section addresses my own experience of the start of the COVID-19 pandemic as a researcher; how it impacted this DPhil project and my relationships with participants; and the resulting ethical questions which arose. It is written as a personal account, reconstructed from my field notes. Further, non-pandemic related ethical questions and lessons are discussed in depth in a dedicated mini-chapter (Chapter 3).

2.7.1. Lockdown research diary: disruptions and changing methods

On the evening of Wednesday 11th March 2020, I was eating dinner in my rented apartment in Thessaloniki when a strange warning message flashed up on my phone – presumably via the mobile network. On seeing the words “stay” and “home” in Greek, I hastily tried to read it but lost the message. I posted on Facebook asking if anyone else

had seen it or had more information. News of Coronavirus was already abounding on various channels and platforms: we knew it was in Greece, in the city, and that there was talk of border closures. Only two students had shown up for the English lesson I taught that morning, with the rest citing fear of the virus as the reason for their absence. That afternoon, after consulting with other NGOs, the coordinator of the centre I was due to go to that day decided to cancel all lessons until further notice.



Lucy Hunt Ingilizova

11 March 2020 ·

...

Anyone else in Greece just get an alert on their phone telling people to stay at home? I closed it too quickly and now can't find it... Who was that, why, what?

The next day, I went to visit my Arabic teacher, who had been expected to continue working with small children in another NGO – despite the fact that no parents from the refugee community were sending them. This meant that she was unable to look after her own children, whose schools had been closed. They and other teenagers played football in the streets, or sat and chatted outside cafés – seemingly oblivious to the eeriness and anxiety slowly pervading the city. Two days later, on Friday 13th March, I spoke to a participant in Athens via Skype who, without any other mention of the virus, concluded by telling me to “keep safe”. Following this, I went as planned to another NGO in Thessaloniki to discuss the possibility of working together on developing creative needs assessment workshops for their learners. We finished our meeting with concerns about what would happen in the coming days, and the potential impact on ourselves and their organisation. We sat quietly, looking pensively into our teacups, and then wished each other good health as I left.

My interview with a member of staff from the municipality, which was due to follow this meeting, was also cancelled. Other interviewees had also gone understandably quiet. At this point, my husband was becoming increasingly concerned

about border closures and urged me to come home while I still could – and so I packed as much as I could into two backpacks, told colleagues and learners that I would probably see them again in a couple of weeks, and took a bus to Bulgaria. Those two weeks became more than three years (and counting).

After the weekend, on Monday 16th March, I watched with anxiety from Sofia as my friends and family in the UK went about their normal lives – including going to large-scale concerts – while even small public places such as cafés in Greece and Bulgaria were told to close. Relatives complained of flu-like symptoms.

During a meeting with my supervisors, we discussed a contingency plan in case the fieldwork became very delayed. They encouraged me to focus on my own and my participants' health, and assured me that the university understood the difficulties. I paused data generation for two weeks to reflect on and analyse what I already had, before continuing online – as recommended by my supervisors. It felt strange to go from frantic in-person fieldwork – jumping in taxis to meetings, running between classes and catching interviewees when they were available – to being seated at a desk in front of a bare wall for the majority of the day. I felt guilty for having a suitable living space and the resources to work during lockdown, and no caring responsibilities, while various friends, relatives, research participants and colleagues struggled. This became especially apparent when we began online lessons at the end of March and they were initially chaotic, as learners navigated accessing the learning platform, sharing mobile internet with other household members and dealing with excitable or bored children who were understandably making noise in the background. While the classes had always been lively, there were also the added elements of relief and joy in interacting together once again, which gave everybody a boost.

With support and practice, the lessons went more and more smoothly, even if attendance was more inconsistent than usual. We found our way with the technology. However, one of the major disadvantages of online learning was that we all (staff,

volunteers and learners) lost our usual chances for more casual conversations around the learning activities: such as meeting in the kitchen in the mornings as we made our tea; bumping into one another on the street; or sharing good news or daily challenges as everyone unpacked or packed up before and after lessons.

Best option is that this virus will pass soon and we can all get back there – but will be going back to a totally different place. Don't know if people will even start coming to classes again, or if they'll be the same.

Fieldwork diary, 26th March 2020

During April, I also resumed interviews online, after running this past the Social Sciences and Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee at Oxford. It was encouraging to speak with colleagues and learners in Greece once again, and I decided to try to speak with further participants who were comfortable with talking virtually. For the most part, this meant youth who were over the age of 18, with the exception of one 15-year-old who wanted to join an interview I had arranged with her mother. I offered participants the chance to invite interpreters of their choosing to our calls, and to pay for mobile data. All except for the mother-daughter pair ended up being one-on-one conversations, with no interpreters present; although some interviews with youth were interrupted by curious relatives at home who wanted to say hello (see the next section for the ethical questions this raised). The biggest difference was that the creative element of the youth pair interviews (see Section 2.3.5) was left out, to not overcomplicate the online process or take up more time, and thus more of the participants' mobile data allowance. Otherwise, data generation continued on the same, key research questions, using the same semi-structured interview schedules.

At the end of April, the Greek government claimed that some restrictions would soon be lifted, but NGOs remained closed for in-person lessons. People were sceptical

that much would resume soon. By early June, some learners in online classes said that they had started meeting up again outdoors and visiting each other's houses, as well as taking part in NGOs' outdoor activities such as cultural visits. By 11th June, however, my voluntary teaching contracts had been completed, and the following week I held my last interview to conclude the period of what became adapted, 'hybrid' fieldwork.

2.7.2. (Mitigating) the impacts of changing methods

The primary impacts of changing to online methods were practical: regarding access and time pressures. It required participants to have access to suitable devices and a stable internet connection which could at least handle voice calls, which other researchers working with migrants found to be a key barrier (Greatrick et al., 2022). It also meant that most of my interviews were with youth over the age of 18, due to the difficulties of accessing and gaining parental consent to speak with minors (either directly from parents, or via a colleague at the NGO who had built relationships with their families). Part of this came down to not putting extra strains on staff time, in terms of taking the time to connect me with either youth or stakeholders, when they were already overwhelmed with the adaptation to remote working. This became very clear when I asked one social worker, Cassie, if she could possibly refer me to one of her colleagues:

I could make a question, but also know that this is the period of Corona, and everybody's like – not really working. And it's a bit chaotic. I could ask but I'm not sure when I will have the answer, because you know, everybody's like, all over the place! And you know, working from home. But yeah. I could definitely ask for you.

Following this answer, I was reluctant to add to their – or anyone else's – workload. While this meant fewer younger participants, I still strove to involve youth of various

educational situations and ages, to fulfil Maglio's (2020) call for educational researchers in humanitarian settings during COVID-19 to still "maintain an equitable sample of participants in view of the extraordinary situation".

Another practical issue was that participants were engaging in interviews mostly from their own homes, which raised questions of confidentiality – as particularly in the case of youth living in camps, this meant speaking from accommodation potentially crowded with relatives. On one occasion, I was speaking to one young person when his brother (whom I also knew) came into the room and wanted to speak. We had a brief conversation, about some colleagues we both knew, but he did not know that I was audio-recording before we started speaking. It would have been rude or dismissive to cut him off, and so I spoke with him briefly (as I was also pleased to see him, and to see that he was doing well) but then later deleted this section of the audio. On other occasions, the friends or relatives of both youth and stakeholders would pass by unexpectedly, sometimes with a passing "hello", or they would be performing various activities in the background. I made sure that all interviewees knew I would be recording, of course, and gained their consent for this, while also confirming that it was a suitable time to talk. I also shared digital versions of the research information sheets and consent forms (in various languages) prior to the interviews, allowing participants at least a few days to read and digest them, and sought verbal confirmation that they consented to taking part at the start of our calls (Maglio, 2020). I also checked if they had any questions and answered their queries, while also reminding them that they could withdraw at any time, as per the 'usual' in-person procedure. However, as other migration researchers have noted, speaking online from family homes or accommodation centres could have made participants reluctant to share potentially sensitive information (Greatrick et al., 2022).

Continuing research interactions online, especially from abroad, meant that I 'left' the field physically, but still participated in the digital learning spaces where

everyone was meeting for learning (i.e. the ‘virtual’ field site). However, as mentioned above, this meant that we lost out on opportunities for casual conversations around the physical learning spaces. These were found to be important for learners, as they gave chances to share personal interests, worries and information on other services around the city, for example (see Paper 3). They were also valuable for me as a researcher, as it was in these moments that we could talk informally about our backgrounds, share jokes, help one another with various tasks (such as adding credit to our Greek phones) and generally create bonds. While the online interviews mostly became individual, rather than following the focus group format – which allowed for more informal talk – it undeniably limited interactions. I tried to mitigate this by making the interviews feel informal, to give space for everyday conversation, and I encouraged learners to contact me if they had issues with the educational content or digital tools – so that they would not miss out on such support.

Still, I felt distant from the participants and the other youth and colleagues I had been interacting with every day, which was amplified by the fact that I was a few hours’ drive away over an international border. I reminded myself that this was a shared feeling, and that given the times we were living through, there were no in-person activities which any of us could have been a part of anyway. It created a bizarre feeling of missing out, despite there being nothing happening to miss out on. There was no alternative. It felt especially strange to complete this process of adapted fieldwork by simply closing my laptop, rather than packing my bags or arranging follow-up visits. Everything felt open-ended – as though things might improve enough to meet one more time, to sit down and reflect on what we had experienced. Underpinning this was a pervading sense of guilt, in being able to cross a border to my husband’s family, while refugee participants became even less mobile (as camps were locked down for controversially prolonged periods of time – see Paper 4). This exacerbated the guilt I

certainly would have felt anyway, without pandemic-related restrictions, due to having the privilege of mobility and the funds to travel.

This is not to say that the online period of research consisted solely of challenges, compromises and negotiations, however. Rather, the following two sections provide evidence of the positives which came out of the switch to online data generation: including the chance for one-on-one conversations, which were valued by the young participants; the opportunity to be reunited in class groups and individually, even if only virtually; and being able to continue our conversations and teaching and learning processes in some way, rather than not at all.

2.7.3. Entering a pandemic together: changing relationships

The very fact of entering a global pandemic together, with the exceptional measures put in place to prevent virus transmission, meant that the nature of my research relationships inevitably changed. While other researchers have noted the difficulty of building trust with new refugee participants from a distance (Greatrick et al., 2022), I had already met and gotten to know those involved in my study. As interviews continued, we naturally compared notes and shared our fears. The process was interlaced with my own personal challenges: for example, passing through the day I was supposed to fly to the UK to see my family; and people I knew becoming ill. These issues arose in conversations with participants such as Marwa, a 25-year-old from Syria:

Lucy: I hope soon we'll get back and get things moving again in Thessaloniki.
Marwa: Are you there now?
Lucy: No, I'm in Bulgaria ... just kind of waiting at the border for things to be alright! Ha.
Marwa: But there's alright. I mean, I guess they've also had very low – has it? I don't know, like the same as Eastern Europe. It's done very well.
Lucy: Yeah. Yeah. Or they're not testing, I'm not sure. Ha. Who knows? But yeah, it seems to be okay. For the moment. We're not sure if we should relax or not yet. They've kind of said that, you know, they're

relaxing some measures, but it's all a little bit confused. Who knows?
Strange times.

We shared our fears and uncertainties, and the impacts on our work and education. As such, it felt as though we bonded over this shared experience of the pandemic – as when talking to Hamid, a young man from Kurdistan in his early 20s:

Hamid: How are you doing there, in Sofia?
Lucy: Um, okay. It's a bit strange. I thought it was gonna be, like, one week and then finished – and then it's two months later! ... Now I don't know when I can come back again.
Hamid: I hope it will get end soon. I'm dying at home, I wanna go out! I wanna see human, ha ha!
Lucy: Ha ha, yeah!

On the other hand, we also shared light-hearted chats about the new skills we had picked up during lockdown:

Vasiliki: I found a lot of things in my free time, let's say, but I think I have to stop cooking! Ha. I think I'm going to become a baker maybe. I don't know. Something like that. What about you?
Lucy: You've changed your direction completely!
Vasiliki: Yeah! Maybe!

There were also warm feelings of being reunited, even if only online, such as when I spoke to Faidra, a teaching colleague:

Faidra: It was nice to see you again! Will you come back to Greece?
Lucy: I hope so! I'm waiting. I'm here almost with my bag packed, ready!

We also compared notes on how things were in our cities, such as when Cassie, a caretaker, told me that “for now we still have to send a message in order to go out, to the supermarket or anything”. We shared our joy at certain aspects of our environments reopening, but tentatively: qualifying our happiness in seeing friends and

colleagues again (such as in offices) with comments such as “we’ll see how it goes” or “it’s strange, though”.

This resulted in what felt like increased rapport, as we navigated the uncertainty of lockdowns together. It also meant that I shared more of my own personal life and fears, and thus became more vulnerable – after trying to be as open as possible with participants and other youth and colleagues. I do not profess to have felt anything near the same magnitude of precarity that characterised the forcibly displaced participants’ lives, but the experience of entering the pandemic together did teach me to feel a fraction of their ‘unsettlement’. I have written about how stakeholders also reported feeling an increased sense of empathy in Paper 4 of this thesis.

2.7.4. Resulting ethical and practical questions

The above excerpts from online interviews at the start of the pandemic suggest the sense of a shared experience (indeed permeated with our fears) which inevitably changed our relationships.

While the interviews conducted during lockdown consisted of the same question schedule, to ensure consistency and limit the impact of the change of approach, the fact that they were mostly one-on-one – and happening at the start of the pandemic – unavoidably gave them a different feeling. This was especially true with the young participants. They signalled appreciation for the chance to talk: as when Hasan said, “I’m so appreciate that we are meeting here. I’m glad to see you again, it is a long time!” Sayed, a 22-year-old from Iran, also concluded our conversation on 22nd April by saying “thank you, thank you so much for that”. Hamid, similarly, said, “thanks a lot, from the bottom of my heart. I appreciate it”. When I wrapped up the interview with Hamid, saying that I did not want to take too much of his time, he replied:

Hamid: I'm so glad. I'm so glad. I'm very happy to hear you. To speak with you.
Lucy: Me too! I'm so happy to see that you're smiling. Your hair is a little bit
messy, but you're smiling. Ha ha.
Hamid: Ha ha! [touches hair] Eh, you know, I don't – because of quarantine,
it's happened!

Marwa said explicitly that she was missing out on counselling sessions (an issue which preceded the pandemic, due to the perpetually limited availability of NGO staff), and that the interview had enabled her to get various thoughts off her chest. "Thank you," she told me, "it was very relaxing to talk to you because it's like, you know, it's like a counselling session!" I was glad that she had felt it a cathartic and beneficial experience, but was simultaneously concerned that she was missing out on the specialised support she needed. The counselling relationship is a professional one which went beyond my role in the field (and indeed my qualifications and experience) – and I was clear with interviewees that I could only refer them to NGOs offering psychological or legal support, rather than trying to give advice myself. My role, as I stated in the information about my study, was as a teacher who could provide educational resources or refer them to colleagues for more specialist assistance.

With that said, I felt it inappropriate to stop participants such as Marwa from sharing thoughts and feelings on various topics beyond education if they felt a need to discuss them with someone who would listen and sympathise. However, if any worrying revelations had come up during lessons or interviews – relating to abuse, for example – then I would have followed the child protection procedure (even if they were above 18) of letting them know that I had to tell a colleague, and then alerting the designated contact person that there was a concern (see Section 2.6).

2.8. Strengths, limitations and challenges of the research

COVID-19 aside, this research has various strengths related to the concepts, focus, methods and overall approach used. Firstly, by providing an ethnographic ‘thick description’ of young refugees’ experiences in Greece, it illustrates the ‘people behind the statistics’ to enable practitioners and the wider public to better understand young refugees’ everyday realities and decision-making. This lack of understanding – and young refugees’ frustration at not being understood – was emphasised by participants clearly during the research. The project attempted to provide much-needed positive images of young refugees, and their resourcefulness and strength, while at the same time not shying away from detailing the exclusion and many forms of violence they face. It aimed to give a fuller picture of the context and people within it, which involved acknowledging that some youth and their families may choose to resist education entirely, or avoid certain learning environments – recognising that these acts, too should be considered expressions of agency. It also reaffirms the place of non-formal education and its meaning for youth, while NGOs are constantly under threat of defunding and political attacks in Greece. This bottom-up approach to understanding such issues of displacement – which is often discussed at the macro level, in terms of trends and policies – shifts the focus from “controlling and governing to understanding” (Allsopp, 2018, p. 192).

In practice, this was supported via the project’s youth-centred approach, which incorporated pictorial and creative elements at every stage of young people’s participation (from information and consent to interviews and dissemination), and my attempts to make the process as comfortable as possible for all participants. It also meant leaving in instances of laughter, hesitation and other more ‘human’ elements of interaction in the transcription of interviews – as well as in field notes – to give a truer sense of how they unfolded and the personalities of those involved. Finally, to respect

the fact that the research context could be approached in many ways, the project engages with many different literatures and debates and offers grounded, policy-close empiricism; contributions to theory; and knowledge on using participatory, arts-based methods. In doing so, I have highlighted the importance of employing various research literacies in such a context.

The project had one main limitation and two key challenges, aside from those discussed above related to COVID-19. The limitation is the flip side of its main strength: namely, that by aiming at 'thick description' of the lived experiences of one age group in one region of Greece – who, as with all refugee communities, are heterogeneous – careful consideration of the degree of 'fit' is required before transferring results to other contexts (Gubrium & Holstein, 2014). The key challenges were managing the complexity of the project and recruiting a sufficient number of participants to reflect the demographic diversity of the refugee population in Greece. In terms of managing complexity, I simplified the study based on feedback from the pilot study and my Transfer of Status interview, kept thorough notes, made clear plans (as far as possible) and kept documents, contacts, schedules and recordings well organised.

In terms of recruitment, due to the importance of building reciprocal, trusting relationships with young refugees (Pastoor, 2015), I put my teaching background to use as a volunteer English teacher at a 'gatekeeper' NGO in the region and invited interested learners to participate. To enable access beyond family and friendship networks and thus ensure a heterogeneous sample, I relied on snowball sampling, word-of-mouth and recommendations (Bloch, 2004; Wirsing, 2008). While I could not offer a financial incentive, I made every effort to ensure interviews were engaging and stimulating, and gave small tokens of thanks (pens and notebooks) (Wirsing, 2008). I also followed Wirsing's advice to 'piggy-back' onto other activities by scheduling interviews for after classes youth would normally attend. Education stakeholders were accessed through personal connections, snowball sampling, word of mouth and email

contact. However, it became apparent through interviews and observations during the pilot study that girls were much less likely to attend NFE programmes, which was suggested to be due to issues of trust between the family and the Greek state, and the fact that many families are reluctant to send girls to classes which are mostly organised for mixed-gender groups. To address this potential challenge of recruiting young women, I volunteered in the female-only space described in Section 2.3.2. (I discuss these clearly gendered barriers in depth in a dedicated paper of this thesis – namely, Paper 2).

2.9. Dissemination of findings

Some criticise the resulting publications from small-scale qualitative and ethnographic research with refugees for being decontextualised accounts which are financially and linguistically inaccessible for participants (e.g. Jacobsen & Landau, 2003; Wright & Nelson, 1995). To address these complaints, I am disseminating findings in a variety of formats – to feed back to the community, address academic audiences and engage a wider public.

For youth and the wider refugee community, an accessible (i.e. jargon-free) summary report will be shared digitally after submission and passing the degree, in the preferred languages of the participants. Attempts will be made to make this youth-friendly and engaging, using visuals such as illustrations. For practitioners, a brief report will be prepared with key suggestions offered by participants – such as techniques and strategies they found to be beneficial for promoting educational engagement among this age group. It will also provide background information on the key challenges facing youth both inside and outside educational settings, as communicated by youth themselves, in an attempt to improve practitioners'

understanding of the refugee community's everyday realities. This will be translated into Greek and any other languages requested by educators.

In terms of disseminating to academic audiences, so far this has included presenting findings from both my empirical data and initial document analysis at more than 30 conferences, seminars and workshops across Europe and beyond. A list of selected presentations can be found in Appendix H. In addition, I have published the first three of the papers of this thesis in academic journals, with the fourth currently under review. Beyond these, I have had several further articles and chapters in edited volumes either published or accepted for publication which look at different themes to this thesis. Full details of my publications can be found in Appendix I.

It was also important for me to raise awareness of the perspectives of youth and the wider refugee community among a broader audience – especially given that one of the key issues identified during the study was a lack of understanding and communication among all actors. One way of doing so was to experiment with sharing findings via my hobby of drawing. The resulting illustrations (see example in Figure 4) were selected for an exhibition entitled *Illustrating Anthropology*, organised by the Royal Anthropological Institute in 2020. They are currently hosted [online](#), with one of my works selected for a smaller, physical version of the exhibition at a gallery in Liverpool, UK. Another comic won first prize in the 'migration' category of the University of British Columbia's Migration and Mobility Art Competition, with the prize money donated to support an educational project in Greece. Other illustrations have been exhibited at the conferences 'Im|mobile Lives in Turbulent Times' (Lancaster University, UK) and 'Global Borderlands' (Leiden University, NL), as well as the annual conference of the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM). These constitute attempts to share findings in a more inclusive and accessible way – following Sou (2019) – and, so far, they have garnered more attention than I believe this thesis alone would have generated.

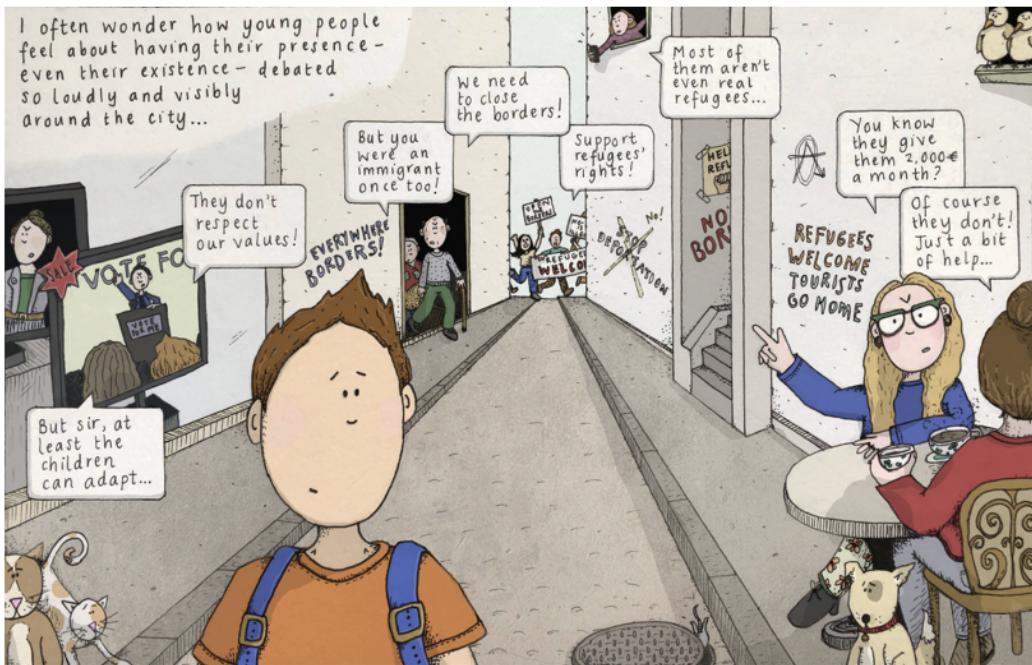


Figure 4. Illustration by the author, based on research findings



Figure 5. *Illustrating Anthropology* exhibition in Liverpool, November 2020, including the author's work. Source: Open Eye Gallery (2020)

3. ETHICS IN PRACTICE: QUESTIONS AND LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

Note: Pandemic-related ethical questions – stemming from changes to my research methods and relationships, for example – are discussed above in Section 2.7. The following mostly refers to the ethical dilemmas, lessons and questions which arose during in-person fieldwork conducted pre-lockdown. It is therefore a more general reflection on doing ethnographic research with young refugees and other stakeholders involved in their education.

As well as putting the pre-considered risk mitigation strategies in Section 2.6 into practice, I also had to manage unanticipated ethical questions and dilemmas which arose in the field. Some questions I resolved at the time; some were resolved for me, by colleagues or turns of events; and some remain unanswered. All of them taught me a great deal about the importance of having a solid ethical foundation (i.e. going through the University ethics application and approval process); the need to engage in constant reflection (including on my identity and how I present myself); and the challenges of following ethics frameworks to the letter when working with real people – and especially when they became students, colleagues and friends. These questions, along with the positive outcomes of this learning process, are discussed below. This mini-chapter takes inspiration from Paul Riser's (2020) in-depth, standalone doctoral thesis chapter on reflexive ethics, which reminds us that ethics lessons are indeed important findings in themselves.

3.1. “Can you help me?” Dealing with requests

The first question is concerned with the requests I received from participants and others in the field. This is because on occasion, I would be asked directly for personal help – not financial, but rather in the form of support such as extra free tuition. After one lesson, for example, a group of young people from different classes came to ask me for information on other learning centres they could go to, and whether I would hold extra English lessons for them after hours. The teacher I was supervised by – a

member of staff at the NGO – passed by and beckoned me away, saying, “you’re only one person, you can’t do so much.” Another time, at the women’s centre, one learner asked me if I would like to do an ‘exchange’: to meet before the scheduled lessons to practise English and Arabic together. In this case, I agreed to come an hour earlier, but then wondered whether a) the centre would find this appropriate; b) the other learners might consider it favouritism; c) the other learners might come earlier as well, believing it was a chance for more English practice; and/or d) the non-Arabic speakers would think that they were being excluded. This was (unfortunately) settled by the outbreak of the pandemic, as all in-person activities were cancelled, and this particular learner did not come back to me about pursuing this option online. However, I believe it could have been resolved by asking the centre coordinator for advice before agreeing, or even finding individual time slots for such ‘exchanges’ or informal practice.

This point played on my mind: was this not the most important part of my fieldwork – to use my professional background to reciprocate participants’ involvement in the research? I asked myself in my diary one day: “does the help I’m providing have enough of an impact?” At the same time, I had to strike a balance between my research and volunteering requirements. I did as much as I could, and especially when the requests for help were for information, short translations or other such small tasks. One mother of a very studious teenage girl, for example, came to me asking for advice on scholarships. While I could not directly assist with the Greek application, I referred the family to people who knew best about such opportunities, and I offered to proofread any applications in English. I had to learn to set boundaries, as difficult as this was, and to say “no”: to not take on too many lessons, not spend much more time helping one learner more than another, and not offer advice beyond the scope of my knowledge or qualifications – as much as I wanted to help.

3.2. Balancing my roles as a researcher, advocate, teacher and 'youth'

This issue of how I was 'helping' leads us to one central question which I repeatedly reflected on when introducing myself and interacting with different people in the field: what is my role here? While I entered the field as a teacher and researcher, I also conducted participant observation as an assistant on programmes for learners who were not much younger than me. For some, then, I was seen as their peer (even though I was officially outside of the 'youth' age range) – albeit an English-speaking, Western European one, who had the ability and resources to come and volunteer for several months. As many of the youth who attended NGOs' educational offerings in Thessaloniki went to more than one course, some of these peers then became learners in the English classes I was teaching. While it was never mentioned by youth themselves, personally I felt an awkwardness in transitioning to the role of educator, with the supposed authority this brings. To not create a disjuncture in our interactions across sites, I tried to keep our lessons light-hearted and more informal, with plenty of space for conversation and questions. We sat together around the table, rather than me speaking to them from a standing position from the front; I opened up the lessons to suggestions for content, to allow them to shape the process; and when new, unfamiliar students came, I insisted that they too call me by my first name (rather than 'Teacher'). I also dressed the same in all contexts, in semi-casual clothing. All of these practices fit, luckily, with the more friendly and flexible teaching ethos employed by the non-formal learning centres I encountered.

The other question was how to balance my roles as teacher and potential 'peer' with that of researcher. I was clear with the NGOs about my purpose for being there, but I could not immediately settle on a way to explain this succinctly to new people I met – and especially when they were unsure of what social sciences 'research' meant, either linguistically or conceptually. In the end, I decided to introduce myself using more

accessible language: I was a student from England, coming to learn about what helps refugees with their education in Greece, what makes it more difficult, and how to be a better teacher for them. (I still felt uncomfortable saying ‘refugees’ to the young participants, despite them using the term themselves.)

These adaptations to my appearance, behaviour and language could be considered what Srivastava (2006, p. 214) refers to as the researcher’s use of particular ‘currencies’ in the field: i.e. the use of the different types of dress, dialect and other actions to “accentuate the malleable aspects of [their] real-life identity”, present themselves as more relatable to participants, and thus foster better connections.

3.3. Issues with categorised identities and blurred boundaries

The multifaceted nature of my identity also raised ethical questions when carrying out interviews. During one pair interview, for example, one young person referred to me as ‘Teacher’. Seeing me as an authority figure, on the same level as a teacher at their high school, perhaps, could potentially have made them more reticent to offer their true feelings on their educational experiences, out of fear that I would inform other teachers or centre staff. I gently reminded them that I would not share anything they said outside of the interview, unless I thought they were having very serious problems – in which case I would have to mention this to the centre staff. Otherwise, it was confidential, among those present in the room. Similarly, outside of interviews, I was open with youth and stakeholders that I supported young refugees’ right to education (evidenced by the fact that I was volunteering as their teacher, if nothing else). However, this fact also could have influenced their responses in interviews – as perhaps they might have feared giving an opposing view, despite me following a semi-structured schedule and, on the whole, being non-judgemental and trying to remain neutral.

Ingvars (2021, p. 149) discusses similar experiences of having a multidimensional role in a solidarity centre in Greece – being a teacher, learner and researcher:

As part of my fieldwork, I studied Greek and taught English at Kentro. Thus, to many of my interlocutors, I was both a teacher and their fellow classmate. This created a bond through which we assisted each other with languages, shared humorous thoughts, and exchanged knowledge and criticism about our cultural habits, economics, and politics.

Indeed, like Ingvars, I found that there were more positives than negatives to getting to know people around the city in different capacities. Knowing that I was also joining in with activities – especially when arts-based, such as in drama sessions – certainly made youth more comfortable with joking with me, asking questions and generally chatting informally.

However, this occasionally then slipped into the grey area of becoming too informal, or indeed inappropriate. One young man, for example, asked for my personal phone number during one session and suggested socialising alone. I responded politely but firmly, saying that I could not stay longer in the evenings, and that the group had a WhatsApp chat for discussing the classes (for which I used a ‘professional’ phone number, obtained for research purposes).

The above suggests the challenge of sorting participants’ identities (and my own) into neat categories, and especially given that they were multifaceted and in flux. For instance, some of the ‘young people’ I met were not only learners, but also volunteer educators and assistants themselves; and over the course of the fieldwork, one ‘young person’ I met left high school to take up employment as an interpreter in a camp. As such, he went from one ‘category’ of participant (‘youth’) to another (a ‘stakeholder’, working with other youth). Some older participants had come to Greece as refugees or migrants themselves, many years before, and had taken up

humanitarian or social work – while others had arrived more recently, from more privileged backgrounds. Personally, I was not only a researcher, but also a teacher, volunteer, learner, privileged migrant, and even a ‘youth’ myself in some eyes; while being associated with particular groups such as ‘Europeans’, ‘humanitarians’ and ‘expats’. This raises questions about the ways in which identities are categorised and employed in research – and especially in this type of context, with this particular population and age group.

Identities, therefore, are conflicted, and neither singular nor fixed. It became apparent that this was also challenging for both refugees and NGO staff and volunteers, as they tried to straddle more than one world – and were pulled in different directions by conflicting loyalties, or felt frustrated at not being listened to as a member of one community working in another.

This reflection on roles and identities leads us on to another question I asked myself in my diary, after some time in the field: “who, really, are the ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’?” The humanitarian ‘space’ was populated by refugees and both international and national NGO staff and volunteers – all of whom had very heterogeneous backgrounds, and indeed their own experiences of migration and displacement (from the more privileged to the much less so). The fact that I was a Western European racialised as white did not seem to be troubling or unusual for either the youth or the Greek staff and volunteers. In fact, during the pilot study in August 2019, it became clear that international staff were not at all uncommon in Greece, and several of the young people taking the course I observed even excitedly showed me pictures of themselves with other British volunteers who were working in camps. However, I was under no illusion that this made me an ‘insider’. While I did not enter a camp myself, some volunteers in such sites were privileged by not only their identities, but also by the fact that they were accommodated in heated cabins while refugees slept in large, draughty warehouses in freezing winter conditions. The former also met

up in upmarket cafes around the city at evening ‘networking’ events to discuss their current and planned work with the refugee community – while few or none of the latter group were in attendance.

There were also tensions among these ‘solidarians’ themselves: i.e. between the Greek staff and those (predominantly) from Northern and Western Europe and North America. One Greek teacher, for example, talked about how many Greeks appreciate the volunteers, and the small way in which they can help, while also commenting on their “saviour complex”. She also warned that Greeks could be hospitable on the surface – to all newcomers – but it was difficult to get to know them on a deeper level. Of course, for Greeks, I too was a foreigner. I was outside of Greek ‘society’, even after studying the language and spending more and more time in the country. There were many pieces of historical, linguistic, political, social and cultural knowledge – concerning festivals, etiquette and heated discussion topics, for example – which I still had to learn. But for some of the refugees I met, we were all simply ‘European’, and it was even assumed that I inherently knew how the asylum and social systems worked in every European country. In this way, I believe I was a ‘curious outsider’ to most people I met.

3.4. The question of language: (un)comfortable interviews and ‘fixing’ quotes

Some (potential) interviewees mentioned that me being a native English speaker made them feel self-conscious about speaking in the language. For example, I asked one Farsi-speaking teacher if he would be interested in an interview – as he had lots to say on the topic of young refugees’ education and their wider life experiences in Greece – and he replied that he would feel too embarrassed, because his language skills were not strong enough. I reassured him that we could invite an interpreter to join us (of either my or his choosing), after which he was very enthusiastic. While this possibility

was stated in the information sheets about the project, which I provided in various languages (including Farsi), perhaps there was the assumption that our conversations would be in English – or at least partly. In future, this should be made more explicit.

I, too, experienced embarrassment at not being able to speak in all of the participants' mother tongues – even if that would have been an incredible feat, given the multitude of languages and dialects spoken among the refugee community in Greece (Ghandour-Demiri, 2017). One Arabic-speaking young person, for instance, was very keen to participate in a group interview in English without an interpreter present, but struggled to find the correct words to express himself fully. He tried to use Google Translate on his phone, and I regretted that I could not assist him more, despite taking Arabic lessons myself. In the end, I decided against using his contributions, as I could not guarantee that it was an accurate representation of his thoughts. Furthermore, it felt inappropriate to single him out for an individual follow-up interview to check what he had said, when he had already expressed his wish to not have an interpreter present. This is of course very unfortunate, as what could have been very valuable input was not included. However, I asked myself: is it more unfortunate for me or for him? Even if his views were not included, he still seemed to enjoy the session. He engaged well in the drawing task, managed to joke with both me and the other participants and tried some of his new English language skills. However, on my part, I was unable to use some potentially 'valuable' data.

This raises further questions about the balance between respecting participants' right to partake in interviews in the language of their choice and ensuring that they can participate fully – and that their contributions are not wildly misinterpreted. For me, the idea of 'discomfort' became key. I have written in the papers of this thesis that I believe the young participants chose to continue in English because they knew me from anglophone environments (i.e. the NGOs' activities around Thessaloniki, which were predominantly carried out in English) and wished to practise and develop their

language skills further. As they were motivated to do so, and did not show signs of discomfort, we continued with the interviews. In future, I will be especially sensitive to any signs of discomfort; and if it appears that participants are struggling to express themselves clearly, I will delicately suggest a conversation at another time, in a language in which they are more proficient – or with a friend or colleague present to help.

For those participants who had the proficiency, I tried to reassure them as much as possible that I understood them well and appreciated the fact that they were speaking in an additional language. I was also self-deprecating about my own skills, to hopefully make them feel better about their much stronger abilities. In one example, at the end of an interview with Melina, a Greek-speaking teacher, she half-joked:

Melina: Don't mention my English mistakes, okay? Ha!
Lucy: Ha ... no, it's great, really. If I need to check something, I might message you, if that's okay. Just if I'm not sure of something you said, to make sure I got it correct.
Melina: Okay, ha, yes, yes, of course. Because my English was not very...
Lucy: No! No, I understood everything perfectly. Really ... thank you for speaking English with me, I appreciate it.
Melina: Oh, it's okay!
Lucy: Because my Greek is *terrible*. Ha.

On a few occasions, participants stopped and looked to me for reassurance, or to apologise – as with one Greek-speaking teacher, Stefania:

Stefania: If a Pakistani 15-year-old boy or girl went to school in Pakistan, at least for 6 years, you can have a great class. And he will understand very fast, really fast, er, the alphabet, the rules, the grammar, everything. On the other hand... yes? [looks at me, checking that I understand] I can't speak English!
Lucy: It's perfect, really!

It also came up with one young person from Kurdistan, Serkar:

Serkar: Before one years, I just learned English. Because my English, I don't very well – and I hope, Lucy, you will a little bit understand! Ha.
Lucy: Hey, yeah! Look at you now! Your English is great. Now you're chatting, ha. Super well.
Serkar: Okay...! Yeah.

Others simply told me to slow down when I got carried away, which reassured me that they felt comfortable enough in our relationship to do so:

Lucy: So I told you a little bit about my project. It's about education for people who come to--
Jilwan: Tell me *siga siga* [Greek: slowly slowly]. Ha!
Lucy: Ha ha! Yeah, sorry, *siga siga*. *Sta ellinika?* [In Greek?] No...
Jilwan: Ha ha ha!
Lucy: No, no! Yeah, I definitely can't!

This leads us on to considerations of how participants' words were transcribed and presented in the papers of this thesis – prompted by one particular comment from a journal reviewer on the grammatical mistakes in a participant's verbatim quote. The reviewer corrected the participant's English, and suggested that they might want me to do so with all of their contributions. I reflected on this, and discussed it with my supervisors – and indeed was concerned that I was presenting participants as deficient in terms of their language skills, when it was because of me that they were speaking in a foreign language. However, if I edited their words, how could I be sure that the alternative wording or phrasing I chose really captured what they wanted to convey? Furthermore, it would take away from the fact that refugees have been said to craft their own version of English in Greece, as a result of mixing with people of many different nationalities and needing to communicate with international actors and service providers (Broomfield, 2017). Would it be appropriate, in this case, to take their words

in the English they were using for their current context and artificially remaster them into my English?

In the end, for these reasons – predominantly related to a desire for authenticity – I decided to leave all of the verbatim quotes as they were. This meant also leaving in my own mistakes, despite transcribers apparently having a tendency to ‘fix’ their own grammar in the interviews they have conducted, but not interviewees’ (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). As such, the transcription in this thesis follows a more ‘naturalized’ approach (Oliver et al., 2005). In line with this style, I have also left in instances of laughter and uncertainty, such as pauses and hesitations, to give more of a sense of how the interactions really unfolded – to make them more ‘human’.

However, Oliver et al. remind us that there may good reasons for ‘denaturalizing’ text, and that we should bear our research outcomes in mind when deciding on a transcription style – such as how much focus the research has on either the content of the talk (e.g. if analysing meanings and perceptions), or the ‘mechanics’ of the interview (such as in conversation analysis). In addition, they note the importance of being sensitive to participants. They cite Tilley (1998), in saying that decisions should be taken in a way which shows respect for participants’ words and intentions. In future, I would ideally build time into projects for participants to not only check transcripts themselves, but also to be involved in the analysis, if they would like to; using creative methods such as painting to help them identify their own themes (as in Balmer, 2021).

Overall, these considerations – which stem from a single reviewer’s comment – have served as an important reminder that “transcription is a powerful act of representation” which requires “reflection at crucial design and implementation points [as] a valuable exercise in honoring both the research process and participant’s voice” (Oliver et al., 2005, p. 1287).

3.5. “What do YOU think?” The issue of neutrality

I also learnt to have the spotlight turned on me during interviews, when participants directly asked for my opinions. It made it impossible to stay neutral on the issues we were discussing, and rightly so: I was asking for people’s views constantly, without necessarily having to offer my own. But this still raised questions about whether my honest responses would affect what they told me later, and whether I was really being completely open in my answers or remaining diplomatic to avoid controversial opinions. This was especially true in my conversations with stakeholders, and particularly when they were from Greek public institutions. While almost all were unequivocally critical of how refugees were being treated in the country, some occasionally appeared defensive about the state’s actions – reasoning that “we” have limited abilities to financially support such a large number of newcomers, and especially following the economic crash of 2008. Without it ever being voiced, I felt that some Greek participants tacitly became defensive when faced with a researcher from a prestigious institution in a ‘richer’ country in Western Europe (as some explicitly noted) who might criticise their practices.

While this had been somewhat expected, I had not been prepared for the fact that some *young refugees*’ views on integration would be quite so conservative – and indeed more so than some stakeholders. For example, when talking to Hamid, a young Kurdish man in his early 20s, I half-jokingly summarised what he had said as “Greece needs to push young people [to attend learning activities] or kick them out”. He replied:

Hamid: Yes! We need to! It won’t be bad, actually. We should force! If you stay here, you should learn something.
Lucy: Okay. Cool.
Hamid: I think you don’t like that! Ha.
Lucy: I, um, yeah...!
Hamid: Ha!
Lucy: I’m neutral! Ha ha!

Hamid: Eh, what's neutral? You can't be neutral, ha ha!

Lucy: No, because, I feel like – my position is that education gives young people many good things, like it obviously teaches you knowledge and skills, and you can make friends with people from Greece, and other countries. There are many, many good things about education, instead of sleeping at home, or chilling on the street, you know...

Hamid: Yes.

Lucy: ...But then also in school, there are some problems sometimes with other students, or, you know, there are sometimes difficult things in school...

Hamid: That's true.

In this case, I was caught off-guard by Hamid's opinion, as it was a much stronger stance than I had anticipated – and especially as so many youth were already living under the threat of deportation as it was. For this reason, I was unsure about how to respond, as I also did not want to discredit his opinion. I disagreed that refugees should be deported for not following educational (or other 'integrational') programmes, but rather than saying so explicitly, I tried to explain my reasoning: that there can be many challenges besides a lack of personal motivation which cause learners to leave programmes. A strict position such as Hamid's could, in this case, jeopardise the futures of people with additional needs due to disability or their psychological health, for example, which would likely not be addressed in 'integration' programmes (from my research experience).

The resulting exchange was somewhat stilted, but we found our middle ground, and it did not seem to impact the rest of our conversations. This was helped by the fact that we had already built up a friendly rapport during different learning activities, during which we had discussed various topics. The situation taught me not to shy away from sharing my own opinions, and the potential friction which may result from it – and especially when taking the stance of being a critical ethnographer. Rather, I learnt to offer something of myself – seeing as I was asking participants to do so – and to respectfully and diplomatically engage in any resulting discussion, while reminding my

interlocutors that it was my personal opinion, and that there were no right or wrong answers in such interviews. This last point ensured that they would not be influenced by any perceived expectations of the interview process.

3.6. Are people feeling annoyed or coerced?

I was also constantly concerned about the balance between the cost and the benefits of taking part in this study, and whether I was bothering participants by even trying to arrange times for interviews. In terms of the snowball technique, I found it certainly helped when I had known stakeholders and youth for some time, and had interviewed them already. In this way, they knew the process, and seemed more comfortable with putting forward friends' and colleagues' names for the study. One interviewee, Melissa, made this explicit. When I asked if I could contact the women at her learning centre about interviews (as they were both refugee youth and mothers of refugee youth), she replied:

Melissa: So usually – of course, we're very thoughtful to that process and rarely engage our members in direct interviews.
Lucy: Of course.
Melissa: But yeah, the thing that I would say that is always the sort of shifting point, is that you're very much part of the community and have had direct interaction for a really long time with particularly some of your students ... It makes all the difference when, you know, people can even just recognise the face or the name. There's a totally different experience than sort of just kind of grabbing someone anonymously.

Melissa then went on to note the benefit of me asking my students directly, rather than via her or a member of staff, to avoid people feeling obliged to participate.

This speaks to a related concern about whether potential interviewees would feel pressured to take part. While I took steps to mitigate this risk, as outlined in my

ethics application prior to engaging in fieldwork – such as by reminding people that participation was voluntary, for example – other questions arose. In one case, for example, I started paid Arabic lessons with someone who fell into the target group for the study, and I considered for a while whether it was appropriate to invite her to take part in an interview. I did not want her to feel as though I was ‘buying’ her participation. Luckily, we had met before I started paying for her classes and she already knew about my role – but the mere fact of money becoming involved made me hesitant.

In another example, I was looking for a Farsi speaker to translate some information sheets about the study, and to potentially help with interviews. The payment from these tasks would have been valuable to youth in the study – as most were reliant upon limited cash cards, which were provided by UNHCR at that time – and most of those I knew spoke English well. However, even if they were over the age of 18 and there was no issue that I would be paying someone underage for this translation work, would this still complicate the researcher/participant (and teacher/learner) relationship? And furthermore, if more than one person was interested in helping – or heard that I had contacted someone else about this opportunity – would my choice be perceived as favouritism? Would they look to me for more paid work or other financial help? In the end, this particular issue also resolved itself, as a colleague put me in touch with an experienced translator who was not involved in the study. However, the question remains of how I would handle this in future.

3.7. What lengths should I go to to get the study done (and done ‘well’)?

The issue of having a limited timeframe created a pressure to ‘get the study done’, which had to be balanced with a respect for participants’ availability, schedules and interests. Would they want to take the time now to talk about this particular topic? We

were all busy, with our various commitments, and also human: we got ill, we needed rest. This issue came up one day, as noted in my field diary:

Felt awful today because of a cold and not much sleep. Considered going to the theatre workshop, but felt quite sick and was aching all over. As much as I need to spend time with the young people there for my research, I can't justify going with a cold and infecting them and potentially a whole refugee camp, who don't necessarily have access to healthcare.

This dilemma highlights two issues: firstly, that time pressures made me push myself too much, to the extent that I believe I got more ill; and secondly, the potential risk this then posed to others, as I considered attending the learning sessions despite being unwell. While this was certainly driven by funding-related constraints, it was also propelled by what I perceived to be the demands of this type of research: to speak to as many people as possible, and observe as much as possible, in the time that I had. This thinking leaves no room for the fact that social sciences are just that – a social, human endeavour.

Another concern was about the lines I should or should not cross, either because of the ethical limits of my research, or my own personal safety. This included crossing the line into participants' homes and family lives. In one example, as mentioned above, I began Arabic lessons with a colleague whose family came to Greece as refugees. One day, she told me that she was starting a new job, and that she would be unable to continue with our lessons, unless I wanted to go to their home in the evenings. We had already talked about my research, and the possibility of an interview, and so I became uncomfortable with the idea of crossing a boundary and entering into a participant's home.

But what was it about her becoming a 'participant' – rather than only a colleague, or private tutor – that changed the situation? Perhaps it was the grey area about what I might learn from their conversations and behaviours at home, and the

issue of whether or not to include that in my thesis? Or the uncertainty about whether her children understood my role, even if their parents were very open about sharing information on their home life? I wondered: should I adhere to the ethics procedures as approved (i.e. to meet participants in public places, not their own homes), or risk entering into a grey area in order to get to know them more naturally (where they would be more comfortable), and possibly generate more in-depth data? I had been invited in – they were not coerced – and interviewing in the home has the potential to be a positive experience for the family, as they can share their views and issues more openly with each other, as well as with the researcher (Yee & Andrews, 2006). I thought about this for a while and decided not to go, even though I was advised by a fellow researcher that it was surely a good way to get to know them better. My decision was guided by my ethical responsibilities to them – in avoiding ambiguities – and also my responsibilities to myself and my own personal safety, in avoiding travelling alone to a distant and unfamiliar neighbourhood on unreliable public transport late in the evening. In the end, however, this was another decision which never had to be enacted, as the pandemic broke out and lockdowns were enforced.

There were also other unexpected risks to my own health and safety which I had to manage, by weighing up costs and benefits. For example, I went alone to meet researchers, participants and other ‘solidarians’ in cafes and offices, despite having never met them before; I took public buses to rundown industrial areas on the outskirts of the city, to assist with one NGO’s language lessons (which were held in a borrowed space there); and I stayed in less desirable neighbourhoods to save on living costs, carrying my belongings at night because of buses arriving late or not at all. If I had not taken any such risks, it could be argued, I would not have been able to generate much or any data. Furthermore, refugee learners far younger than me were enduring, and had endured, much worse to be able to live in relative safety in Greece and attend such learning activities.

3.8. Concluding thoughts: being human, being a social scientist

Overall, this type of research – and indeed all social sciences research – involves a curiosity about what it means to be human, in different contexts and conditions. It is inherently a human endeavour, made up of human interactions. Especially when using an ethnographic approach, it leads us to the question: can you really ‘write’ (*grapho*) the people (*ethnos*) without truly being present and capturing the everyday joys, fears and other trivialities of their lives when they come up in conversations and interviews? We were not talking in clinical settings, following a strict interview schedule. Rather, I had to learn not to be too blinkered and concerned about generating specific data, and to instead focus on being actively present – and especially in the pair interviews with youth. I learnt to be comfortable with joking and leaving instances of laughter and teasing in the transcripts, to bring them to life. This is particularly important, I believe, when refugees’ sense of humour is almost never acknowledged in research or news stories.

Beyond this, I learnt to be open and flexible. On starting this project, and especially being new to ethnographic techniques, I held the idea that I should be the ‘objective and professional researcher’ entering the field to investigate the specific set of questions of interest to me and my funding body. However, I learnt to listen to the people around me and adapt my study to better fit the issues most pressing to them, while also adapting my methods and conceptual framework to better fit the participants, context and type of researcher I wanted to be(come).

These and the other lessons and concerns I have written about above are a reflection on my process of navigating ethics-in-practice – and my own vulnerabilities, dilemmas and unanswered questions. Pillow (2003, p. 192) urges researchers to live with such a reflexivity of discomfort: to move towards more critical usages of reflexivity which push beyond “a simple story of subjects, subjectivity, and transcendence”.

Rather, “a tracing of the problematics of reflexivity calls for a positioning of reflexivity not as clarity, honesty, or humility, but as practices of confounding disruptions – at times even a failure of our language and practices”. This means being accountable to struggles for self-representation – including our own – and using “more ‘messy’ examples, examples that may not always be successful, examples that do not seek a comfortable, transcendent end-point but leave us in the uncomfortable realities of doing engaged qualitative research” (p. 193). The messy examples, negotiations and ‘uncomfortable realities’ discussed here have been my own honest attempt to work through – and work on – a reflexive ethics which will continue to be built for the rest of my research career.

4. OVERVIEW OF THE FINDINGS

4.1. Form and structure of the findings

The key findings of this study are presented over four papers, which were intended as journal articles for publication. They address different aspects of young refugees' 'unsettlement', their individual and collective methods of navigating them and the actors and spaces involved in this process. Each was written to make best use of my DPhil data to address slightly different, but equally important, gaps in the refugee (education) research literature.

As my research speaks to various disciplines (such as education, migration and youth studies), such an integrated thesis format allowed me to write distinct, discrete articles for journals in different fields. As such, I could situate myself and my work as interdisciplinary, and contribute the findings from this project to various discussions. In addition, three of the articles in this thesis were prepared for themed special issues – and as such, I was guided by current conversations and urgent questions in the field of refugee (education) research. Writing articles thus enabled me to be more responsive to debates and publication opportunities as they arose, and to contribute my findings to them. Finally, related to this, the integrated format allowed me to experiment with different but complimentary theoretical ideas, which all fit together under the overarching conceptual framework of this thesis: namely, the 'navigation' of 'unsettlement'.

4.2. Overviews of the four papers

The following section introduces the four papers and explains how they address the research questions and different angles of the research topic. For ease of reference, the research questions were as follows:

Overarching question: How do young refugees in Greece experience and navigate 'unsettlement' in/via education?

- **RQ1:** How do young refugees (aged 15-25) who have arrived in Greece since 2015 experience 'unsettlement', and how has this impacted their (re-)engagement with post-15 education?
- **RQ2:** How do individual factors such as gender, age, accommodation and legal status shape their experiences?
- **RQ3:** How do youth navigate these conditions of unsettlement in/via education?
- **RQ4:** Which key (educational) actors and factors support them in their process of educational navigation?

4.2.1. Paper 1

Paper 1 is entitled '*The impact of institutional bordering practices on young refugees' (re-)engagement with post-15 education in Greece*'. This paper was published in the journal *Social Sciences* as part of a special issue on 'Crisis, (im)mobilities and young life trajectories'. The version included here is as published (see Appendix J), albeit with a slightly edited title.

This paper focuses our gaze on the state, and the impacts of institutional 'reception' practices on young refugees' (re-)engagement with education after their arrival in Greece. It uses the concept of 'institutional bordering', drawing from human geography and border studies, to theorise these macro-level issues – and to provide evidence of how precarity can be manufactured, and how this impacts individuals at the micro level. The paper argues that three key institutional bordering practices in Greece – namely, the bordering of space (via encampment), time (via enforced waiting) and public services (via administrative barriers) – have played a central role in young refugees' (re-)engagement with post-15 education; often causing their dreams to be diverted or downgraded (answering RQ1). It is suggested that these are intentional

acts to destabilise refugees' social standing and, ultimately, make them feel less welcome and less likely to stay. It is based, primarily, on young refugees' own accounts of their first months and years in the country.

It details how, with determination and the support of willing 'gatekeepers', refugee youth found ways to (re)construct adapted learning trajectories despite, and in response to, these arrival challenges (RQ3). While their aspirations may previously have been to finish high school and attend university, administrative and linguistic barriers made it difficult in Greece. As such, they adapted their goals to be more achievable. They attended vocational training, for example, which was often considered 'easier' to enter than general senior high schools, and especially after the age of 15; and they focused on developing their language skills to find work and further learning opportunities. With spatial and financial barriers to language courses, they strategically spent time with international volunteers in camps, tried hard to make Greek friends and offered to volunteer themselves, to build their linguistic skills.

The findings demonstrate the significant role of (un)willing social actors and their in- or exclusionary practices in creating or breaking down barriers. It was found that school directors, for example, could act as 'gatekeepers', accepting refugee youth or denying them for invented reasons; while at the same time, local friends assisted them with language and other cultural knowledge to guide them over the threshold into society (RQ4). In addition, NFE – despite being severely limited, especially in camps – proved itself to be an important support for youth navigating institutional borders in the everyday.

Overall, the paper highlights how state practices towards new arrivals hold them in a state of legal and social 'unsettlement', restricting them from progressing with their educational trajectories. It provides evidence for the argument that precarity is, indeed, manufactured; and that states have the power to eliminate some of the immediate constraints preventing young refugees from achieving their educational and other life

goals. It also offers evidence of the relational nature of young refugees' navigational actions.

4.2.2. Paper 2

Paper 2 is entitled '*Allies, access and (collective) action: young refugee women's navigation of gendered educational constraints in Greece*'. This paper was published in the *Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies (DiGeSt)* as part of their special issue 'Changing surroundings and gender: gendered experiences and gender-sensitive support in migration contexts'. The version included here is an extended version which includes more literature and empirical material. The published version can be found in Appendix K.

This paper pays attention to the gendered impacts and experiences of 'unsettlement', and particularly how the instability of forced displacement can exacerbate tensions in young refugee women's micro-level relationships with family, teachers and peers. As such, it particularly responds to RQ1, on the impact of unsettlement on young refugees' educational decision-making, and RQ2, which asks about individual differences in their experiences. The paper argues that young refugee women's 'unsettlement' can involve or create gendered barriers to accessing and progressing through post-15 education. It details how they navigate these constraints to continue learning (RQ3), and the role of alternative (i.e. non-formal) learning spaces and educational actors in this process (RQ4).

The paper describes how despite the stereotypes of the 'young, lone, male refugee' arriving in Europe, there are also a significant number of young women making the journey – many of whom wish to continue or begin their post-15 education. This could be because they never had the opportunity previously; because they wish to build a social support network through schools and/or educational NGOs; because they

need language skills to find work; or perhaps because they wish to continue the academic path they commenced before having to flee their home country. Others, however, may choose to prioritise family responsibilities over attending school or other learning settings.

For those who do wish to participate in educational offers, a number of gendered constraints – which primarily stem from displacement-induced tensions in family and peer relationships – can make it difficult to do so. For example, parents may be hesitant to send their daughters to unknown settings on public transport, or distrustful of the people they may meet there; young women themselves may be occupied with childcare, which prevents their access to formal education in particular; and they may face racialised and gendered forms of abuse or discrimination if they enter predominantly white, Orthodox Christian, Greek-speaking settings. Almost all of these constraints can be related back to their conditions of ‘unsettlement’: especially social precarity, in the breakdown in refugee/‘host’ community relations; refugee families’ mistrust of Greek services; and young women’s loss of a support network due to their flight.

The paper details young refugee women’s expressions of collective and relational agency as they navigate these educational constraints. As identified during interviews with stakeholders and youth themselves, their navigational tactics involved finding and shaping alternative learning opportunities, educating peers and leveraging collective strength. They sought out NFE which offered childminding services or allowed them to breastfeed (including in lessons); learned enough Greek and/or English to correct their peers’ stereotypes or speak back to discrimination; or attended NFE as a group for ‘strength in numbers’. Overall, the paper demonstrates how the precarity of refugeehood has gendered dimensions and impacts, and how young women plot a path through it – with the support of gender-sensitive initiatives and local advocates.

4.2.3. Paper 3

Paper 3 is entitled '*Creative (en)counterspaces: solidarity arts workshops as sites of valuable contact for young refugees*'. This paper has been published in the journal *Migration Studies* (see Appendix L), for a special issue I am guest-editing with colleagues which is tentatively titled 'Urban encounters: living with difference in cities'. Following the primary focus on constraints in the previous two articles, this paper looks more at how and why young refugees (re-)engage with *particular* forms of education in a context of overlapping forms of 'unsettlement'; as well as the influence of their relationships with social actors in these learning spaces (RQ3 & 4). It primarily draws from my interview and participant observation data related to non-formal arts workshops organised by the Thessaloniki branch of an international NGO, which is here referred to as 'Hearts & Minds'. As such, the paper zooms in on one site refugee youth engage in after the age of 15, and their reasons and supports for doing so.

The paper begins by outlining some of the key issues youth are facing in their wider social worlds, and how this contributes to their marginalisation and sense of 'unsettlement' (RQ1). It then explores the role of non-formal education as both a safe and welcoming 'counterspace' – drawing from critical race, youth and leisure studies – as well as a site of valuable contact. This means one in which non-fleeting encounters with other refugee youth and members of the 'majority' public are fostered, leading to outcomes the participants valued. As mostly volunteer-led initiatives, taking place in the 'third space' (Bhabha, 1994) of civil society, NFE offers are often framed as acts and sites of solidarity in which diversity is welcomed. These accessible offers can provide a sanctuary for youth in which they can engage in skill building, skill sharing and more comfortable self-expression – with the arts playing an important role in this process. This permits the rebuilding of identity and aspirations following flight. However, despite encouraging and being underpinned by the principle of solidarity, issues of inclusivity

(touching on RQ2) and unequal power relations can still arise in – or be carried over into – these spaces.

The paper thus unpacks these dynamics and the nature of arts-based NFE as a potentially positive site of cross-cultural contact, by describing young refugees' everyday experiences of such places and the meanings they ascribe to them. It was found that young refugees seek out such spaces as a means of gaining social capital and language skills, among other benefits, in processes which are mediated by local 'gatekeepers' and arts materials and practices (RQ4). In this paper it is argued that the relationships and practices of arts-based NFE can be powerful tools for assisting youth in their navigation of 'unsettlement' – if done with sensitivity, and via long-term programmes with sustained interest and funding.

Overall, the paper aims to demonstrate how despite the challenges of micro-level social dynamics and macro-level constraints surrounding the running of NFE, it provides an important space of ownership and belonging. It is a space in which youth can meet and learn about one another, rebuild their confidence and identities, and navigate the everyday difficulties of their 'unsettlement' – even if it arguably remains a 'micro-public' (Amin, 2002) at the margins of society.

4.2.4. Paper 4

Paper 4 is entitled '*Locked-down learning amid COVID-19: refugee youth in Greece navigating yet another crisis*'. It is under review at a journal in the field of education studies.

Following on chronologically, this final paper details how a new and unexpected set of challenges – unanticipated at the time of designing the research – also came into play in the young participants' experiences of education. Namely, it addresses the various ways in which COVID-19 lockdowns impacted young refugees' learning

opportunities and experiences, and how it worsened their already substantial feelings of ‘unsettlement’. It draws more on the concept of ‘crisis’, highlighting how the financial and migration ‘crises’ were already severely impacting refugees’ ability to participate in Greek social and economic life, including in spheres such as education, before the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020 and its associated lockdowns made the situation even more dire.

The paper begins by sketching out what is known from the global literature about the impact of lockdowns on refugees and their education, before presenting the nature of the COVID-19 responses and lockdown procedures in Greece and the limited data available on the specific consequences for refugees’ education. It then goes on to explore how, for participants in this doctoral study, lockdowns compounded pre-existing issues and impacted their learning. It details how both formal and non-formal educational opportunities were disrupted or lost; how technological and family-related issues affected their ability to continue learning online; and how wider issues such as uncertainty and immobility came into play. However, the paper also shows how youth tried to navigate these barriers to beginning or continuing learning, with the support of peers, educators and non-governmental organisation staff and volunteers – highlighting their expressions of relational agency amid overlapping crises. As such, it addresses all of the research questions: responding to RQ1 by discussing the nature of their ‘unsettlement’; RQ2 by highlighting the influence of individual factors such as accommodation type; RQ3 by outlining their navigational strategies; and RQ4 by describing the role of educational staff and external factors such as policy and health.

The paper concludes by arguing for sustained financial and political support for refugee-serving organisations, alongside greater flexibility and accessibility in the public education system. It aims to contribute to debates on ensuring equitable digital access, as education around the world increasingly becomes virtual; on ensuring that the most vulnerable are not left behind in turbulent times; and, as in the other papers,

the role of civil society in supporting displaced communities. It also touches on how, when the general public are faced with their own heightened forms of uncertainty and precarity, this can either amplify anti-refugee sentiment – for example in the spreading of unfounded racist messages regarding virus transmission – or potentially lead to greater feelings of empathy and understanding.

5. PAPER 1: 'THE IMPACT OF INSTITUTIONAL BORDERING PRACTICES ON YOUNG REFUGEES' (RE-)ENGAGEMENT WITH POST-15 EDUCATION IN GREECE'

Below is the first paper of the thesis. This paper was published in the journal *Social Sciences* in November 2021 (DOI: 10.3390/socsci10110421), following peer and editorial review. The below is the same version as was published (see Appendix J), albeit with a simplified title.

5.1. Abstract

Greece has been a site of various crises in recent years: firstly, the financial crash of 2008; secondly, the ongoing 'refugee crisis', which peaked in 2015; and thirdly, the current COVID-19 pandemic. This paper addresses the first two of these crises, and particularly how state responses to increased migration flows shape young refugees' (aged 15-25) (re-)engagement with post-15 learning opportunities upon arrival in the country. It is based on semi-structured interviews with young refugees living in Thessaloniki, conducted as part of an ethnographic doctoral project on educational decision-making. The findings reveal that three key institutional bordering practices in Greece – namely the bordering of space (via encampment), time (via enforced waiting), and public services (via administrative barriers) – played central roles in young refugees' (re-)engagement with post-15 education; often causing their dreams to be diverted or downgraded. However, with determination and the support of willing gatekeepers, refugee youth found ways to (re)construct adapted learning trajectories despite, and in response to, these arrival challenges.

5.2. Introduction

Sayed is a young man from Iran in his early 20s. His is a recognisable face in the various language, arts, and sports courses run by solidarity initiatives around

Thessaloniki, which were established in response to the financial and refugee crises in Greece. He is an energetic character who does everything at full speed and with maximum effort: whether it is hammering out old songs on malfunctioning keyboards or excitedly explaining the Farsi roots of English words. During his time in Greece he has tried to get involved in as many learning activities around the city as possible, as both a student and volunteer, to gain friends and work experience. However, especially in the beginning, he said that it had not been easy to find and access these opportunities. He complained that a number of forces worked against him and other refugees in Greece, trying to keep them “out of society”, saying, “it’s as if that they are controlling, to not let them get in society or improve themselves – or there are no chance to do that”. This control could involve asking for particular documents to enrol in schools, which many refugees simply cannot provide, or, as Sayed explained, keeping refugees in isolated spaces and uncertain legal states.

The aim of this article is to explore the impacts of these state responses to newcomers and particularly to show how they impact young refugees’ (re-)engagement with post-15 education after arrival in the country. These practices are conceptualised as examples of *institutional bordering*; drawing from the geographical literature which understands that borders are not just static physical entities at the state periphery, but also active processes of exclusion taking place in everyday life and spaces *inside* the state (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013; Yuval-Davis et al., 2018). The article follows Strasser and Tibet’s (2020) proposition that the border crisis at the margins of Europe has resulted in intensified political and legal controls that trickle down into the everyday lives of young migrants. It attempts to expand upon the “daily, soft, lived, and unspoken realities” of these controls, which the discourse of overlapping crises often renders invisible (Carastathis et al., 2018, p. 29), with a particular focus on how education is implicated. Furthermore, it explores how youth respond to and navigate these controls, with the support of willing ‘gatekeepers’. In doing so, it aims to add to the limited

literature on young refugees' expressions of agency, particularly as they encounter hosts, school systems, and other forms of education (Guo et al., 2019; Pace, 2017).

In terms of structure, the article first sketches out the socio-political landscape of 'Crisis Greece' today, young refugees' educational opportunities within it, and their known challenges and supports. It then lays out the theoretical framework underpinning the discussion and the methodology of the wider study. The article then presents and discusses findings from the study which demonstrate how youth are forced to navigate multiple forms of institutional bordering that impact their post-15 educational trajectories, and the role of non-formal education⁹ (NFE), 'gatekeepers', and other everyday social actors in this process. It concludes with implications for research, policy, and practice.

5.2.1. Refugee youth in Greece: a context of intersecting crises

To understand young refugees' challenges and their educational impact, it is first necessary to sketch out the nature of the 'critical times' Greece is experiencing (Dalakoglou & Agelopoulos, 2018), as well as refugees' place within them. As a key entry point into the continent, Greece took a central role in what has come to be known as the 'European refugee crisis' (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017); referring to the heightened numbers of arrivals seeking refuge in Europe in recent years. Since 2015, more than one million people have entered the country, with the majority seeking asylum (Clayton & Holland, 2015). In the early days of the 'crisis', most passed through and continued their journeys to Northern and Western Europe; however, due to the closure of borders and other 'migration management' strategies, 177,463 people are

⁹ The Council of Europe (CoE 2019) defines *formal education* as that which takes place in educational systems, follows a syllabus and involves assessments, while *non-formal education* (NFE)—despite also being organised and intentional—mostly takes place outside of the formal system and does not result in accreditation. It may be more focused on particular activities, skills, or areas of knowledge and take place in community settings such as NGOs.

now currently trapped (Afouxenidis et al., 2017; Crawley et al., 2016; Stathopoulou, 2019; UNHCR, 2021b). As of May 2020, an estimated 45,300 of this number were under the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2020). While the majority of minors have been arriving with their families and are gender-balanced, around 12% are unaccompanied; being mostly 15 to 17-year-old boys (UNHCR, 2020d; UNICEF, 2019a).

The majority of the refugee population is on the mainland, in a somewhat better situation than those left behind in the notorious conditions of the island ‘hotspots’, but many are still in overcrowded camp conditions which the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs has previously admitted are ‘horrendous’ (MoERR, 2017, p. 14). Camps and Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) – such as those outside Thessaloniki – are often in remote locations, with little infrastructure and insufficient resources (Tsavdaroglou & Lalenis, 2020). As of May 2020, 28% of all registered refugee children (under 18) were accommodated in such camps; 24% in RICs; 31% in hotels and apartments for families; and the remainder in shelters, hotels or ‘safe zones’ for unaccompanied youth, or ‘informal arrangements’ (UNICEF, 2020).

One of the fundamental issues is that newcomers have entered a country still struggling with the aftershocks of the ‘financial crisis’ of 2008. This has caused high levels of unemployment and severe cuts to public sector funding, meaning that it was a country already experiencing economic instability, social tensions, and an increasingly prominent far-right voice (Christodoulou et al., 2016). While it has been suggested that Greece is “accustomed to refugee crises throughout its history”, which have traditionally been met with “a stance of hospitality towards the stranger” (Lazaratou et al., 2017, p. 800), the recent heightened numbers, diminished welfare provision, and enduring nature of both ‘crises’ have led to personal and community insecurity, which has lessened “the chance of integration” (Vergou, 2019, p. 3165). Therefore, despite etymologically denoting critical, decisive moments, the current ‘crises’ have instead led to an enduring state of risk and uncertainty (Kowalczyk, 2018) – what Veizis (2020, p.

264) calls a situation of “chronic emergency”. Before the COVID-19 pandemic added a further crisis, this meant that material, political, and social conditions were already deteriorating, impacting the inclusion of young refugees in Greek schools (Lazaratou et al., 2017).

5.2.2. Young refugees’ education in Crisis Greece: opportunities and challenges

In theory, young refugees beyond the Greek compulsory schooling age of 6-15 have various educational opportunities. A ‘reception class’ system (DYEP¹⁰), for example, was established by the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs to gradually introduce newcomers into public school settings (Leivaditi et al., 2020). These reception classes, offered from the primary (*δημοτικό σχολείο*) to senior high school (*λύκειο*) levels, cover a ‘core curriculum’ of language, mathematics, information technology, arts, and sports and are taught by specially appointed substitute teachers. Youth can also opt for vocational high schools and can register at any point during the academic year (Leivaditi et al., 2020; Palaiologou et al., 2019). This process is aided by Refugee Education Coordinators (RECs), i.e. seconded teachers from the public system who have been tasked with liaising between refugee families, schools, camp management, social workers, and other actors to support enrolment (OECD, 2018). Alternatively, those over 18 can join a Second Chance school for two years, taught in Greek, to obtain the equivalent of a junior high school (*γυμνάσιο*) certificate (Leivaditi et al., 2020).

Aside from these state-organised opportunities, young refugees can also attend various free NFE offers in camps and urban settings run by intergovernmental organisations such as UNICEF and by civil society, ranging from ‘catch-up’ courses and homework clubs (supporting formal schooling) to language, employability, arts, and

¹⁰ Δομές Υποδοχής και Εκπαίδευσης Προσφύγων

parenting skills training (INEE, 2020; OECD, 2018). The recent HELIOS project from the International Organization for Migration also ties housing to six months of adult education, covering language, culture, and employability and life skills (IOM, 2019). In large metropolitan areas such as Thessaloniki – where the research described below took place – the higher number of refugees, greater presence of international humanitarian actors and solidarity initiatives, and nature of local policy responses have meant that a wide range of such educational opportunities are available (Dicker, 2017; IOM, 2021; Sabchev, 2021a).

However, in practice, participation in these opportunities remains low. Only half of the 15- to 17-year-old age group in managed accommodation¹¹ across the country were enrolled in public schools by 2019, and of this number, half were said to eventually stop attending (Tzoraki, 2019; UNICEF & REACH, 2017c; ESWG, 2019). Engagement in higher education is also said to be very low (Leivaditi et al., 2020). Even in NFE, which many youth have said they prefer, participation has also been inconsistent (UNICEF & REACH, 2017c). Various reports have attributed these figures to challenges such as delays with implementing secondary-level reception classes; a lack of support with complicated enrolment procedures; a lack of capacity, coordination, and sustainability; fragmented responses; and insufficient teacher recruitment, skills, training, and working hours (Leivaditi et al., 2020; MoERR, 2018; Papapostolou et al., 2020; Tzoraki, 2019; Vergou, 2019). There have also been reports of local parents' loud objections to young refugees' enrolment, particularly in primary schools, due to unfounded fears of insecurity and health issues — mostly associated with their residence in camps (Nagy, 2018; Vergou, 2019). This has led to

¹¹ 'Managed' accommodation refers to Reception and Identification Centers (RICS), 'open sites' (i.e., camps), apartments, hotels, shelters, 'safe zones', and supported independent living (SIL) schemes managed by the state or partners such as UNHCR, as opposed to being private or 'informal' (UNICEF, 2020).

fear and mistrust among refugees and their families, which reduces the likelihood of participation (OECD, 2020).

While there is therefore some understanding of how macro-level, structural issues prevent educational access, only rarely are the impacts of state responses *beyond* the education system discussed. Few studies have drawn a line between practices such as encampment (e.g. Vergou, 2019; Vergou et al., 2021) and legal uncertainty and young refugees' education, especially at the post-compulsory (15+) level. Even less research has explored the 'non-typical' educational routes refugee youth may choose to take instead, such as in non-formal settings (Palaiologou et al., 2019), from the perspective of youth themselves. Moreover, young people's situated experiences of state practices – in specific cities and regions, with their highly varying local-level responses and socio-spatial characteristics (Sabchev, 2021a; 2021b) – could also be further explored.

This article aims to contribute towards filling this gap by adding to the literature on how refugee youth experience and navigate state-level bordering practices in the everyday. It aims to answer the questions:

- How does the institutional treatment of young refugees upon arrival in Greece impact their (re-)engagement with post-15 education?
- How and why do youth navigate (the impacts of) these practices, and what supports them in this process?

In doing so, it is hoped that the paper will enable a better understanding of young refugees' decisions to stop attending learning settings, to not enrol in the first place, or to opt for non-formal offers; as well as identifying resources and relationships that can be leveraged to support them to continue.

It is based on the belief that participating in education after the age of 15 in Greece can offer youth the benefits of more employment opportunities, better health

outcomes (for both them and their children), and ownership of a ‘safe space’ in which they can rebuild their aspirations and grow emotionally and socially; all of which contribute to more positive well-being (Ben Asher et al., 2020; Iraklis, 2021; Leivaditi et al., 2020; Rezaian et al., 2019). Beyond this, for the wider community, it can play an important role in creating the conditions in which diversity in social life is accepted (Pastoor, 2017).

5.2.3. Theoretical framework: institutional bordering

This paper is based on an understanding of *bordering* as an active process of social, cultural, political, and economic exclusion, rather than only the delineation of physical or drawn territorial boundaries (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). While bordering can be performed symbolically by everyday social actors – for example, when teachers establish an ‘us’ and ‘them’ that excludes newcomers from the ‘national community’ (Paasi, 2013) – this paper focuses primarily on the Greek state’s macro-level practices towards new arrivals. Following Dimitriadi and Sarantaki (2019), the paper refers to *institutional bordering* to conceptualise this process. However, while Dimitriadi and Sarantaki’s definition of institutionalised bordering ranges from the actions of border guards at the periphery to exclusion in the housing sector, this paper focuses solely on how bordering processes operate *within* the state after newcomers have entered the country. As such, it aims to explore how, institutionally, even after young refugees have crossed the physical border, they continue to be kept ‘outside’ of society – behind camp walls and legal and administrative borders. As Dimitriadi and Sarantaki (2019, p. 21) put it, “if borders determine one’s mobility, while in the country inclusion and exclusion are managed through administrative processes, legislation, access to employment, health care and living conditions to name a few”.

Regarding administrative processes, there is a growing literature on how everyday bordering operates via public institutions, most of which builds on the seminal

work of Yuval-Davis et al. (e.g. 2018). This literature focuses on how everyday social actors such as university and school administrators come to function as local-level border guards – through devolved border controls – in a direct relationship between education and state border governance (Jenkins, 2014; Lounasmaa, 2020). Rodriguez et al. (2020) refer to schools themselves as a ‘borderland’: a space in which the humanity of the ‘other’ may be denied but also in which, drawing on Anzaldúa (1987), processes of domination can be challenged and transgressed. In this space, they argue, school staff have the potential to escort migrant youth across everyday borders. This paper explores how these dynamics of institutional bordering and support operate in Greece, and how refugee youth have navigated them to (re-)engage with post-15 education. In doing so, it responds to calls for more research analysing the subjectivities of those ‘on’ or ‘outside’ such borders; and how young refugees in particular experience border regimes both inside and outside of schools, and the impact this has on their learning trajectories (Lafazani, 2021; Oliver & Hughes, 2018; Strasser & Tibet, 2020).

5.3. Methods

5.3.1. The project

This article draws on data from a qualitative doctoral project on young refugees’ post-15 educational decision-making in Greece. Ethnographic methods were used to obtain a deeper understanding of young people’s relationships with their social context while avoiding recreating the experience of asylum interviews (Rodgers, 2004; Tudge & Hogan, 2005). Data were generated via individual and paired semi-structured interviews with refugee and asylum-seeking youth and educational stakeholders in the city of Thessaloniki. In order to triangulate findings, enable ‘thick description’ of the situation, and improve the validity and reliability of the study (Long & Johnson, 2000),

participant observation was also carried out during the eight months of fieldwork. Having a teaching background, the author volunteered as both a teacher and educational assistant at three NFE sites several times per week, as well as observing one further programme. Ethical approval was granted by the Social Sciences and Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford.

The participants in the interviews were a 'core group' of 12 refugee and asylum-seeking youth, aged 15-25, and 38 educational stakeholders with first-hand knowledge of their experiences. This latter group included refugee parents, teachers, educational assistants, RECs, education programme coordinators, social workers, 'caretakers', and cultural mediators from both the public and non-state sectors. All were delivering, coordinating or otherwise supporting educational programmes (for example, by arranging access). All were recruited via purposive and snowball sampling. This meant that initial participants were identified and selected as those with knowledge related to the phenomenon of interest and were then asked for recommendations for further participants – thus facilitating access to the population with target characteristics (Parker et al., 2019; Patton, 2002). As this paper focuses on the young participants' perspectives, and specifically their retellings of their learning trajectories from just before and following their arrival in Greece, the remainder of this section details only the youth's backgrounds and the methods carried out with this group.

5.3.2. The young participants

The criteria for inclusion of the young participants were that they fell within the 15-25 age range, had arrived in Greece during or since the peak of the 'refugee crisis' in 2015, and were attending at least one educational activity per week. The 15-25 age parameter was intended to align with that of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other educational initiatives in Greece offering non-formal activities which target youth. However, it should be noted that 'youth' can refer to as broad an age range as

15-35 in Greek policies and literature (Perovic, 2017). The arrival requirement meant that the study could investigate experiences of laws and policies implemented as a response to the refugee crisis, as well as the impact of the 'crisis' discourse among the public and media. The attendance requirement was set as the study sought to better understand young refugees' experiences of and supports for participating in educational activities.

The 12 young participants who agreed to take part in the interviews identified as Kurdish (4), Iranian (3), Iraqi (2), Syrian (2), and Congolese (Kinshasa) (1). The majority were young men (9 young men, 3 young women), reflecting the fact that the majority of learners attending lessons in the observation sites were indeed young men. All of the young participants had either applied for or received refugee status. They were either living in apartments in Thessaloniki (provided via an accommodation scheme) or in camps one to two hours outside of the city by bus. The majority (9) had travelled with at least one family member or had joined family in Greece, while the remainder (3) were alone. To protect their identities, pseudonyms are used throughout this article.

5.3.3. Data generation and analysis

While in Greece, two in-person pair interviews were conducted with youth aged 15-18. Following the outbreak of COVID-19 and associated restrictions, the remainder of the data generation took place online and involved individual interviews with the remaining eight young participants (all aged over 18). These were carried out using platforms such as Viber, Skype, and WhatsApp, depending on participants' access and preference. The same semi-structured schedule was used for both the in-person and online interviews to minimise the effects of the change in approach on the results. The 12 youth participated in one individual or pair interview each. Despite being reminded that the interviews could be carried out in a language of their choice, with an interpreter

of their choosing present, all decided to proceed in English. However, pictorial information sheets and consent forms were provided in various languages. The interview schedule was centred around educational aspirations, preferences, challenges and supports. The interviews ranged in length from 25 minutes to over one hour, with an average time of 40 minutes. In total, just under eight hours of audio were recorded with the young participants.

The data from the wider study were analysed according to the principles of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). In line with these principles, interview transcripts and field notes were immediately entered into NVivo and coded by the author using an open coding technique (based on participants' own words). Following this, a process of axial coding explored the relationship between the initial codes to create categories which were then organised into themes. New codes were compared with the existing ones, to refine the characteristics of each category, in a process of 'constant comparison'. Data were generated and analysed iteratively until theoretical saturation was reached. This paper focuses on the key institutional factors shaping the young participants' (re-)engagement with education upon arrival in Greece, as identified in their responses. The themes identified, which are detailed below, are *spatial bordering*, *temporal bordering*, *administrative bordering*, *bordered aspirations*, and *navigating borders*.

5.4. Results

For youth in the study, the treatment they received upon arrival in Greece had a substantially disruptive and diverting effect on their (re-)engagement with post-15 education. The key factors shaping this process are conceptualised here as the institutional bordering of space, time and public services, with a mediating role played by 'gatekeepers' and other everyday social actors. These bordering practices and

actors, and their impacts on young refugees' aspirations and consequent learning practices are detailed below.

5.4.1. Spatial bordering: encampment and accommodation instability

The lack of legal routes for asylum seekers to safe countries in Europe meant that youth in the study had had to leave their home countries via irregular means, arriving in Greece either via the land border with Turkey in the north-eastern region of Evros, or via the stretch of sea from the Turkish coast to the Aegean islands. After doing so, they faced the Greek state's practice of encampment of newcomers, which, in some of their cases, had lasted for several years. Depending on when and via which border they had arrived, the youth were held in camps on the Aegean islands (and later transferred to the mainland); in isolated locations in the north west; near the Idomeni crossing to North Macedonia in the north; or in one of the camps outside Thessaloniki. Some of these sites have since either been closed down due to safety concerns (Owens, 2017), or, in the case of Moria camp on the island of Lesvos, burnt down (BBC News, 2020). Those around Thessaloniki have been described as not meeting international standards and being "located at significant distances from urban centres, within industrial zones where residential use is not permitted" (Tsavdaroglou & Lalenis, 2020, p. 163). For youth in the study, being placed in such camps – and the social and material conditions of the specific sites – played a large part in shaping their (re-)engagement with education after arrival.

Firstly, the camps were described as overcrowded, noisy, and tense spaces. This is how Jilwan, a 25-year-old from Kurdistan, recalled the conditions in a camp he had been in on arrival, in which he lived in a tent with the other eight members of his family. He grimaced and said that "life in camps terrible. Many times have fighting... Maybe because it's more louder". Youth said that they could also be moved at short notice, causing them to experience greater instability and uncertainty and adding to this

tension. Before being moved to camps and apartments in Thessaloniki, Jilwan said that he and his family had already spent a year in a camp in Alexandria; Reza, a 16-year-old from Iran, had been in an isolated camp near an unwelcoming village; and Karvan, a 19-year-old from Iran, had spent time on Samos and near Idomeni. Most had stayed in more than one city or village in their short time in the country, meaning that they did not know whether they should try to enrol in local schools or NFE programmes or to bide their time until being given more stable accommodation or, indeed, being resettled in another country. This uncertainty left them unwilling to invest time and energy into starting programmes if they were to be moved after only a few short weeks or months.

The poor social and material conditions meant that even when learning opportunities were available in and around the camps, many of the young people's minds were elsewhere. Karvan expressed how he had found it difficult to engage in learning in his early days in the camp, saying, "the only thing you're thinking is just to leave from that island... just to go. So I don't think you can focus on the Greek, or learning". Hamid, from Kurdistan, agreed, noting that his family's move into an apartment in Thessaloniki was a definitive turning point in his trajectory. He groaned and said, "you know, camp – it sucks. A lot of people, and all are refugees... I didn't do nothing, first six months. But then they give us a home – *spiti* [home], ha – and then I start ... school, a lot of organisation... I forget some!"

The other aspect of life in the camp is that in a situation in which newcomers have little access to information (in a language they understand), they follow the lead of others around them, with both positive and negative consequences for their education. Hasan, a 25-year-old from Kurdistan, said of his co-residents in his first camp:

Generally, they follow each other... Because the community, someone is from 2017 is here. He said, 'no, is Greece very bad, and Greece very not good educated', and he don't know it's truth – he have to follow this. So he said again this words, and this word will spread: 'not good education, not good', like that.

‘No have classes, no one helping you’, that stuff. And then – he will listen like that. He know it like that. But after that he said, ‘oh my god’ – like from my side, I’m saying, ‘oh my god’... I spend some time is for the sleeping! I am very regretful this time.

Beyond the fact that his co-residents were dissuading him from learning, he recalled how “everyone say, ‘oh, Greece is very hard life, you cannot stay there’ – and who is trying to find good money kind of left”. He had listened, in the beginning, and decided not to spend his energy seeking out unbeneficial learning opportunities, especially if he was going to leave the country. Marwa, a 25-year-old from Syria, admitted to being one of those people in the camp who had influenced others, saying that she had told people not to bother learning Greek and to focus on English instead. However, she regretted this deeply, after realising that many people would not be able to leave:

I used to work with women protection. But usually I was like, ‘no no, learn English, English is more international’. And now I am like, oh my god, you are staying in Greece, how did I say this? Ha. They need their country language! Why did I said them English and not learn Greek!

On the other hand, others in the camp could also be an important source of information on the learning opportunities available, particularly in the non-formal sector. Hasan slowly made friends with other young people who had arrived previously and who then encouraged him to join the youth programmes being offered: “they told me that a organisation [did] theatre, music, arts... and we try to meet with someone there, and we doing that project”.

However, on the whole, the young participants reported that opportunities—especially for language education – were severely lacking in and around the camps. Hasan described his disappointment at the limited offering from NGOs, who struggle to sustain long-term funding and volunteers. As he put it, “they have education, like

small... Greek language, and English, but there is not enough – because three times per week and half hour". As a result, he felt that "school – you know, inside the camp – it's very, very not good enough for the learning languages". One of the issues was the young people's age on arrival and the lack of offers for adults. As Jilwan explained, there were language classes "only for people under 18, and for over... it was only one time on week – for Greek one hours, and for English one hours".

5.4.2. Temporal bordering: legal limbo and uncertain futures

Another aspect of life in Greece was that it became, unexpectedly, just that: a life in Greece. Many of the youth said that they and their families had initially aimed to travel on to Northern and Western Europe, either to reunite with relatives or due to a belief that they would have more (and higher quality) work and educational opportunities. However, due to the time taken to process their asylum claims, they had become caught behind legal (and consequently, physical) borders. As Hasan recounted:

When we are come in Greece... we don't, like, to make a plan for living here forever. Everyone's said okay, maybe the European Union, they will decide to take it immigration from Greece, to other European country... Then, day by day, our time is free time... Now it's two year passed and I'm still in Greece!

Three key, international 'migration management' strategies have led to refugees becoming stranded in legal limbo in Greece: the EU's approval of the Dublin III Regulation in 2013; the closure of the 'Balkan route' in 2015; and the turning point of the implementation of the so-called 'EU-Turkey deal' shortly afterwards. Firstly, the Dublin Regulation (EU law No 604/2013) determines that the first Member State that third-country nationals or stateless persons enter in Europe is responsible for processing their application for international protection. This means that refugees must remain in the country until their application has been either approved or denied (unless

they decide to leave via irregular means), and in the case of Greece, this may take years, due to a lack of capacity to deal with the overwhelming number of applications it receives (Póczik & Sárik, 2018). Secondly, Northern Macedonia and other states to the north closed their borders from November 2015 (Deardorff Miller, 2017), sealing off the 'Balkan route' and putting an end to Greece's facilitated transit strategy. This left refugees with few legal routes out of the country (Tramontanis, 2021). Thirdly, in 2016, the European Commission made a controversial agreement with Turkey to stem the flow of irregular migration to the European Union. The deal essentially contained migrants on the Aegean Islands and drastically reduced movements (Baster & Merminod, 2019). Now, in order to remain in Greece, many refugees have applied for asylum in the country, but due to the additional pressure on an already flawed system – due, for the large part, to the economic crisis of 2008 – the process is taking several years to complete (Tramontanis, 2021). In addition, gaining refugee status (and its associated protections) is not guaranteed; particularly for youth in the study such as Serkar, who travelled from Kurdistan.

Like Hasan, Serkar had also struggled with how to progress with his education while distracted with being in legal limbo; a state that continued to the time of the study. When he had asked for information from NGO-provided legal services, he was constantly told "next month, maybe next week". He said that due to this, he was still waiting before considering his formal education path in Greece, because "if I can't do it my interview, I can't do anything ... we need ID".

This legal uncertainty – and, consequently, protracted displacement and enforced waiting – had had various impacts on the young people's visions of their futures. They had come to Europe with a range of aspirations, whether educational or employment-focused, in Greece or abroad. However, with ongoing uncertainty surrounding their legal status, some youth realised that they might be in Greece for some time, facing a number of difficulties. Especially when they were towards the

upper end of the age bracket, they felt they needed to build their language skills – in Greek, English, or both – to help them navigate their new environment, by finding work, information, and a social network. This was evident in Marwa's self-described stress at not being able to communicate with staff and volunteers in the camp, which became her initial motivation to learn English:

It was not easy in the beginning. I mean, when I arrived I didn't speak any English, I was kind of stress, not being able to communicate with no one. And if someone is going to tell me anything, I'm kind of person, I'm very anxious about things – I keep in my mind what they told me, and if the interpreter has told me in correct manner... This was the first step that I decided I need to learn the language.

Hasan, too, said, "just being, okay, we are still here, we can learn it English" – but more because "it would be more benefit, if I left this country", rather than for the present.

However, he and most of the others also aimed to continue their disrupted formal educational pathways alongside, or following, these linguistic efforts. When asked why it had been important for them to continue learning, the young people's responses signalled a deep valuing of education for creating or stabilising their futures. Hamid, for example, and Hala, a 15-year-old from Syria, described educational activities – whether formal, non-formal, or informal – as a way to "make my life" and "do my future", respectively. Karvan had the same attitude, saying, "you should put some things first, and some things second, and some things in a third side of your life. So I think, I believe that education is the first one – because with education, you can achieve whatever you want".

Marwa had the same attitude to education, but saw it as being more preventative of bad outcomes than promotive of the good. She reflected: "education, it really makes sense... because I know I will find job later on, because I have experience. But for a person who's not doing nothing... he's going always be under risk

of being homeless, you know. This sort of things". Jilwan, too, sought various skills to cover various bases, "because we don't know how it's going in the future. We don't know after two days how it's going in the world... maybe it will help me one day, we don't know". Besides this 'future-proofing', youth also wanted to engage in learning to avoid 'wasting' time and to spend this period of waiting for asylum decisions 'improving' themselves. Hasan, for example, was determined to "find the good thing for these migrations" and "be benefit from this time – not just spend the time for free ... just sleeping".

However, while stranded and forced to wait, other changes came into play that diverted their educational plans. Particularly after being moved into more stable apartment accommodation, some youth and their families had warmed to the country and, after a few months, decided to stay. Karvan, for example, said that

In the beginning – this is the truth – I didn't want to stay in Greece. No one didn't want to stay in Greece. But after some months, let's say, or after year, I say Greece is a country that I want to live... I really like the culture that they have here. The character that they have here, it's near to my character.

Hamid said that his family, too, had changed their minds: "in the beginning we decided to go 'up' – in first weeks, or month. But change, everything. We didn't know that Greek people will be, like, a very kind people". This commitment had motivated Hamid and Karvan to learn the Greek language and attempt to gain access to public high schools – with mixed success.

5.4.3. Administrative bordering: accessing formal education via gatekeepers

I was very good student in my country. It was my last year in high school, but we came here.
(Hamid)

It is important to emphasise, at this juncture, that the young refugees in the study did not arrive in Greece as a *tabula rasa*; rather, they had diverse learning histories that were disrupted as a result of their flight. Hala, for example, explained that she was supposed to have only one year of high school remaining before she could continue to university, but “when I come here I lose one year. For that, I have two years more”. Sayed also found himself at the same stage as he had been some time ago: “about four years ago, at same level that I am now – in 11th grade of high school – I had to escape Iran... I studied psychology, and literature, philology... then we had to leave our country”. This meant that if they wished to continue along a formal educational route, they had no choice but to enter the system at either the same or a lower level than they had already completed.

For some, this disruption came at a critical moment. Hasan, for example, explained that “when I was in Iraq, I took my high school exams. For graduate. But I don’t get result, because I left the country”. This timing meant that Hasan did not have proof of his prior learning and could only apply for the first year of senior high school in Greece, rather than university. Sayed explained these rules regarding documentation:

If you studied in your country, the 10th grade of high school, you will be able to get in the high school... So if a newcomer come here... if he has his previous documents, which is related with his previous education in his country, then he will be able to carry on his studying.

He found this requirement to produce a diploma particularly frustrating, as

One of the other problem that the refugee has, is the word of ‘refugee’. ‘Refugee’ is absolutely different than ‘migrant’. The refugee is not able to have connection from his country back. That’s unreasonable to ask from a refugee for provide his document. It doesn’t make sense for most of us. So that’s different. If a person is migrant ... he can provide the document. For the refugees, it’s different.

Marwa had been more fortunate in this regard: “I had my diploma from Syrian high school... and I had another diploma from Iraq. So for me, it was okay. I had like two diplomas – I just had to translate one of those”. This meant that she had been able to apply for a university scholarship directly and bypass the need to repeat high school. While a European Qualifications Passport for Refugees has been piloted in Greece, which is based on an assessment of refugees’ prior education, work experience, and language proficiency via “available documentation and a structured interview” (CoE, 2021), the programme’s development has been slow, meaning that it had not been an option for any of the youth in the study.

Even when the youth could produce some evidence of their prior learning, however, language was still a barrier to accessing education at the same level they had reached in their home country. As Hasan explained:

We study our country, our language, and we left the country and we came here. What we learned, what’s going here, is totally different. Like I’m 12 years I’m study, and just going to pass the exam to go to university – I came here, they said ‘no... you have to first the language, and then you’re going to apply for the high school, and then you’re going to university’.

As Hasan mentioned, language was a key issue. Despite arriving with a wide range of first, second, third, and more languages, youth in the study had no Greek proficiency; and especially around 2015, there were no country-wide integration programmes in public schools at the senior high school level to support non-Greek speakers. Part of the reason is that post-15 education is not compulsory for either Greek citizens or newcomers. Therefore, while afternoon shift reception classes were established in primary and lower-secondary schools in Zones of Educational Priority by the 2016-2017 academic year, this was not extended to the upper-secondary level until 2018 (MoERR, 2018). At the time of the study, reception classes were still not running in all of the senior high schools around Thessaloniki, as they required a sufficiently large

number of newcomers to justify employing a substitute teacher to deliver the programme.

Most of the youth lamented that the key thing they had needed was this form of language support for accessing school and work, but that this had not been provided. According to Sayed, there is still not “any proper system to integrate a newcomer who doesn’t speak Greek or English. So there is no system how to do integration a new student, in the school, or in the civilisation”.

For those who had wanted to enrol in school but had limited Greek or English skills, the only options were to attend non-formal language lessons or to pay for private tuition. Marwa complained that the lack of accessible and free tuition, especially after the age of 18, was holding refugees back:

I have my family in Germany. My siblings are going to proper language school... Here, I understand, because the economy is very weak, and Greece are not able to open language school for refugees. So people are stuck, you know, with the language. You have two option, you either go to the Greek university and you pay 2,000 euro for the language school. This is what happened to me. And I was like, no, not because I’m not willing to pay, because I don’t have this amount to pay. So the people... they just wait, you know, to learn slowly, very slowly.

One option was to travel to NGO offices and community centres in the nearest city to their camps, if they were close to one at all, meaning a considerable investment of both time and money. Zainab and Hussein, aged 17 and 19, respectively, and both from Iraq, said their parents had stopped them from taking the journey to Thessaloniki to attend lessons at one popular NGO for precisely this reason. However, even if youth had the time, money, motivation, and permission to take the journey, the lessons in the city were often over-subscribed and subject to long waiting lists. Hasan recalled that from the point of registering for language lessons at one centre, it had taken four months for them to call and offer him a place on a Greek course. He said in disbelief,

"after four months, they told me, 'okay, you can start now from the Greek classes'. Ha ha... I start already! I learned by myself already!"

One extra factor among this group that complicated matters was, again, their age. For those who had wanted to enrol in senior high school – which, on paper, is for 15 to 18-year-olds – being overage could be a barrier. Sayed explained that for

Single people, older than 18, there are difficult process to get in the high schools... If you are older than 18, you should have either your previous school from your country, or be able, very good level of Greek, to get in the high school situation.

Reaching 18, according to Sayed, could be a cut-off point in terms of access to upper-secondary education. He explained that "you have to arrive here before age of 18, and then you can carry on"; to arrive at 16 or 17 and start from junior high school (for ages 12-15). For him, he said, "this is the way that I got inside the high school". For those who had arrived before the age of 15, participation was more strongly supported, due to the fact that schooling is mandatory from the age of 6-15. There are more lessons and support systems in place for this age group, which meant that "most of the teenagers, most of the minors are at school" (Sayed).

The young people in the study did not seem to be clear about the specific rules surrounding age, however. As Jilwan summarised it, "the systems in Greece, I don't know how is. They don't tell us". Karvan believed it was possible to enter high school even if you are over 18, saying, "there's no problem... If you know English, you can start from *lykeio*, and you should have studied before". There was evidently some flexibility surrounding the age requirement, but this had not been clarified in law and policy, meaning that often, the young participants' acceptance in upper-secondary education had been dependent upon the willingness of the school director to enrol them. Sayed confirmed this explicitly, saying that their access to schools

depends the person. I mean sometimes, some responsible are very personal, they don't help you... They have to clarify this one [the access procedures], because the system is very complicated... Management – they do whatever they like, there are judge just like... the colour of your skin, and language. So this situation is very bad... In this country, which is the 'mother of democracy' as they say, it depend to many things.

This aligns with previous research, which found that some schools in Greece have invented 'hindrances' to try to discourage refugees' enrolment (Vergou, 2019).

Other directors diverted youth in the study away from general high schools, despite them having completed the same level of studies in their home country (albeit with a distinctly different curriculum). Several of the youth over the age of 18 reported being encouraged to apply for the evening 'shift' of technical senior high schools instead, with many other refugees, rather than the morning shift of general high schools – which offer an academic route towards university. This had happened to Hasan:

When I came to Greece, and I'm try to can apply for somewhere – like the college or high school in Greece – because of age they don't accept me. And they told me, you have a chance to go into, I don't know, it's like high school but it's for different things – engineering, with mechanic, any. And I applied for there, and accepted.

Similar reports from Germany have suggested that refugee pupils as young as 10 may be directed towards what are perceived as "less demanding tracks", which are often vocational routes (UNESCO, 2019, p. xviii).

According to Sayed, however, in the high school he had recently joined, "fortunately, they have a good manager who is really good, has really good connection with us". Hala, too, had been fortunate with the school in which she had first enrolled. Her mother had gone straight to the school director – taking their social worker along to translate – and had requested that they accept Hala, even without a reception programme in place. Fortunately, the director had agreed and had permitted Hala to

begin attending even before the registration process was complete. As such, high school directors functioned as 'gatekeepers' of public services for youth in the study, either escorting them across administrative borders or limiting their ability to pursue the academic routes they had previously imagined for themselves.

5.4.4. Bordered aspirations: diverted paths and downgraded dreams

As a result of the disruption and uncertainty caused by these bordering practices – and with a lack of confidence in their language abilities – most of the youth had lowered their aspirations in response to their perception of their opportunities in the new country. Sayed, for example, mentioned having "too many friends who wants to study in Greek university system, but there are many, many obstacle in front of them". This fact meant that he, and others in the study, had shifted their ambitions onto only finishing high school, rather than the higher degrees they had been aiming for in their home countries. One such case was Hamid, who described how he had been planning to study engineering at university, but in Greece, "I can't". When asked if he would like to go to university to study another subject, he responded, "I don't think I will. Just if I finish high school. I don't know, ha... not never".

Most of the youth had two responses to the question of aspirations: the ideal and the more practical. The latter was shaped by the necessity of securing an income, and especially for those over 18 and without the support of a family. Sayed exemplified how many youth had had to adjust their ambitions to follow a more 'practical' route. While he had enjoyed his studies in literature and philology in Iran, his priority in Greece was to gain vocational skills. When asked if his goal was to find work, he responded:

That's the point. Because what you going to become? What you are going to get money from?... It's difficult to study what you like but not getting money from it – when you are in Greece, and you are a brown skin. Ha.

Similarly, Reza mentioned that “you have to be two ways, and two plans” – and especially when you set yourself an ambitious first target.

5.4.5. Navigating borders: (re-)engaging with post-15 education

Amid these various institutional and social influences, all of the youth in the study had decided to get themselves back into learning. As they did so, despite having support from family and friends, they found that a lot of the responsibility for overcoming the borders surrounding education rested on their shoulders. As Sayed put it, “they don’t know how to integrate us, so they put all the pressure on the student, and tell them ‘you have to deal with the situation’”. Hasan echoed Sayed’s sentiment that the pressure was on him to find his own way, including with finding learning opportunities in the first place. He said that in the end, after struggling to find information and support, “I tried to improve myself by my own... to enjoy, what I can find it, and participate on it”. He said that one day he had made a resolution: “let’s go out from the camp. Go to this town, in Thessaloniki. What they have inside? Like, maybe find a opportunity. And I try to go into some NGO organisation... I register my name for the English classes, and Greek classes”.

Karvan, for his part, was steadfast in his belief that a lack of access to structured education does not mean you cannot learn, saying, “if you want, you can learn. *All* the time”. While searching and waiting for formal and non-formal opportunities, he and most of the other youth had made do with what was at hand. As mentioned above, they believed that language skills would provide a foundation for everything else to follow, whether it was enrolling in Greek high school, accessing information and services from the state or NGOs, or finding work. With a lack of in-person educational offers and unstable mobile internet connections to learn online, youth had drawn from a key physical resource available to them: international

humanitarian staff and volunteers. They had picked up language skills either through volunteering themselves and actively trying to build their proficiency or more passively through friendships and everyday encounters.

Marwa was one such case. She explained that after she had decided she needed to learn English, “it was kind of very fast for me. I learned it, like, two months. Not very good English but okay, I could communicate, I could write little bit”. Her learning mainly came through volunteering and speaking with staff in her camp; a difficult process that she pushed herself through for the sake of gaining valuable skills:

I volunteer with... this NGO... and I was keeping asking people ‘what is this? What is this?’ I was trying to talk with someone, with some English speakers, this what I was trying to do. And for sure it was not professional English... When I start talking English, I was looking super funny. Because I was telling very stupid stuff, very wrongly, you know? Like, in a different meaning sometime!

Hasan also spoke of drawing from this key social resource, saying, “I don’t spend my time by playing the game too much... First for the language, from the organisation who they working there – I try to spend my time with them. Even I find a half hour with a teacher”.

Karvan, too, had drawn from friendships with Greek students and teachers he had met to develop his language skills. He recalled how he had learnt the alphabet

in 40 minutes on the bus... I told my friend, you know, she was Greek. And I told her, ‘could you help me with that?’ She said ‘of course, let’s see’... When we get out of the bus – I read all the places that it was written by Greek. I didn’t know what they mean, but I just read it, and I asked my friend, ‘what does this mean? What does that mean?’ And you know, I learned like that... this was my start.

In this way, youth took their first steps with Greek, and developed the varying levels of English they already had. Hamid, for example, proudly explained that “when I came to Greece, I start even English from zero. I didn’t know”. Despite a lack of

support and bordered access to opportunities, two years later, he smiled and noted his ability to converse “with someone who’s from UK, America”. The youth in the study had persisted in this manner, and at the time of the study, Marwa had sufficient skills to pursue a degree taught in English at a private university in Thessaloniki; Hasan had secured a paid role as a translator; and Karvan had passed the notorious Panhellenic exams at the end of general senior high school. All of the others were engaged in high school, NFE and/or other work or voluntary activities, with most still engaging in more than one form of learning concurrently.

5.5. Discussion

The findings from this study suggest that upon arrival in Greece, young refugees are subject to multiple forms of institutional bordering that make it challenging to (re-)engage with an educational trajectory – especially in public high schools. Through the practice of bordering space – predominantly via encampment – youth were placed at long distances from opportunities, faced tense and cramped environments in locations that were often unfit for human life, and were moved at short notice, causing feelings of instability. These factors left them unable and unwilling to engage in learning, even when offers were available. At the same time, social and material influences around the camps left them uncertain about their futures and unable to make firm plans in the country. The effects of this spatial bordering were exacerbated by the prolonged uncertainty surrounding their legal status. As Dimitriadi and Sarantaki (2019, p. 1) put it, since 2015, Greece has become “a place of strandedness, limbo, and immobility”. This relationship between time and immobility, as also experienced by youth in the study, supports Leutloff-Grandits' (2019, p. 2) claim that “borders are created through... not only spatial and social but also temporal dimensions”. If and when youth sought out formal educational opportunities, they then faced administrative borders; specifically, in

the requirement to produce documents proving their prior learning, and in unclear policies surrounding the age limit for enrolment. Their ability to bypass these restrictions was heavily dependent on the support of willing 'gatekeepers', such as school directors and administrators.

Overall, the institutional bordering of space, time, and services led to the youth's motivation and academic or other dreams being downgraded or diverted, as they were denied access or left without information or social and material support. However, rather than resigning themselves to a state of 'frozen transience' (Nagy, 2018), they actively navigated and negotiated these conditions. As Fiddian-Qasmiyah (2020, p. 3) reminds us, "people who have been displaced do not merely 'experience' displacement, but also actively respond". The youth drew from any available resource (whether human or technological) to keep learning, as a means of simultaneously 'future-proofing' and navigating their new, everyday lives in Greece. However, due to shifting social, legal, and accommodation conditions, the educational trajectories they began to construct for themselves were far from linear. Most engaged in parallel trajectories – learning languages and/or vocational skills alongside high school – and some strategically decided to jump from one path to another, when more beneficial opportunities arose.

These findings raise a number of considerations for future research, policy, and practice. In terms of research, more investigation is needed into the educational impacts of the Greek state's responses to irregularly arriving youth. This means exploring more deeply the multiple, intersecting forms of exclusion and neglect that impact their life trajectories, along with more overt instances of hostility and abuse, and especially as they are established, maintained, and navigated in everyday educational life (Lems, 2020). The study demonstrates the importance of a bottom-up approach to studying these issues, which centres refugees' everyday experiences and perspectives.

In terms of policy and practice, the findings suggest that school-level administrators have a key role to play in inviting refugee youth across the threshold of society: acting as 'gatekeepers' who manage who is or is not permitted a presence within it. With a clearer policy framework – particularly surrounding age – refugee youth's access to education will not be so dependent on such social factors. Outside of schools, the availability of NFE – as a welcoming 'in-between' offer – needs to be increased and protected from ongoing financial and political threats.

5.6. Conclusions

This article has explored the question of how institutional responses to young refugees' arrival in Greece impacts their (re-)engagement with post-15 learning. Drawing on data from an ethnographic doctoral study, it found that their trajectories were strongly influenced by practices of encampment, delays with asylum decisions, and administrative barriers to accessing formal education. Borrowing from the geographical literature, and particularly from border studies, this was framed as the 'institutional bordering' of time, space, and public services. These practices were found to reiterate borders in the everyday and to prevent youth from (re)constructing the educational trajectories they had begun or imagined for themselves in their home countries. Alongside these practices, the findings revealed the important role of other social actors whom young refugees encounter – particularly in camps – who either encouraged or discouraged youth from pursuing education during their prolonged period of uncertainty.

To conclude, for youth in the study, (re)constructing their learning trajectories had taken extraordinary personal motivation and strongly supportive social influences to overcome bordered space, time, and access. A large part of their ability to continue learning – which they primarily valued for finding work, contacts and further study

opportunities – seemed left to chance. It was dependent on meeting willing 'gatekeepers' or other refugees with beneficial information, or being in the right place at the right time to learn of funding and other opportunities. There was an understanding that it was their own responsibility to bring about their success – whether they felt this was correct or not – due to limited support measures put in place by the Greek state. While this highlights their impressive ability to navigate institutional bordering practices, the fact remains that poor arrival conditions at the margins of Europe, which were becoming increasingly poor at the time of writing, can severely disrupt the lives youth envision for themselves when fleeing conflict and poverty.

6. PAPER 2: 'ALLIES, ACCESS AND (COLLECTIVE) ACTION: YOUNG REFUGEE WOMEN'S NAVIGATION OF GENDERED EDUCATIONAL CONSTRAINTS IN GREECE'

Below is the second paper of the thesis, which explores the gendered dynamics of displacement-related precarity – and particularly how it shapes young refugee women's (re-)engagement with post-15 education. An abridged version was published in the *Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies* (DOI: 10.21825/digest.v8i2.17557), and is included in Appendix K.

6.1. Abstract

Contrary to popular media tropes of the 'young, lone, male refugee' arriving at Europe's borders, Greece has in fact seen a steady flow of young refugee women arriving since 2015. While many wish to engage in post-compulsory education, in order to gain valuable skills and enjoy new freedoms, various factors make it difficult to do so. Based on eight months of ethnographic fieldwork – involving interviews and focus group discussions with refugee youth (aged 15-25) and other stakeholders – this paper details young refugee women's expressions of collective and relational agency as they navigate educational constraints. These constraints primarily stem from tensions in micro-level relationships with family, peers and teachers which result from, or are exacerbated by, their conditions of 'unsettlement'. Young refugee women's navigational tactics involved finding and shaping alternative learning opportunities and educating peers, while support came from local-level advocates and the leveraging of their collective strength. The paper concludes with implications and recommendations for gender-sensitive educational initiatives.

6.2. Introduction

More than one million refugees¹² have entered Greece since 2015; the majority of whom, in the early days of the ‘crisis’, passed through on their way to Northern and Western Europe (Afouzenidis et al., 2017; UNHCR, 2020a). However, with border closures and other controversial ‘migration management’ strategies implemented from the end of 2015 – as well as severe delays in processing asylum applications – 168,737 have become trapped in the country (AIDA, 2020; Stathopoulou, 2019; UNHCR, 2021a). Therefore, while often referred to as a ‘transit’ country (Tsitselikis & Agelopoulos, 2019), it may be better described as a country of ‘unsettlement’: given that refugees are now staying for years with unsettled asylum cases, limited inclusion policies and an overriding lack of planning and stability. One third of those experiencing this ‘unsettlement’ are under 18, and one third are women; many of whom are single, pregnant and/or taking care of the elderly (AIDA, 2021; Fernandes, 2019; UNHCR et al., 2016; WRC, 2016).

On paper, young refugee women have access to various post-compulsory (15+) educational opportunities. They are legally entitled to enrol in senior high school (λύκειο) on the same basis as Greek youth; including in evening ‘shifts’ when they are beyond the standard age of 15-18 (AIDA, 2020; UNHCR, 2020b). While many youth aged 15-25 enrol in high schools – as well as non-formal¹³ offers such as language, employability, parenting and arts courses – drop-out rates are high, and attendance is inconsistent (ESWG, 2019; Theirworld, 2020a; Tzoraki, 2019). In a 2017 report on refugee children’s educational integration, the Ministry of Education, Research and

¹² In this article, for brevity, the term ‘refugee’ refers to both those who have been granted protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention and those who have applied for it.

¹³ The Council of Europe (2019) defines formal education as that which takes place in educational systems, follows a syllabus and involves assessments; while non-formal education (NFE) – despite also being organised and intentional – mostly takes place outside of the formal system and does not result in accreditation. It may be more focused on particular activities, skills or areas of knowledge and take place in community settings such as NGOs.

Religious Affairs noted that girls' participation was a 'special issue' due to vague 'cultural obstacles'. However, little research has explored these gendered barriers, and especially beyond the age of 15; with even less attention paid to how young refugee women navigate constraints themselves, through practising both their individual and collective agency. This paper aims to fill this gap.

In terms of structure, firstly the background, literature and concepts framing the paper are presented. Following this, the methodology of the wider doctoral project is detailed, before the key factors identified as constraining young women's educational participation are identified. The paper then discusses examples of how those who wish to participate navigate these constraints. It concludes with recommendations for gender-sensitive initiatives which can support young refugee women to continue their education. Overall, it responds to calls for greater, more contextualised understandings of refugee women's needs when developing 'durable solutions' (Diamond, 2019; Hatoss & Huijser, 2010). Such solutions are direly needed to help refugee women enjoy the benefits of post-compulsory learning¹⁴: such as more employment opportunities, better health outcomes, new support networks, 'safe spaces' to rebuild aspirations and a means of renegotiating hierarchies, increasing mobility and claiming ownership of otherwise male-dominated space (El Jack, 2010; Iraklis, 2021; Rezaian et al., 2019; UNHCR, 2016b; 2020c).

6.3. Situating the research: context and literature

As mentioned above, there are approximately 56,000 registered refugee women in Greece; who, in recent years, have mostly travelled from Afghanistan, Syria and Pakistan (AIDA, 2021; UNHCR, 2021a). The majority of the literature on their

¹⁴ The term 'learning' throughout this article refers to the development of knowledge and skills in either formal contexts, such as schools, or non-formal contexts, such as free educational provision in community centres.

experiences discusses their vulnerabilities both during their journeys and in camps after their arrival: such as exposure to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and a lack of access to healthcare and psychosocial support (Freedman, 2016; HRW, 2019; IWI, 2021; Papadimos et al., 2021). After being relocated from camps, they may face homelessness, harmful living conditions and discrimination, including in the asylum and family reunification process (Bastaki, 2019; IWI, 2021; Tastsoglou et al., 2021). Such findings have led to calls for more initiatives which support refugee women and girls' security – such as those which promote "skill acquisition, and methods to assess and mitigate economic vulnerability" (Papadimos et al., 2021, p. 115). As Papadimos et al. suggest, supporting them to build skills – via education – is one means of enabling empowerment. However, as mentioned in the introduction to this article, young refugee women over the age of 15 are the least likely to attend educational activities in Greece. While some recent research has begun to explore the experiences behind these statistics (e.g. Rezaian et al., 2019), there has been little focused inquiry into gendered barriers among youth.

Literature from around the world suggests that young refugee women are less likely than men to participate in (post-)secondary education for myriad reasons: including early and forced marriage, pregnancy, care and domestic work, the increased risk of trafficking and SGBV and 'cultural barriers' such as stigma, 'othering' and families' views on girls' education (Akua-Sakyiwah, 2016; Bajwa et al., 2018; Hatoss & Huijser, 2010; Rana et al., 2011; Ruzibiza, 2021; Wagner et al., 2018; Watkins et al., 2012). This paper aims to contribute towards filling two distinct gaps in this scholarship. Firstly, it addresses the European context and the contextualised impacts of protracted displacement amid the ongoing 'refugee crisis', while the majority of the available literature tends to focus on women in low- and middle-income contexts in the Global South (followed by North America and Australia). Secondly, the paper contributes much-needed evidence of how and why young refugee women either resist education

or navigate constraints themselves, in examples of their gendered (educational) agency.

These expressions of agency are conceptualised here as forms of 'social navigation' (Vigh, 2009; 2010): an analytical lens which illuminates how migrants constantly re-adapt their praxis to 'get by' in contexts of ever-shifting insecurity. In line with this framing, it is understood here that young refugee women's 'tactics' are shaped by emerging opportunities, barriers and constant (re-)evaluations of the social-political 'seascape'. In addition, however, this paper views family and other everyday social relations as fundamental influences on these tactics; and as such, it follows Daniel et al. (2020) in highlighting that social navigation can be both a highly relational and potentially collective feat. The paper also, therefore, aims to build on conversations around (conceptualising) refugee women's agency (Asaf, 2017; Greene, 2020), and their educational agency in particular (Dahya et al., 2019; Ibesh et al., 2021; Rezaian et al., 2019).

6.4. Methodology

The data on which this paper is based was generated between October 2019 and June 2020 during ethnographic fieldwork with refugees in Thessaloniki, Northern Greece. This involved participant observation as a volunteer English teacher (including at a women's centre), and individual and pair semi-structured interviews with 38 educational 'stakeholders' (such as parents, educators, coordinators and assistants) and a 'core group' of 12 refugee and asylum-seeking youth aged 15-25 (9 young men, 3 young women). The participants – who identified as Greek, Afghan, Syrian, Iraqi, Iranian, British, Albanian, Palestinian, Kurdish, Congolese (Kinshasa) and American – were recruited via convenience and snowball sampling. Due to restrictions following the outbreak of COVID-19, all teaching and research activities moved online (to Skype,

Zoom, Viber and WhatsApp) from March to June 2020. Ethical approval was granted by the Social Sciences and Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford. To protect participants' identities, all names used here are pseudonyms, and the names of organisations are omitted.

Despite being reminded that interviews could be carried out in the language of their choosing, with their own choice of interpreter assisting, all participants decided to proceed in English. Interviews focused on post-15 educational aspirations, constraints and enablers among both young men and women, with particular attention to the role of micro-level¹⁵ social relationships. After being entered into NVivo, interview transcripts and field notes were analysed according to the principles of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). As such, the data was immediately coded by the author using an open coding technique, followed by axial coding to explore the relationship between the initial codes, and to create categories which were then organised into themes. Data was generated and analysed iteratively until theoretical saturation was reached. This paper focuses primarily on participants' references to gendered constraints and supports. It should be noted that due to the sample size and specific nature of the context, careful consideration is needed before generalising findings to other geographical areas. They present the realities of one group in one local context and offer themes for further exploration.

The social constructivist foundations of the study necessitate an examination of the values which led me to this research and the influence of my identity on the research process (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; May & Perry, 2014). Having a background in teaching highly aspirational refugee youth in different contexts undoubtedly led me to advocate for educational opportunities for displaced populations;

¹⁵ In this article, 'micro-level' refers to close, everyday relationships with family, teachers, peers and other educational actors in young women's immediate environment (following Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

thus providing the impetus for the study. However, being a young, British, female doctoral student from Oxford racialised as white meant holding a privileged, outsider position which may have affected the answers participants gave. To mitigate these factors, I engaged in constant, critical acknowledgement of the inevitable political positions brought to the research process (Griffiths, 1998; Itani, 2019); conducted a pilot study to gain as much understanding of the participants and context as possible (Gateley, 2014); and sought to reciprocate their participation and build trusting relationships by volunteering as a language teacher and assistant throughout the fieldwork.

6.5. Findings and discussion

6.5.1. Educational constraints for young refugee women

There is an agreement in research from around the world that parents – and especially their socioeconomic background, level of support, beliefs about education and priorities – can play a key role in refugee girls' attendance and learning (e.g. Boit et al., 2020; Ndijuye & Rawat, 2019; Watkins et al., 2012; Sieverding et al., 2018). This study also found that many young women did not attend educational activities because their parents – and fathers in particular – would not allow it, due to the family's religious and/or cultural beliefs about girls' education, gender roles and what constitutes youth and adulthood. Girls and young women could, for example, be responsible for tasks such as cooking, shopping, cleaning and childcare, which increased with age; meaning that even if she had completed lower levels of education, she was less likely to make the transition to senior high school at the age of 15. Teachers reported that fathers would tell them: "she's a girl. I don't want her to go to the secondary reception classes ... I want her to have this good marriage and succeed in her private life".

With both NFE and senior high school being optional in Greece, there are no legal frameworks compelling parents to enrol their children. Girls themselves could also prioritise other goals or activities over attending school. These questions of family priorities are crucial to consider – and especially in a context marked by financial, social and legal precarity. As Elena, a coordinator, explained:

Those who do come with a family, family is a very sacred thing to them. So if the father says, 'no, you don't go to school today because ... you have to go to market today. The kid will not come to school, they will go to the market. If the mother says you don't need this, let's do that – the same ... The family is a very, very strong determinant of what these kids do ... You do get the cases of people who say 'why do we need this? Let's do something else, because now we need money'.

Beyond questions of priorities, it was reported that some families also refused to allow their daughters to attend due to issues of protection and trust. Attending school or NFE could mean travelling on several public buses alone, for example, or entering male-dominated spaces in the city – such as one programme in Thessaloniki which took place in a 'traditionally' male-dominated community kitchen. This, the teachers suggested, made young women fearful of participating. In addition, there was mistrust of unknown organisations and educators. In a country which treats arrivals in increasingly inhumane ways (Amnesty International, 2018) – with particularly acute threats for young women (Freedman, 2016; Kofman, 2018; UNHCR et al., 2016) – it is understandable that the refugee community would be reluctant to send their daughters alone to state-run activities (or indeed, any activities run by Greek or other international staff). This issue of mistrust has also been reported by the OECD (2020) as a factor limiting all young refugees' access to education in Greece.

Various participants reported the related issue that formal education – and most NFE – was mixed-gender. One public school teacher, Maria, noted how on several occasions, "when the father realised that there were boys at school, he didn't want her

to continue". Nadia, a cultural mediator, explained that families may have "no gender problem in learning" but simply prefer separate classes for boys and girls. In addition, they may find activities such as drama and certain sports inappropriate. One coordinator of youth NFE programmes, for example, recalled an incident in which a young woman – who "wasn't a minor", he noted – had been coming to their drama workshops without telling her father. After finding out that she had played the part of another participant's wife, he had immediately stopped her continuing. This aligns with other recent research from Greece which documents parents' concerns about sending their daughters to mixed settings (Sarikoudi & Apostolidou, 2020). Other participants in this study also reported mixed classes as the reason why girls themselves were refusing to come to school.

As well as protecting them from harm, this resistance could also be an attempt to protect young women from stigma. Particularly when they were living in camps, in close proximity to many people of the same background, departing from community expectations could result in young women being ostracised. As Katerina, a teacher, explained: "if the community sees that you send your child to the school, then they're gonna think that this kid is not appropriate for their boys, or ... for her to make a family". However, very few appropriate, single-gender opportunities existed. Women-only spaces were limited and often reliant upon financial donations and volunteer support; meaning that programmes may not have been consistent or long-term. In Thessaloniki, the one dedicated women's centre had had to cap its number of registrations due to its popularity.

As well as being daughters, many young women in the 15-25 age group were wives and/or mothers with caring responsibilities. Having children was reported to be a significant factor determining young women's attendance. With responsibilities in the home and husbands typically out working or looking for work, they had little free time and no support network to help care for their child(ren); and therefore, even if they had

completed primary education elsewhere, they could not continue participating. Older mothers could also delegate childcare responsibilities to their daughters, meaning that they could not attend either. This is not to say that these young women were forced to stay at home, however; as Melina, a teacher, noted, many girls she had met “wanted to be inside the house … they thought that they have a role to the family”. Some could be the head of their household, due to male partners and fathers travelling separately to Northern or Western Europe. Others felt the weight of responsibility after losing family members, and prioritised caring for their remaining family over all else. Melissa, the coordinator of the women’s centre, recalled one such incident when a young woman gave up a scholarship: “she was a very, very talented student, but after a loss of an additional family member and feeling the weight of responsibility in the home, she dropped out”.

For the many young mothers who *did* register for NFE and regularly participated in educational activities, their roles and responsibilities could still affect their ability to continue attending, to attend consistently or to otherwise benefit fully from the experience. Those with babies could feel uncomfortable breastfeeding in a public place, and when childcare facilities were not available, having their own or others’ small children in classrooms could be disruptive. Community centres were often unable to offer childcare and tailored, alternative education for women consistently throughout the week – especially if this did not fit their donor-dictated remit. Mothers could also find it difficult keeping to centres’ schedules – particularly when having to take children to nurseries, schools or medical appointments – and struggled to spare the time for homework or further study alongside domestic tasks and childcare. This ‘second shift’ – also known as women’s ‘double burden’ – has been reported as a challenge for refugee women’s inclusion in education and the workforce around the world, and especially when they are single mothers or the head of a household (European Parliament, 2016; Holloway et al., 2019).

Beyond childcare challenges, some participants reported instances of domestic abuse and husbands forbidding young women to attend work or education. Girls and young women who were engaged in forced or ‘strategic’ marriages at a young age – for what they perceived as security – were at an especially significant risk. While recent research has suggested that refugee women’s decisions to marry are agentic and empowering acts (Taha, 2020), there is also a body of research which documents how early marriage, as a coping mechanism, can result in abuse and the limiting of freedoms such as attending school (e.g. DeJong et al., 2017; Hattar-Pollara, 2019; UNHCR, 2016b). Melissa reported that she had seen a number of such cases at her centre.

When young women participated, the fact that they were entering a new social environment could also create challenges. As well as being initially uncomfortable with mixed-gender classrooms, for example, they could also face gendered issues in their interactions with – or isolation from – Greek peers. This was especially true in Greek public high schools. While it is often reported that refugee women and girls are made invisible or silent (e.g. El Jack, 2010), the opposite issue was found during fieldwork: that of being ‘hypervisible’. For hijabi girls, their ‘hypervisibility’ as a female, Muslim, racialised ‘other’ in predominantly white, Orthodox Christian schools could draw unwanted attention and racist remarks.

Hala, a 15-year-old from Syria, had faced such issues. Hala had come to Greece with her parents and two brothers in 2015, taking an irregular migration route via Turkey and the Aegean Sea. She had entered high school relatively quickly, in comparison to other refugees of her age: her and her brothers were registered almost as soon as they were relocated to the mainland, thanks to their mothers’ commitment and initiative with enrolling them. However, while her brothers were younger and had settled in somewhat more easily, Hala had faced gendered issues in the beginning with

her predominantly Greek teachers and teenage peers. She said that when she first started attending school, she was asked by other students:

'why you wearing hijab? Why you are here, if you like to wear hijab? Why you come here? Just take it off, you don't have to have it. Why you are Muslim?' You have so many things they ask you, and then you cannot speak with them, they do not know English and you do not know Greek very well.

She firmly believed that their comments were based in racism. She said that "not all the Greek people ... like to have friends from Arabic countries ... they don't feel happy, they feel like, oh, they come from another country and they take our country". This racism was tied up with religion and gender. As Hala said, when she first arrived and they realised that she was Muslim, "they was looking ... They think that we [Muslim girls] don't go to school".

Another young Syrian woman, Marwa, who was studying at university, echoed how gender, race and religious markers are intertwined. She said that because she does not wear a hijab and her family have "really white skin", no-one guessed that she was Syrian. She said that "the students, they thought maybe I'm from France"; and it was only when her peers found out that she was Syrian that "something became different ... especially with the Greeks". As the only major difference between these two young Syrian women was a few years of age and their choice of wearing a headscarf, this suggests that the latter became a hypervisible symbol of 'otherness' (and assumed 'refugeeness') which opened Hala up to abuse and discrimination. These findings align with research which has found that young migrants have "an intense awareness of their own appearance" which "they linked to how they were treated" (Bradby et al., 2017, p. 9); especially when it intersected with factors such as their age and religion. Other research has also described how peers at school can limit refugees' agency and positioning by categorising them according to their race,

nationality and gender (Hummelstedt et al., 2021). All of these factors reduce young refugee women's sense of belonging and desire to participate, and put them at risk of dropping out.

On the other hand, challenges could also arise when young women *did* form new relationships with peers and teachers from Greece and elsewhere. For example, due to the instability of refugees' accommodation – and the short-term nature of funding and volunteer arrangements in NFE in particular – either the teacher or learner could leave abruptly. This meant that trusting relationships built up over weeks, months or years, which encouraged girls to continue attending, could be cut off. In addition, when these peers and teachers came from different linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds, they could influence young women's appearance, behaviour and attitudes; which, while not necessarily an issue in itself, could lead to 'symbolic distance' between themselves and their family. Irina, an NFE teacher, explained that many teenage girls "integrate fast", adopting "this different style, this European style ... and the parents are a little bit stressful about that!" Mothers in the women's centre spoke of their daughters speaking in Greek with their friends so as not be understood by their parents, which, as has been found elsewhere, can fracture mother-daughter relations and have long-term emotional repercussions (Selleck, 2023, p. 201).

One reception class teacher, Vasiliki, described how she had been in many situations with young women who were conflicted about their identity and future directions, following their time in the Greek context and after forming new relationships. She explained how many wanted to reunite with their families either elsewhere in Europe or in their home countries, "and then to deal with the education and all the other details that we put a lot of meaning, at least in Greece ... and I think, all around Europe". However, many others, according to Vasiliki,

wanted not to go abroad with their families. They wanted to separate from their families, because it was this pressure again, the traditional pressure. They wanted to finish school, to put away the scarf, and live a normal life. All the time they were asking me a lot of days about how a Greek woman lives, and ... you have to deal with very sensitive matters. Because their families all the time, wanted to remind them their tradition ... So that was very, very strong conversations, and a lot of mothers deal with that.

Establishing relationships in educational settings – from both within and outside their national or cultural community – was found to be crucial for girls' motivation to continue attending. However, if they led to tensions within the family, they could potentially destabilise their home life and threaten the family's support for their participation in education.

6.5.2. Navigating constraints: (collective) action, allies and alternative spaces

Despite these constraints, many young refugee women participated in post-compulsory education – whether for work opportunities or the chance for further study, independence, friendships or having 'something different' to do during a period of enforced waiting. As one teacher, Elena, explained, many refugee girls and young women had "high ambitions":

like 'I want to be an architect, or I want to be a doctor, I want to do this' ... very confident about their dreams. The girls especially from Afghanistan and Iran, because they had to migrate mostly because of their lack of their right to go to school and education, they are far more eager to do things and do well, because this is the very reason they and their families wanted to leave ... What they seek in their new home is another life. And I saw them coming to class and very, very strong cases, some 18 year old girls – amazing, amazing potential.

To achieve their educational goals, these girls and young women often took matters into their own hands to eliminate or navigate constraints. To address social issues in public high schools, for example, they took steps to 'fit in' by proactively

building their Greek proficiency and educating their new peers. Vera, a Refugee Education Coordinator¹⁶ (REC), mentioned one girl who had refused to speak anything other than Greek with her fellow high school students, and consequently had progressed "easily" through the system. Similarly, Hala – who had had to deal with racist remarks at school – recalled how she had requested assistance from English speakers to correct peers' and teachers' misconceptions about what it means to be Syrian, Muslim and/or a refugee. As such, she had directly tackled their exclusionary 'othering' practices. Others addressed the inappropriacy of mixed-gender offers by actively seeking out alternative spaces¹⁷ in which they felt comfortable and welcome. This often meant somewhere they could bring their children (either into the classroom, or to simultaneous children's activities) and breastfeed. This, of course, would not be possible in a public school.

If the learning opportunity did not fit their needs, some young women sought out other ways of gaining certificates, language skills and work experience: such as through volunteering as teaching assistants or interpreters. Others, either alone or collectively, created and shaped their own learning offers: for example, by requesting female-only spaces or adapting opportunities to allow them to share childcare. Alexandra, an NFE teacher, recalled one such example in a camp setting:

What happened after one or two months ... is that the youth zone, let's say, was like a women's zone, and the adults' zone was like a men's zone ... They made it in a way that it was gender... 'slots', and not age slots ... because also a lot of these couples, they have younger children, so one of them should stay at home.

¹⁶ 'Refugee Education Coordinators' are teachers from the public system who have been seconded to liaise between schools, refugee families, NGOs and other stakeholders to support and encourage public school enrolment (OECD, 2018).

¹⁷ 'Alternative learning spaces' refers to community centres and other non-state-run sites in which non-formal educational offers are provided by intergovernmental organisations (such as UNICEF), (international) non-governmental organisations (such as IsraAID) and local volunteer networks.

Young women also attended mixed-gender settings as a group – bringing siblings, friends or parents for ‘strength in numbers’, to ‘legitimise’ the space or simply to enable others to enjoy its benefits. Beyond negotiating access, young women also requested particular content – or more lessons in general – and taught one another skills such as languages, cooking, sewing and crafts. This allowed them to fulfil their needs and make the best use of their time, rather than joining Second Chance schools or high schools and struggling to catch up – due to starting late, or because of the Greek language barrier.

Marwa, for her part, had grown tired of waiting for free language learning opportunities and had taught herself Greek and English through voluntary work in her camp – and later, through paid employment. As she told me, it is “not because I’m not willing to pay [for expensive private tuition], because I don’t have this amount to pay”. After hearing about the possibility of a scholarship for a degree at an anglophone university in the city, she drew more from her social resources in the camp, and sought out linguistic support with her application. However, after being awarded the scholarship, and finding paid employment to further support her studies – opening up a very valuable opportunity – this then created other issues and instabilities, as she was no longer eligible for financial assistance from UNHCR. This meant that all of a sudden, she was expected to navigate the housing market (and the unwillingness of Greeks, she explained, to rent to refugees), sustaining her own income and also getting settled into a new and challenging educational programme. On top of this, Marwa had pressure from her family, who were all based in Germany, to find a way to leave Greece and join them. She told me that

my family, they keep telling me, here in Greece you don’t have future – they have very weak economy ... and they are right, sometime ... They are really waiting me to graduate ... I’m not sure if they would like me to keep here, after the next year.

This conflict between her family's wishes and her own ambitions added another layer of instability to her daily life. However, despite these issues, she was incredibly determined to complete her degree, even if the future beyond it was still to be negotiated. She asked her university counsellor for help with academic difficulties; she repeatedly requested counselling support from NGOs, despite its limited availability and long waiting lists; and she remained focused on achieving her dream of completing higher education, after the disruptions to her learning trajectory during and after fleeing Syria.

Several key, micro-level actors and factors supported young women in this navigation of their constraints. In terms of actors, girls benefited from having (primarily female) advocates and allies around them who enabled and promoted their participation in education. Some parents, for example, wanted their children to enjoy opportunities they had never had, and as such encouraged all of their children to attend; with some fathers claiming, for example, that "all children must finish school, and this is a law in our family!" Similarly, as Elena put it, "if the mother says go to school, this is important ... the kid will go even if they don't want to!" Such parents often had an educational background themselves, as has been found elsewhere (e.g. Beydoun et al., 2021). Some supported their daughters' education more than their sons', due to believing that boys are more 'useful' for earning an income. In some families, as one teacher participant put it, there could be a "really strong mother figure" who advocated for her daughter(s) to attend. This was the case with Hala: her mother had become frustrated with the lack of support from NGOs and the municipality, as no formal education integration structures were in place at all in 2015, and had gone directly to the school directors and insisted that they enrol her three children immediately. She had been successful in all three cases. Vasiliki mentioned other similarly motivated parents who were

asking me more details about how their children are going to be better students, and how they're going to help them, although they don't know Greek. But actually those families were willing to stay in Greece. They didn't have this dream to go to *Almania* [Germany] as well.

If families supported girls' education but were fearful of risks, some mothers or other family members – including their much younger brothers – would accompany them, at least for the first few sessions. Young women also often chose to attend in pairs or groups, in acts of what one teacher called "female solidarity". While these collective tactics may not be viable in formal settings, it enables greater participation in NFE – while protecting young women from stigmatisation and harm. A side effect of this tactic is that different generations of women encouraged one another to engage with education. Melissa, for example, spoke of how young women would bring their mothers to her centre (and vice versa), or other family members would come along out of curiosity; thus multiplying women's engagement.

Outside of families, every educational actor interviewed communicated their strong support for girls' education. As such, young women were surrounded by educational advocates – such as teachers, RECs and non-governmental organisation (NGO) staff – who often mediated the relationship between the family and the educational provider. This was done through community meetings and awareness raising among parents, or through what one teacher called "fighting by words": to "explain, and explain, and again explain ... to find ... some way to *press* them". These advocates also encouraged young women themselves to value education and raise their aspirations. One teacher, Charissa, recalled one such incident while working on the verb 'I can':

One girl says, "we can only cook" ... and she was so upset about it ... And I was like, "no, this is what you know, this is not what you *can* do ... Right now, you think you can only cook, but this is what you know".

This exchange demonstrates the direct impact teachers can have on refugee learners' aspirations. Charissa was explicitly trying to inspire the young women to pursue academic or employment routes they may not have previously considered, or which they may not have considered suitable.

Most participants emphasised such supportive relationships with teachers as a key factor determining whether young women chose to continue attending. Indeed, for one teacher of young refugees, Maria, the biggest influence on young refugees' decision-making about remaining in and progressing through education came down to "the relationship that they have with the teachers". As she said, "that makes them have a positive attitude [about their education]. That's what I believe".

In both formal and non-formal settings, teachers were said by their colleagues to often go "above and beyond", providing advice and psychological support. This then became a practice of care, or what some participants even referred to as 'mothering'. While this duality of 'teacher and mother' is not unproblematic (Howell, 2020; Tamboukou, 2000), there was a suggestion from some interviewees that teachers should demonstrate 'love' if they are to support young refugees sufficiently; and in fact, it was offered by staff themselves as a description of the identity underpinning their practice. Maria used the term 'teacher-mother' explicitly to describe a colleague:

We had another teacher – I called her 'teacher-mother' ... I still remember, that the refugees from Syria didn't know what a pomegranate is. Pomegranate. It was in a text. So the next day, she bought a pomegranate herself. She cleaned it, I mean only the seeds, and she brought it in a bowl, and they all tried and they ate. So I mean it's not just a teacher, she was also – I call her, 'you're a teacher-mother'.

Beyond the motherly metaphor of nourishing their bodies as well as their minds, this demonstrates how teachers – who, during my fieldwork, were predominantly female –

are expected to demonstrate 'care' to address what Maria called "the psychological part". "I feel compassion", she told me. "I feel... okay, it could be not love, but I care ... That's how we feel. Most of us". Nadia, a cultural mediator working in educational contexts, also defined the ideal teacher for refugees using Maria's 'teacher-mother' terms. When I asked what supports young refugees to continue participating in education, she replied: "a caring and loving teacher, that show them that she is next to them, that she will be their support, that she will push them, slowly, slowly; that she will give them the first steps, how to open their wings".

It was also reported that girls tended to open up more with their female teachers than their parents, due to what one coordinator described as feeling "less distance" between them. As one teacher, Claire, put it, "you are not just a teacher to them ... you're needed so much more". Marmaridou (2019, p. 50) also found that teachers in Greece "crossed the limits they would otherwise set" by discussing "personal matters" with refugee girls and generally being "friendlier". Several participants described them(selves) as becoming role models, as they represented new forms of female authority and possibility. As Claire explained:

I think actually being a Western woman, actually teaching the class, was a really big attraction for them. In terms of like, seeing me, in a position of power, in the classroom, and having my own agency, about my own life, was a real, like, 'wow' moment for some of the girls ... they saw me as, like, a vision of what their life could be.

This also arose in a conversation with Vasiliki, who had reflected a lot on the challenges and possibilities of not only being a role model for the refugee girls and young women she taught, but also having to mediate their changing interests and their families' wishes. As she said:

always I was ... 'okay in Greece, we do that, but your tradition is welcome as well'. And they said to me, 'no, teacher, we don't want to wear the scarf' ... And some of the boys were telling them, 'okay you have to wear the scarf, otherwise you don't believe. And you're being disrespect'. And so I have to tell them that 'I am Orthodox, okay. So in my tradition, I have to wear these long skirts and so on. And I say them, 'no, look at me, I wear my trousers. I put my trousers on but I believe in my God. God is in my head. So don't cry, you are a good Muslim too!' ... And so a lot of children are becoming women. They wanted to separate – this tie. They wanted to be more free ... And I really appreciate their fears and their expectations. So that's why they wanted to finish school. And they wanted to go to the university, because they want to be stronger, like me, like their teachers ... And I said to them, if you want to be like me, you have to finish school. So they asked me lots of details about my life ... And for the first time in my life, I was very careful with my words – I didn't want them to feel this two ways of living. I want them to decide what are they going to become.

This mention of being "careful with my words" shows Vasiliki's awareness of the potential for her to contribute to ruptures within the family, if the refugee girls and young women she taught sought a different path to the one their families imagined for them. At the same time, she demonstrated her strong influence on their heightened aspirations.

As well as supportive and caring teachers, alternative learning spaces were also vital for young refugee women, as they provided both an accessible and 'appropriate' place to learn and the chance to rebuild a support network. They were more accessible for young mothers, in particular, as childcare or simultaneous children's activities were often provided; and in addition, the timetable could be more flexible and short-term than in formal education. Women-only spaces could also be considered more 'appropriate', as they were single-gender, and thus avoided the concerns associated with mixed-gender settings. Melissa described her centre as a "legitimate" place to spend time: as both a female-only space, and somewhere where women could learn valuable language skills for employment. As such, according to Melissa, participating "might be considered something productive that could bring something back to the family". This was especially true for young women caught in

abusive situations, or in a family which had other priorities. When girls and their mothers or other family members attended together, this gave it even more weight, as they legitimised the space for one another.

The other advantages of attending lessons in alternative spaces such as women's centres were that learners could establish relationships with others from different backgrounds, with shared experiences, and benefit from the further social and pastoral support available. Beyond community building, members could access other services (such as legal advice and accommodation assistance) from both staff and other members, as well as help with communicating with healthcare services and their children's schools. Therefore, attending women-only activities and spaces was, according to Melissa, much more than "the final result of taking a diploma". They provided a familiar, safe place of ownership and belonging in which young women could immediately continue learning, while also addressing wider social constraints. Other studies in Greece have also noted the many benefits of community-led, women-friendly initiatives for not only enabling learning, but also for accessing information, feeling safe and contesting power by reclaiming and shaping space (Amnesty International, 2018; Arahova, 2017; Rezaian et al., 2019).

6.6. Conclusion: promoting young refugee women's educational participation

This paper has described the (predominantly micro-level, social) constraints which limited young refugee women's participation in post-compulsory education, and the actions, actors and other factors involved in navigating these constraints. These constraints mostly related to tensions and responsibilities in their relationships with family, peers and teachers; all of which are exacerbated by, or resulted from, their conditions of 'unsettlement'. Due to a desire for independence, an income or a more fruitful way to spend time during a period of enforced waiting, young women found

ways to navigate these constraints. For example, they made efforts to fit in with and educate their peers; they requested and shaped learning offers to fit their needs; they engaged in ‘appropriate’, alternative learning opportunities which mitigated their family’s protection concerns and/or better suited their situation; and they drew upon the support of advocates and allies to build strong, encouraging relationships and continue learning.

The findings reiterate the need to listen to and work with (young) refugee women when designing and implementing educational provision or other support (Ibesh et al., 2021). Their needs, as seen in Greece, often included having childcare provided (either in the centre itself, or elsewhere in the city), private spaces for breastfeeding or simultaneous provision for young children. Beyond this, having safe spaces – where they feel welcome, part of the community and comfortable to express themselves – is crucial. As women request such places, and often become engaged in shaping them themselves, it is a natural point of departure for encouraging more women to learn. Starting with low-stakes offers based around their hobbies increases the likelihood of them continuing to attend; and, perhaps, later building enough confidence to continue down other (formal) educational paths. To envision and start making steps down these paths, having role models who can discuss and advise on possibilities is key. As seen above, when these role models are ‘new’ female figures of authority and possibility – from different cultural and religious backgrounds – this guidance should be provided with tact and sensitivity to avoid deepening rifts between young women and their families.

The findings also demonstrate not only refugee women’s individual educational agency, but also align with other accounts of how they have collectively “created and actioned opportunities for resistance or change” to overcome “social, political, gendered and familial constraints” (McPherson, 2015, p. 128). The paper contributes examples of their collective acts, and the importance of relationships in shaping

individual agency. For example, it demonstrates that when young refugee women are enabled and supported to participate in education, their friends and family members are also encouraged to attend – multiplying the benefits across their networks. A clear understanding of these relational influences would lead to appropriate, holistic, gender-sensitive support tailored for young women's situations and needs. This is crucial for supporting their existing strategies and enabling them to experience the benefits of education after the age of 15.

Overall, support should aim to centre these strengths, needs and interests, while recognising what they can bring to educational settings and initiatives themselves. At the same time, NGOs and governments must appreciate parents' viewpoints and not try to override or disqualify their decisions. This means recognising, as one Greek participant put it,

the other realities, like how good parents they are, how strong the bonds of family are, more than the European ones ... It's very, very difficult to just get rid of the stereotypes, and the fear, all these things, and just explore what's different. Behind those borders. The linguistic ones, the geographical ones.

Thinking beyond borders, to better understand new populations, is the basis of successfully welcoming more young refugee women in educational spaces.

7. PAPER 3: 'CREATIVE (EN)COUNTERSPACES: SOLIDARITY ARTS WORKSHOPS AS SITES OF VALUABLE CONTACT FOR YOUNG REFUGEES'

We now come to the third paper of the thesis, which zooms in on a particular educational setting – namely, one NGO's non-formal arts programme – and the motivations, benefits and challenges for young refugees participating in this type of offer. Below is the full and unabridged version. An edited version, which was published in the journal *Migration Studies* (DOI: 10.1093/migration/mnad016), can be found in Appendix L.

7.1. Abstract

This paper explores the role of non-formal arts education in Thessaloniki, Greece for fostering contact considered valuable by the young refugee community. Drawing on accounts of their daily life, gathered over eight months of ethnographic fieldwork for a project on their post-15 educational participation, the paper details how around the city, young refugees (aged 15-25) experience conflicted encounters involving both hostility and solidarity. While this hostility impacts their aspirations, self-image and feelings of inclusion, a large solidarity movement attempts to counteract these challenges by offering educational activities for 'inclusion' such as arts workshops in temporary spaces. These offers were popular among youth in the study, as they constituted a welcoming opportunity for building social connections, language skills and self-confidence – outcomes which extended beyond the physical space of the workshops. As such, they functioned as valuable, creative '(en)counterspaces'. Based on observations from one case study site, this paper unpacks the key processes which promoted these valued outcomes – including collaboration, mediation and informal contact – as well as the role played by arts materials and arts-making practices in these processes. The paper also offers key considerations for designing similar

activities, such as being sensitive to inclusivity and power relations. It aims to build on the literature on both ‘counterspaces’ and ‘encounters’ by documenting the outcomes young refugees value from contact in these sites of solidarity, and how and why they proactively seek them out; as well as analysing the other actors and specific activities involved in them.

7.2. Introduction

One winter’s day in Thessaloniki, a young woman from Afghanistan – who had sought refuge in Greece alone – was curled up on the floor of a drama studio pretending to be an egg. She was not the only egg: a young British volunteer was similarly hunched over next to her, trying to make herself as ovate as possible. They gradually opened up, attempting a painstakingly accurate portrayal of the life course of a chicken, and cracked out of their imaginary shells. They breathed fresh air for the first time, eased their necks from side to side, slowly tried out their wings – and then caught one another’s eye, and keeled over once again in fits of laughter. They looked up at their small audience, consisting mostly of fellow refugee youth, NGO staff and volunteers, who then joined them in laughing. It would be their turn next.

The youth had been attending this workshop for some weeks, in a city-centre basement studio lent to the organising NGO by a local cultural association. Many also participated in the NGO’s other frequent arts programmes, held in other borrowed spaces around Thessaloniki, to promote – as the organisers stated – young refugees’ inclusion in social life in the city (meaning, predominantly, gaining friendships and employability skills). Based on my observations and interviews with the youth and educational stakeholders involved in such workshops, and using the concept of ‘creative (en)counterspace’, this paper contributes insights on the nature of young refugees’ encounters in these ‘safe’ spaces of solidarity; the outcomes they valued; the

key principles and processes which promoted these desired outcomes; and key considerations for designing and running similar arts-based, non-formal education (NFE) initiatives for young refugees. I argue that these spaces can foster cross-cultural friendships, language skills and self-confidence, in processes catalysed by arts materials and practices – thus providing young refugees with the tools they need to navigate some of the social challenges they face in their everyday lives. However, certain issues can persist, such as refugee-solidarian power imbalances and the homogenising of the refugee identity and experience. Furthermore, while such initiatives may create meaningful ‘micro-publics’ (Amin, 2002) which hold value for refugee youth, they remain for the most part at the margins of society – with their bottom-up efforts inevitably limited by entrenched structural and social exclusion. As such, the paper offers a much-needed discussion of the value and limitations of arts NFE as not only a safe and supportive counterspace for refugee youth, but also as a bridge into their new society. Before embarking on this analysis, however, I shall situate this research conceptually, empirically and geographically.

7.2.1. Conceptual framework: arts workshops as a creative (en)counterspace

This paper brings migration studies into dialogue with youth, leisure and critical race studies by drawing on the concepts of ‘encounters’ and ‘counterspace’ – and then weaving an arts thread through them.

Firstly, the case study arts programme analysed below is framed here as a form of ‘counterspace’. Counterspaces – a term stemming from critical race theory and applied in youth and leisure studies – are defined as safe and supportive community settings for minoritised youth of similar backgrounds in which they can affirm their identities and challenge deficit-focused narratives (Case & Hunter, 2012; Margherio et al., 2020). They may be physical school spaces where youth meet and socialise, study

groups, student organisations, or study programmes for underrepresented scholars (Margherio et al., 2020; Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012; Sanchez Medina, 2022). They are often created by youth themselves as same-race peer networks which mitigate the psychological, emotional and physical stress caused by racism and in which they support one another's success, in a positive resistance strategy which strengthens their aspirational, social and navigational capital (Carter, 2007; Margherio et al., 2020; Sanchez Medina, 2022). While other concepts such as 'safe spaces' and 'sites of resistance' are similar, the Counterspace Framework encapsulates the specific functions of such settings for self-enhancement and self-protection, and thus for adaptive responding to marginalisation and the promotion of well-being (Case & Hunter, 2012).

Application of the Counterspace Framework is very limited in refugee and migration studies, despite the fact that forms of oppression are relational and interlocked – such as how a migrant's undocumented status can compound the exclusion they face due to racialisation (Yosso et al., 2009). The research which exists, however, has found that in education, dedicated counterspaces can facilitate new skills and other learning outcomes which may not be possible to achieve elsewhere – due to learners' immigration status – while also creating solidarity networks (Villegas & Aberman, 2020). They can also function as spaces of "epistemic possibility", in which migrants' non-mainstream identities and forms of belonging can become viable and exclusionary discourses can be reworked (Shirazi, 2019, p. 480). Outside of learning settings, activities run by civil society can also function as counterspaces for refugees, Bendixsen and Wyller (2019, p. 4) claim, by providing "spaces of hospitality" which oppose restrictions, crisis discourse and populism.

An example from the world of arts is the cultural festival: a counterspace which can validate refugees' experiences of rejection and marginalisation, celebrate their achievements, foster feelings of acceptance, permit expression in culturally meaningful

ways, promote self-concept, and allow the building of social capital (via mentoring and volunteering schemes) (Hassanli et al., 2020). They also offer marginalised groups the chance to move both psychologically and physically from the periphery to the centre: permitting them to safely engage in urban areas they might otherwise avoid, due to the likelihood of stigmatisation. As such, they fulfil a function as not only a counterspace or 'refuge', but also a safe site of possibility for interactions with 'dominant' groups (Hassanli et al., 2020). This paper picks up on and develops this last point: on the potential of solidarity arts initiatives to function as a counterspace for young refugees, while also offering the chance for positive encounters with the wider community. As such, here I term them a 'creative (en)counterspace': i.e. a safe space at the margins which can provide support and identity affirmation for refugees, while also fostering interactions with the 'majority' public and potentially offering a bridge into 'mainstream' urban social life. As in Hassanli et al. (2020), this counters the notion that counterspaces are inherently separatist settings, and suggests that they can also act as sites for cross-cultural contact which lead to outcomes valued by refugees.

7.2.2. Engineering valuable contact via the arts

This takes us to the specific role of arts (programming) in fostering positive interactions between groups – and especially between migrant and 'local' youth.

This has been attempted via activities such as dance workshops, mask-making and festivals, which have resulted in not only language skills and increased self-esteem, self-worth and creativity among migrant participants, but also trans-ethnic and interfaith solidarities, trust, intercultural exchange, feelings of 'togetherness' and belonging and participation in society more broadly (Hickey-Moody, 2017; Korjonen-Kuusipuro & Kuusisto, 2019; Pace, 2017; Wood & Homolja, 2021). This is because, it is argued, artistic creation not only provides hospitable spaces for intercultural learning

and amplifying marginalised communities' voices and identities – opening up possibilities for solidarity (Harvey, 2018; Harvey et al., 2022) – but, fundamentally, it enables the *materialisation* of young people's identities in relation to their communities (Hickey-Moody & Harrison, 2018). Beyond their benefits for the individual, these embodied and situated acts of making can then create new community sentiments towards young people and materially disrupt dominant discourses, via an 'affective pedagogy' which encourages mutual understanding and connects feelings to places and images (Hickey-Moody, 2013; 2017).

With this said, cultural and creative practices have their limits in overcoming unequal power relations and ensuring long-term change amid anti-migrant discourse and policies (Jeffery et al., 2019). Moreover, it should be noted that encounters which are 'engineered' in this way may not lead to any behavioural or attitudinal transformation at all, or indeed the result may be negative (Wilson, 2017) – as encounters can also generate anxiety, fear and violence, and even exacerbate existing prejudices, boundaries, power differences and conflicts (Amin, 2002; Boersma, 2020; Kraftl, 2013; Listerborn, 2015; Valentine, 2000). Overall, the particular conditions and participants matter: contact and its potential for positive outcomes may be shaped by the historical, economic and social processes at play in particular cities (Al Helali, 2021); political and legal factors such as the results of participants' asylum applications (Whyte, 2017); young people's motivation to attend and openness to meeting 'others' (Mayblin et al., 2016); and in general, the "situated social dynamic" of the space (Amin, 2002, 969).

With these issues taken into account, the question thus arises: which particular principles and processes, then, can promote successful interactions in creative (en)counterspaces and lead to the outcomes refugee youth value? For Amin (2002), this type of group activity should be organised and purposeful, and involve people of different backgrounds who are brought together in new ways – in an opportunity to

dismantle fixed interaction patterns and learn new ways of relating. In terms of specific processes, Mayblin et al. (2016) suggest creating a safe space for youth to explore differences and similarities, and to develop shared interests; while recognising the importance of ‘banal sociality’ – i.e. young people’s time spent ‘hanging out’ alongside purposeful activities, in which they can develop friendships based around their interests. In arts projects specifically, the limited literature suggests that successful interactions involve “opportunities for choice and relatedness” (Heckmann Erekson, 2018, p. 89) and honour both “young people’s desire to convey the hopeful aspects of making home” and their expert position (Frimberger & Bishopp, 2020, p. 58).

To explore this question further, this paper analyses one case study arts programme – which had the explicit intention of bringing young people from different backgrounds together, while acting as a form of ‘sanctuary’ for refugees – and whether and how any positive effects were achieved from this engineered contact, according to participants themselves. In doing so, it also aims to contribute to scholarship which centres young refugees’ agency, and the role of arts education, practices and spaces in their navigation of precarity and belonging (e.g. Askins & Pain, 2011; Korjonen-Kuusipuro & Kuusisto, 2019; Pace, 2017; Whyte, 2017). This particular case comes from an urban context which is under-represented in the international literature on refugeehood, encounter and counterspace, and which is coming to terms with its new forms of diversity.

7.2.3. Thessaloniki: a landscape of crisis and solidarity

As a key entry point into the European Union, Greek borders have become a particularly contested site over the last decade. The heightened numbers of refugees and other migrants arriving, peaking in 2015, resulted in what came to be described as a ‘crisis’ – and more broadly, part of the ‘European refugee crisis’ (Georgiou &

Zaborowski, 2017). However, Greece is also still suffering from the impact of the financial crisis of 2008, which saw severe cuts to public sector funding and high levels of unemployment (Dalakoglou & Agelopoulos, 2018). Therefore, before the COVID-19 pandemic brought a further crisis, the country's hospitality towards refugees was already becoming strained – to put it mildly. Now, according to UNHCR's statistics, almost 170,000 refugees, asylum-seekers and other 'persons of concern' are currently trapped in a country in which welfare provisions for displaced communities are slowly – and often quite discreetly – being dismantled (MIT, 2021; Smith, 2022; UNHCR, 2021c). Despite decreasing numbers of initial registrations, more than half of the applications submitted by the end of 2021 had been pending for over 12 months (GCR, 2022). Even after being granted asylum, recognised refugees risk losing financial and other support, and must still wait potentially years before receiving travel documents (Andrea, 2022). This leads to a state of seemingly permanent 'temporariness' – being suspended in unfinished procedures, often undocumented, without the knowledge of when or where they may be (sent) in a day or a year's time (Papatzani et al., 2021). In addition, the political discourse has become increasingly anti-refugee, to the extent that the word 'refugees' is often replaced by 'migrants' or 'economic migrants' (e.g. *Capital*, 2019), which erases the imperative of hospitality.

However, alongside this hostility, a substantial solidarity movement involving both Greek and international support has also mobilised in response to the 'crisis', which continues to fill state gaps by providing various forms of assistance to refugees today. Government-led 'inclusion' programmes have been described as "more or less nonexistent" – and indeed, the state has also been accused of pushbacks and creating difficulties with accessing the asylum system, which prevents refugees from even getting to the stage of 'inclusion' (Schmitz, 2022). As such, Schmitz writes, aid groups have stepped in to "create more opportunities to help migrants become a part of society". This is especially true in Thessaloniki – Greece's 'second city', known

anecdotally as one of hospitality – where since the beginning of the ‘crisis’, a number of (inter)national humanitarian organisations have gathered and established initiatives (Dicker, 2017; IOM, 2021). This was for the most part due to necessity: Thessaloniki constitutes the largest metropolitan area before the country’s northern borders, which were infamously and decisively closed in late 2015 and 2016 (Deardorff Miller, 2017). This resulted in many refugees congregating in the city, having been placed in camps and apartments in and around it. As a consequence, today Thessaloniki is a site of varied and increased forms of cross-cultural contact: both among refugees themselves, and between refugees and the wider community. As such, it provides a relevant and somewhat under-researched field site for analysing such contact.

7.3. Methodology

This paper draws on fieldwork conducted between October 2019 and June 2020 with young refugees and asylum-seekers (aged 15-25) and educational stakeholders in Thessaloniki. This involved semi-structured interviews with both groups in individual and pair formats, with drawing tasks incorporated into the interviews with younger participants. In total, a ‘core group’ of 12 young refugees were interviewed, along with 38 stakeholders such as teachers, parents, social workers and educational programme coordinators. Alongside this, I engaged in participant observation as a volunteer educator and assistant for four NGOs in the city, given my professional background in teaching. Through this participant observation of NFE programmes, I was embedded in what were mostly international structures created or ‘activated’ in response to the ‘refugee crisis’; and as such, I also became an actor within this particular contact zone myself. This approach to being actively involved in arts workshops and joining youth in activities offers the chance to build relationships and overcome communication issues (Jiménez Sedano, 2019) – which is especially important for a volunteer coming from a

different linguistic and migratory background. While including the voices of only 12 of the participants could have left the study at risk of bias, due to the issue of them eagerly 'self-selecting' to take part, the value of the programme was also evident in the fact that not only were the other participants consistently attending (across different programmes), but they also brought friends and relatives along who often ended up committing to the programme themselves. Following the outbreak of COVID-19, all interviews and teaching activities moved online – to platforms such as Zoom, Viber and Skype – with the same interview schedules used, to minimise the effects of this shift. Ethical approval was granted by the Social Sciences and Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford.

The young participants were invited to take part via purposive and snowball sampling. Further criteria for the youth included being within the 15-25 age range; having arrived during or since the 'peak' of current flows in 2015; having applied for or received refugee status; and being a participant in at least one educational activity per week. The 'core group' who participated in interviews identified as Kurdish, Iranian, Iraqi, Syrian and Congolese (Kinshasa), with nine being young men and three young women. This reflects the fact that the observation sites were mostly attended by young men – which is why they are primarily quoted in this article. For stakeholders, criteria included having first-hand knowledge of young refugees' education, from the classroom to the policy level. In this paper, the focus is on one particular NGO – here named Hearts & Minds – and one key member of staff: the coordinator of their youth programmes, Alex. As someone who had been working with displaced youth in various settings in Greece for many years, Alex was able to provide valuable insight into not only their educational experiences in the case study workshops, but also how their lives outside the spaces impacted them. All names have been pseudonymised in this article.

Hearts & Minds' work with youth is based on the principle that exclusion from education, employment and other activities in the local community leaves them at risk

of isolation, with severely negative consequences for their mental health. Their conceptualisation of 'inclusion' is two-way (i.e. involving steps from both refugees and the 'local' community), and is tied up with empowerment: being based in youth's own needs, as determined via needs assessments. These include being able to relax in safe spaces; get work experience and skills; process traumatic experiences via creative therapies; connect to their own and others' cultures and identities; make communities; and share experiences. Hearts & Minds' programmes thus aim to make links to the community and foster the development of skills and friendships, while offering a form of 'sanctuary' from their everyday, displacement-related difficulties. Arts and sports are considered a productive way of achieving this, as they promote collaboration around what are intended to be therapeutic activities. The observed programmes had 10-15 participants each week, and some youth participated more than once per week (e.g. in both painting and drama workshops).

Interviews were conducted in English, in line with participants' preferences – having been given the option to invite an interpreter of their choosing. This was likely due to the fact that we had mostly met in the predominantly anglophone environment of non-formal education in the city, and many youth wished to practise their language skills. Information sheets and consent forms for youth were still, however, provided in a pictorial format and in various languages. Interview transcripts were entered into NVivo and analysed according to the principles of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006): they were coded using an open coding technique (based on participants' own words), followed by axial coding to identify the relationships between the open codes and to create categories which became themes. This was completed in an ongoing, iterative process until theoretical saturation was reached. This paper focuses on young participants' responses regarding their everyday lives around the city and their experiences in Hearts and Minds' arts workshops in particular.

7.4. Findings

7.4.1. *Young refugees' everyday urban encounters in Thessaloniki*

Young refugees in the study spoke of experiencing racism and discrimination in their everyday encounters with the public in Thessaloniki, while also finding support and assistance. They were conflicted about responses from Greek people, saying for example, “I can say, probably half people is good, and others … For example, I can go to buy something at market or in shop, and when we are in the market, several people look at me” (Augustin, 16). Sayed, from Iran and in his early 20s, confirmed that “still now there is discrimination here. According the nationality, your colour, your religion, the status – single or family – this kind of thing is happening here”. Youth suggested that this is often connected to their identity as refugees, or assumptions are made that they are refugees, based on the languages they (do not) speak and the ways in which they are racialised. For example, Serkar, a young Kurdish man in his early 20s, said that:

Some people help me … Like I tell them something about my paper, I need something, it’s help me. Yeah. Good people … Other ones don’t like refugee … Because they tell me, ‘you’re coming to my country, you are bad, you are so bad’. Like that. Yeah. But it doesn’t matter, about that … I don’t care about this!

Augustin described these people as ‘haters’. He described how there are haters everywhere, and when asked if this included people on the street, he responded:

Maybe at my street where I live, yeah. When, for example, I got out to go to school, maybe I found some guys said to me, ‘hey you! Where you go?’ I can say, ‘I go to school’. ‘Oh, you go to school? You think one day you will be somebody important in your life?’ Yeah. And now when you listen to him … it really affects your life.

Hasan, 25, from Kurdistan, put these issues down to a lack of education:

They have a kind of racism here, about the different skin and talking and that – like, where did you come from. But really it's not all of them ... They have really, like, some very good people. They know equality, humanity. But I think these people they have educated – very good educated ... He knows ... even you are black skin, you are white skin, or you are poor or wealthy, like European or Asian, you are a human.

Sayed, too, believed that there was a crucial lack of understanding about refugees and their home countries, and indeed, about their lives in Greece. For example, he said that “the natives sometimes ask us something very awkward, like ‘you are getting this amount of money, you are getting these services’”. They believed, he said, that refugees were being given considerably more financial support and other forms of assistance than they actually were.

However, young refugees could also experience hostility *within* the very heterogeneous refugee and migrant community. Other participants mentioned avoiding spaces such as certain language centres which they felt were “for Syrians”, for example, and the tensions which arose in camps due to living in close proximity and challenging conditions. As well as this, it was reported by several interviewees that migrant populations who had arrived previously (such as Albanians, notably in the 1990s) and other minoritised communities (such as Roma) held grievances against newly arriving refugees, as they felt that they were being supported more generously by Greek and European authorities. This highlights the need to pay attention to the tensions at play in ‘refugee-refugee encounters’ (Dalal, 2020) – and indeed in ‘migrant-migrant encounters’ – and the multidimensionality of identities within these groups.

Beyond this gulf of misunderstanding about refugees, even when the youth did encounter Greeks and other city residents, the language barrier still prevented meaningful interactions and the development of the friendships most of the participants

desired. This could be due to either or both of the parties lacking skills or confidence in English, Greek or any of the various other languages refugees knew. For example, Serkar still felt that his English level was holding him back, despite being able to hold a conversation. When asked if he had friends from Greece or elsewhere, he replied, “no, I have just from my country before. In Greece I have a little bit friend. I don’t so much ... because my English”. Aside from preventing the development of relationships, this linguistic barrier also stopped refugees from being able to tell their stories and correct the misinformation which abounded.

Another impact of these hostile and halting encounters was more psychological: they began to shape young refugees’ self-image and self-efficacy. Alex, the aforementioned youth programme coordinator, described how the young people he worked with had begun to believe the negative messages about themselves:

That’s the thing that a lot of our participants have ... They are hard-wired with the idea that they are refugees, they are poor, people do not like them – you know, all those stereotypes that are [internalised] ... I mean, if you keep hearing it, and if you keep saying it, if you keep receiving it from all the people, of course you will believe that that’s your life.

This caused them to limit their aspirations and believe that they could only reach lower educational or other life goals – or as Alex put it, to believe that “you cannot get to the ten, you can get to two”. According to Melissa, the coordinator of a community centre, the refugees she worked with did not have to personally experience hostile encounters to be affected psychologically:

In general, that has a lot of indirect impact ... on one’s psyche and feeling of freedom of being able to do things, when this is consistently the narrative that you’re hearing. So even if you don’t have that experience, for example, on the bus where the bus driver segregates you or doesn’t let you on – which has happened to a lot of the members actually – even if you don’t have that experience, in here, your friend shares that with you over a tea or, you know, it’s just general, there’s more of that fear or concern.

All of these factors and experiences described above suggest that in their everyday lives in Thessaloniki, refugee youth were navigating what Yiftachel (2009) refers to as a 'gray space': a condition of 'inbetween-ness' or 'permanent temporariness' between acceptance and exclusion, legality and illegality, and formality and informality. It was also marked by uncertainty, as they did not know to what extent they would be legally, politically or socially accepted or excluded from one day to the next, or indeed how much time, in the long-term, they would remain in this space. For some young people, this left them with strong feelings of disappointment and hopelessness – as Alex pointed to above. However, it also became clear that this unsettled 'gray space' could be one of resistance, which gave rise to new relationships and solidarity initiatives organised by both refugees and their allies.

7.4.2. Encountering solidarity in Hearts & Minds' arts workshops

Despite these considerable social challenges and their impacts, refugee youth were quick to mention the 'good ones' who helped them: the people who were often considered more educated and more open to understanding refugees' realities. Many of these people can be described as 'solidarians' (*αλληλέγγυοι*). While in Greece, this term is used more for the grassroots activists and pro-refugee protestors who mobilised during the 'peak' of the crisis (Rozakou, 2016), here – following Goździak and Main (2020b) – I also subsume within it the staff and volunteers from NGOs who became involved in the response. It is all of these actors, and their solidarity initiatives, which have given rise to NFE offers for refugees in Thessaloniki: ranging from homework clubs and language courses to arts and parenting workshops (GESWG, 2018; Hunt, 2021a; INEE, 2020). Youth in the study often sought out such initiatives, knowing that they were intended as welcoming, safe and inclusive environments in which they could meet others of a similar age and acquire skills (see also: Hunt, 2021a; 2021b). Building

language competence was a key motivating factor for those who attended – and indeed it was the top priority for most, as they believed it would help them to gain employment. After this, youth noted it was useful for meeting and making Greek friends. As Serkar put it: “I am so young, I need more friends in Greece!”

One offer which was popular, and is thus analysed here as a case study, was the series of arts programmes run by the international NGO Hearts and Minds. Hearts and Minds’ programmes were mostly reliant on financial donations and volunteer support, and were run in ‘borrowed spaces’ around the city – such as dance studios, repurposed factories and NGO offices – which were lent to them by cultural or humanitarian organisations. In terms of their purpose, like other NGOs around the city, they aimed to facilitate positive contact between young refugees, their Greek peers and other young migrants. However, each NGO also had its own ‘flavour’ – or, indeed, its own funder-dictated remit. As Alex, for example, explained:

We provide psychosocial support and skill development through the use of arts and sports, so until now we have run several projects around theatre, film making, painting, photography, music, football, basketball ... It focus more on refugee populations, refugee and migrant population. At the same time, we try to engage locals as well ... to create learning environments for both local and refugee youth.

For Alex, building language skills was another important part of their programmes, as he felt it constituted a crucial step in social inclusion:

It's the first step towards achieving your goals ... It gives you access to a lot of things that like, not knowing, you would not have it, or you would not understand the processes. [Language] goes with understanding of how things are operating, and how they are, in order for you to be a part of it.

These principles, and the ways in which they were put into practice, led to overwhelmingly positive outcomes for youth in the study – as described below.

7.4.3. Creative encounters: new connections, language skills and confidence

As a result of their participation in Hearts and Minds' workshops, young people reported that they met their goals of building confidence and language skills; and, importantly, making friends with other young refugees, migrants and Greeks and establishing relationships with facilitators and coordinators. In the workshops, they predominantly met other young people – some of whom were Greek, but most of whom were also from refugee backgrounds. In fact, many participants came together with one or more of their siblings or friends, meaning that the same faces could often be seen across workshops. As well as other youth, they also met staff and volunteers – who, during fieldwork, were mostly Greek, with the exception of those from across Europe and North America. They included students, artists, psychologists, cultural mediators, youth workers, dancers and others, mostly volunteering their time to teach or assist with courses which typically lasted for a few months. Most of these 'solidarians' were below the age of 30 – often students or practitioners looking to gain experience in teaching and youth work – who also brought their own friends or colleagues along. As such, young refugees encountered a relatively diverse mix of people, who may also have had their own experiences of racism, discrimination, displacement or other commonalities.

Hearts and Minds' workshops were deemed particularly valuable, however, for offering the chance to develop relationships with Greeks. As Hamid, a young Kurdish man in his early 20s, explained:

Most important thing, they make us like, share with Greek people. That's good. Because the other organisations, just we were, for example, 20 refugees, one Greek. I didn't like. But in Hearts and Minds, we were Greek people, and you, from England ... That's important, for Hearts and Minds especially – like people come near, close each other ... Because of Hearts and Minds, I have a lot of friend right now.

For Sayed, too, “maybe the most important things” he had gained from his involvement in Hearts and Minds had been

coming to the society, coming to the experiences, coming to the arts ... because this is one of the way that you integrate in society. If you don't have too many friends, you will make friends, will take many experiences. I improved in this way, like my social skills ... I met so many good friends there, that are really good person, and they really help me. I took good advice from them.

Hasan had had a similar experience, saying that through Hearts and Minds, he had had the opportunity to not only mix with Greeks but also to “meet with the volunteer from different countries”. As such, he had made

many friends, from many different nationalities. And sometime you are get outside, we talk about our culture, and her culture, or his culture. And we practise our language and we talking each other. Yeah. From Hearts and Minds we are very different – okay, we are immigration, and Greek people mixed.

Just as Hasan said that their conversations continued when they “get outside”, indeed, it seemed that the relationships they developed during the courses (with Greeks and others) extended beyond the physical spaces of the studios or NGO offices. They would follow one another on social media and share resources for learning in their group chat – such as YouTube videos and CV templates – and particularly when in-person workshops were suspended due to COVID-19. Therefore, the relationships which grew from these encounters could lead to other opportunities and forms of social support in their wider lives – such as multiplying participants’ access to (information about) other spaces of cross-cultural educational contact around the city. As Hamid explained:

I have just one friend, her name is Eleni. Once, before one year, we joined a project ‘How to make a movie’ ... So I met her there, she like me ... So we finished this project, and she’s told me once, that she’s doing another about

education, about politic. Like, present speech to people. I was [there] once, just to listen and to get something.

As well as this, participants met outside of the workshops for social events such as walks on the seafront and coffee. The staff and volunteers, for their part, also invited them to their performances and exhibitions around the city, or out for group lunches, and arranged for transport to help them get there. In one example, one trainer was performing late one evening, and it would have been impossible for many of the refugee youth to attend without missing the last bus back to their camp. Therefore, the staff arranged a taxi and a plan to meet and walk to the theatre together – as the participants anxiously asked, “will you be there too? We don’t want to be at the door alone”. In this way, the relationships youth established in the workshops resulted in accompanied access to further urban spaces.

Another important outcome of their encounters in Hearts and Minds’ workshops was the ability to practise desired languages and grow in confidence with using them. This was the case for Hasan:

Hasan: We meet many different people ... The theatre [workshop] make me to brave and talk. Even you are right, even you are wrong! Ha. Just like, say your thinking, your opinion, okay. Even if accepted or not, and making me brave to speaking ... I’m very shy boy, I don’t speak. If I saw someone I say, ‘oh my god, if I say her or he, “hi”, he will be respond or not?’ ... But after that, I see it’s not like that ... But before I very shy, I said no. If I say ‘hi’, and he say me ‘yeia sou [hello]’, what can I...?

Lucy: Agh! Ha ha. Run away!

Hasan: Ha ha. Yes!

This growing confidence was observed over the course of different programmes, and particularly among young women. After sitting out of some drama games at the beginning of a course, for example, after some time they would act things out and use more English in front of the group – if still nervously giggling throughout. Alex, too, said

that he had seen a particularly positive change in the confidence of the young women who attended:

The difference that I can see that's huge, like how they interact with people that they don't know ... I think all those projects ... participating in the creative things, just makes you more comfortable with your identity, who you are.

The increased confidence in self-expression was clear. As one example, after Hasan's shy start to a drama course, some weeks later he was unable to 'freeze' during a musical warm-up game and continued dancing. When the facilitator laughed and told him to stay still, he continued smiling and moving his shoulders, saying apologetically in English, "I can't! There's music!"

These arts-based educational encounters can therefore be described as valuable in young refugees' own terms, as they enabled them to meet their social goals of gaining cross-cultural connections, language skills and confidence: the ingredients they felt they needed to overcome some of their everyday, local-level social challenges around the city. The following sections take a deeper look at how this was achieved. The first section details the key promotional processes observed, before the next discusses some key factors to consider when developing and running such activities.

7.4.4. (Co-)creating valuable encounters: key processes

The range of nationalities in the arts workshops among youth, staff and volunteers made for multilingual settings. The youth themselves spoke many different languages, whether from their home countries or picked up en route to Greece. There was a pride – and something playful and competitive – in counting off how many languages they knew, and in their attempts to test them out; while youth also helped one another by translating instructions, for example. While some young people would occasionally become despondent if they could not understand or be understood, mostly these

linguistic differences were welcomed and celebrated, including by being incorporated into activities. For example, during a hip hop session, the group translated A Tribe Called Quest's song 'Can I kick it?' into all of their languages on a flipchart, and everyone performed the song together, going through each of the translations. The pride was evident on their faces when they reached their language and everyone was shouting, "can I kick it? Yes, you can!" in Farsi, Arabic, French, and so on. This constitutes a marked difference from formal school environments, in which youth study predominantly in Greek.

One key element was the presence of multinational mediators who could support young refugees in expressing themselves across linguistic barriers. In one music session, for example, there were volunteers assisting with translations who spoke Farsi, French, Spanish, Greek, Arabic and English between them. This was especially useful for helping youth to perform during drama workshops, as Hamid explained: "it's easy, also, for these who don't understand. For me, I had no problems. I prepared myself, with help [from] the others ... They had a translator ... he know Arabic ... and he speaks English very well". The help of mediators enabled youth to participate more fully and share their ideas – as in one drama session, when a young Greek man was excitedly telling his group his idea in Greek and a volunteer assistant was translating it into English, with another translating the English into French for two of his peers. It was then translated back in the same way, enabling the group to develop a short sketch. Such mediation was also helpful for supporting informal conversations. During a painting course, for example, a young woman came who was reliant on a proactive and supportive Arabic-speaking staff member. With this mediation, she was able to speak to a British volunteer – and the three began to learn about each other's backgrounds and families.

As well as via translation, interactions were also mediated via arts materials and activities which were not based on verbal or written communication in Greek or English

– which would have required language (and indeed literacy) skills. This principle was often actively employed, such as when facilitators used visual prompts to help explain tasks and give information. However, it also arose more naturally, when objects organically helped to start conversations. In one example from a painting workshop, a new participant was initially very hesitant to use the English she knew with the group. However, after some time moving around a table drawing a collaborative story, she began helping others to label pictures and translate them into Greek and Arabic – smiling at their attempts at Arabic and gently correcting their pronunciation. This example also highlights the benefits of grouping participants across languages, rather than in monolingual groups – which, despite potentially pushing them out of their comfort zones, allowed for these much-needed opportunities for developing cross-cultural understanding across language barriers. Other researchers have also noted the significance of the materiality of arts-based encounters, and specifically the role of objects in inviting movement around a space, enabling and prompting conversations and new relations (across language and cultural divides), and overall effecting playful and embodied interactions (Askins & Pain, 2011; Heckmann Erekson, 2018; Korjonen-Kuusipuro & Kuusisto, 2019).

The activities mentioned above give an idea of the collaborative and interactive nature of the setting. Participants would engage in a lot of pair and group work: such as performing songs, creating stop-motion animations or making shapes using their bodies. Many activities, especially in the drama workshops, were based on trust and being attentive and responsive to other participants – such as leading one another blindfolded around the studio, responding to subtle eye movements or performing improvised scenes together. The success of these interactive tasks was clear when youth became more comfortable with the previously unknown participants they had been grouped with.

In addition, as also found by Mayblin et al. (2016), 'natural', banal interactions were found to be equally important for developing relationships. During breaks and the wait for other participants to arrive, some refugee youth would take advantage of the chance to practise their Greek or other languages with the staff and volunteers. Others sat alone with their phones or crowded around someone else's as they played games or shared videos, while their peers joked, smoked and chatted about everything from relationships to their countries' geographies. After a few sessions with a new group, they would call others from outside their friendship group over for snacks or cigarettes, and include them in conversations. They also demonstrated a keen interest in each other's countries, and would praise each other's language skills or dancing, for example. In other words, they had a space to exercise a range of young adult interactions which helped them to develop friendships, all outside of the structured activities which were designed to engineer them. This provides further evidence that unstructured leisure activities, based around hobbies and sports, can offer important opportunities for youth to develop their identities and initiative (Abbott & Barber, 2007).

This points to another important aspect of young refugees' encounters in these arts spaces: what Case and Hunter (2012) and Michalovich (2021) call 'identity work'. Here, I use this term to specifically mean the opportunity to share skills, jokes, interests and stories, on their own terms, while also working to break down stereotypes and determine their own visibility. In terms of skill sharing, they would teach one another dance moves and songs in their own language – proudly showing off complicated footwork they had learnt as children, or playing songs to sing together during celebrations such as participants' birthdays. As well as these skills, they shared their stories. While in asylum interviews, they had to tell 'thin' stories (Kohli, 2006) which followed strict conventions in order to convey 'deservingness' and secure their legality, in these arts spaces, they could share their personal information in ways they preferred. They joked about the refugee experience during drama games, for example

– such as in this example from my field notes, when a facilitator asked each group to form the shape of a boat:

The first group made a large, flat ship, and the second a smaller one complete with deck, two sides and two people rowing. The first group teased the second for having a little boat. However, one of the young participants in the second group – who was standing and pretending to row furiously – said, ‘it’s a small boat, for refugees! Coming from Turkey!’ They all laughed.

This moment exemplified their ability to process and make light of their experiences during these arts sessions in a ‘safe’ space, alongside allies who would not misinterpret their jokes as them being undeserving of protection. Other researchers have also found this tendency among migrants to use satire and ridicule as a coping mechanism and means of opposition to their criminalisation (e.g. Pérez & Freier, 2022).

The topic of humour and playfulness came up during an interview with Alex, who believed that engaging in ‘silliness’ could help young refugees to ‘break stereotypes’:

By making fun – in a good way, of course, of some things – it just breaks the whole stereotype and the whole idea of, you know, ‘I’m a refugee and I can do only this’. Like, ‘one-two-three’ ... I think [it] helps them to be themselves, have fun, which is very important. They understand that there is, you know, for three hours it’s like a respite – I can have a break of my whole refugee thing. Refugeehood. So I think it sometimes helps them to rebuild a little bit and re-establish, actually, who they are and who they want to be.

This means not only ‘breaking stereotypes’ for themselves, but also among the wider community – while also permitting them some ownership of city space and greater, more desirable visibility. They had access to the ‘borrowed’ educational spaces, and indeed could literally redefine them by painting murals on the walls; even if these were, in general, temporary spaces which were not frequented by the general public (for example, in run-down NGO premises). However, the arts workshops did occasionally

offer some limited opportunities to claim more public city space. This was the case with the outcome of one drama workshop, in which Hasan participated: “for three months we done the theatre project. And then … we doing very good, nice event, and the people came watching us in the city centre”. Through arts practices, young refugees therefore had chances to share – quite publicly – other aspects of their multifaceted identity beyond ‘refugee’.

Crucially, facilitators such as Alex worked to transform these temporary urban spaces into safe and supportive places of contact, allowing youth to step (or dance) out of their comfort zones. This was very apparent in young participants’ relationships with the Hearts and Minds facilitators. On one occasion, for example, a young refugee arrived at a session seeming unusually quiet. He did not want to participate and often slipped outside, which caused Alex to take him aside during a break and check what had happened that day. On their way back into the room after an apparently successful motivational talk, the young person managed a weak smile as Alex said loud enough for others to hear, “this is a different space – I know you have your problems, but they don’t need to come here”. After this, the young man participated in all of the remaining activities. On another occasion, after complaining about late arrivals, Alex reinforced the unique nature of the space, saying that “here we have values, we don’t have rules … we’re not the police or school”.

The youth, for their part, responded by showing considerable respect for Alex – giving him hugs and high-fives and asking him to join in – while also feeling comfortable enough to tease him verbally or via memes in their group chat. Hasan held him in particularly high regard, saying, “we don’t [have] a word for him. He’s very, very good”. Mayblin et al. (2016) also note the importance of the facilitator in engineering meaningful contact, as they can mediate young people’s conflicting views, give youth the confidence to share their opinions and emotions, and find ways forward. However, this facilitation – especially of arts projects which could cause difficult memories to

surface – should be done with tact, care and appropriate training (Korjonen-Kuusipuro & Kuusisto, 2019; Wilson, 2017).

7.4.5. Power, inclusivity and motivation: key considerations

This note above about facilitation leads us to considerations of the refugee-solidarian relationship, and particularly the ways in which staff and volunteers mediate, or engage in, interactions. Certainly, power relations between young refugees and Greek and other international staff and volunteers were ever unequal. Europeans and North Americans tended to be the donors, making financial contributions or bringing in-kind resources such as arts and crafts supplies. They were considered representatives of well-off populations who could afford to take months – or even years – off work to volunteer, while also having the legal rights to travel and stay. In addition, their relationship with young refugees was often didactic and one-way, putting them in the authoritative position of being holders and imparters of ‘valuable’ knowledge, working with relatively young groups. This led to contradictions in their interactions with young refugees. On the one hand, they would emphasise that all involved were a ‘team’ and would sit and smoke together during breaks, chatting as equals; whereas during activities and cultural trips, some would occasionally infantilise and strictly ‘manage’ the participants, treating them like schoolchildren with rules and curfews. In this way, their actions could subtly or unintentionally reinforce the gap between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Another issue was the potential for some facilitators to engage in ‘othering’ by focusing too heavily on the refugee experience, instead of allowing youth to fully explore and share other facets of their identities.

These issues exemplify what Askins and Pain (2011) refer to as the tense meeting of power, privilege and otherness in the ‘contact zone’ – as well as the fact that ‘hospitality’ and initiatives which rely on people’s desire to ‘help’ can still create an

uneasy relationship of host and guest (Andrikopoulos, 2017; Rast & Ghorashi, 2018).

The solidarian quest for equality, empowerment and fair participation is further complicated in educational contact zones, as teachers and/or facilitators often become authority figures. Therefore, there is a need to not only pay attention to power imbalances rooted in race, mobility and humanitarianism, but also 'adultist' tendencies – i.e. the systematic subordination of young people by adults – which can also constrain meaningful facilitator-youth contact (Kennedy, 2019).

Another more specifically pedagogical point to consider relates to the nature of the tasks involved and the extent to which all members of the group felt able and willing to participate in them – in other words, their inclusivity. One issue observed in this particular site was cultural barriers. Despite using non-verbal and object-mediated approaches, some activities were easier to understand if the participants had played similar games at school, for example. Several assumed a specific base of knowledge – such as what university involves – which some youth, due to never having been in formal education, did not have. This caused them to lose motivation and confidence. Also of note were divisions in participation according to gender. Some of the young women in the group would complain of aches or not attend at all if they knew that there would be intense physical exercise involved; while most of the young men, for their part, thrived on these activities. This compounded other gendered obstacles which affected their participation – such as being asked by their parents to take care of their much younger siblings, and having to bring them along. This limited their engagement in activities and ability to socialise freely with other attendees. All of the above illustrates the importance of taking intra-youth, intersectional issues into account when designing and running such programmes.

The final consideration, beyond young people's ability to participate in workshops, is their interest in the topic. If they were interested in painting and illustration, for example, then even if there was some confusion around instructions, the

youth would still be motivated to attend and fully take part. This therefore increased the amount and quality of interactions they engaged in, as they got to know the group, facilitators and volunteers over repeated sessions. This need for sustained interactions in arts education to routinise contact and foster transformative change has also been cited by other researchers (Askins & Pain, 2011). In this way, young refugees can be guaranteed continued support – so long as the funding and their interest remain constant.

7.5. Discussion and conclusions

Research has shown that arts can be used as a means of protest and resistance, challenging common stereotypes and misrepresentations of refugees (e.g. Bhimji, 2016). However, there is limited scholarship on the specific role of arts (education) as a means of refugees' social inclusion, or indeed, as a space for potentially positive interactions with a 'majority' public.

Drawing on young refugees' experiences in Thessaloniki, this paper has demonstrated how arts workshops run by solidarians – and, potentially, non-formal education more generally – can function as important creative '(en)counterspaces'. This means 'safe' spaces in which youth can meet and learn about one another, rebuild their confidence and navigate the everyday difficulties of their lives in Greece. Arts education gave them the tools to disrupt discriminatory practices at the everyday, local level: specifically, in gaining the language and confidence to speak back to misinformation and harmful narratives about refugees, and the opportunity to build long-term, trusting relationships within and beyond the (young) refugee community.

The observed workshops involved several key promotive processes, which were catalysed by arts objects and practices: namely, the celebration of multilingualism; linguistic and cultural mediation; collaboration and interaction; 'identity

work'; and facilitation by a leader who created a space of safety and support. These collective, creative methods enabled trust-building and self-expression via various forms of verbal and non-verbal communication. As well as these social benefits, this 'in-between' place also functioned as an effective counterspace: offering youth somewhere of their own and allowing them to reclaim physical space in the city (Case & Hunter, 2012). Within it, they could be the host; they could joke with their friends and escape their daily challenges for a while; they could practise their old and new identities; and they could be at once invited into 'Greek' society (as multi-layered as it is) while having their own 'mini-society' at the margins. As such, they became sites of potentiality and re-creation, which – through use of the arts – facilitated what Hickey-Moody and Harrison (2018) refer to as the 'materialisation' of young participants' identities and connections to place.

The question which remains, however, for NGOs such as Hearts & Minds – which have the self-proclaimed aim of fostering inclusion – is 'inclusion into what?' While the youth praised the fact that they could meet people from Greece and beyond, often the volunteers working in these 'solidarity' spaces were young and Northern or Western European. As such, besides the few Greeks who led or took part in the courses, refugee youth were mostly meeting other refugees and migrants who were potentially only staying for short and/or indeterminate periods. The most stable relationships were those with other young refugees – and as mentioned above, familiar faces could be seen across programmes, which created something of a consistent learning community. While such opportunities for refugee-refugee encounters and co-learning are very important, the lack of 'cross-cultural' contact with others beyond the refugee community could suggest that the programmes were falling short of their potential for wider social inclusion. Furthermore, in terms of the specifically cultural aspect of these programmes, it could also be argued that focusing on publicly performing 'traditional' songs and dances, for example, constitutes a superficial form of

inclusion – a harmless and arguably non-political act of social participation. In this vein, while non-formal arts programmes can support youth to “begin to see the creative and cultural spaces within the city as theirs” (McIntyre, 2016, p. 157), the point may be exactly that – that it is only those particular creative spaces to which they feel they belong, rather than the city as a whole. Such arts workshops, then, could do more to build relationships between refugees and Greeks who share the city in the longer term – to extend the benefits further out of the confines of their physical spaces and project timelines. In this way, alongside efforts to advocate for structural and political change in the treatment of refugees, such bottom-up initiatives could begin to escort the communities created within these temporary settings out of the margins of city life.

With this said, it should also be recognised that the encounters in this study *did* result in a meaningful experience for this particular group. While they may still have been a small community or ‘micro-public’ (Amin, 2002) in a counterspace of their own, which gathered and remained at the margins of society, this does not necessarily depreciate what the space and contact within it signified for this particular group. As Closs Stephens and Squire (2012) note, you do not always need to make wider claims in order to demonstrate the value or meaningfulness of encounters, as they can also have value in and of themselves. Overall, these arts workshops had considerable potential as a constructive and creative place to spend time, and as a way to bring various social actors together. They served four important functions: firstly, they enabled communication, especially via non-verbal means, which provided the basis for meaningful encounters; secondly, they fostered a sense of belonging to a local community (even if only the local refugee and ‘solidarian’ community); thirdly, they permitted youth to reclaim aspects of urban space while hostile social actors tried to exclude them from others, such as public schools; and fourthly, they permitted youth to (re)present themselves and their backgrounds and stories as they wished – to govern their own visibility, even if only within this new mini-society. As such, arts workshops

were found to be a productive space which enabled valuable encounters, connections and potentially – as a consequence – the disruption of everyday forms of exclusion.

In focusing on how refugee youth themselves felt about these encounters, this paper has attempted to re-centre their agency and power in discussions of (engineered) encounters. It highlighted how youth are not only ‘thrown’ together in urban spaces, and have activities happen *to* them; rather, they enthusiastically seek out and *choose* to engage in such opportunities, and play an active role in how processes unravel (see also Christiansen et al., 2017). It also answers Wilson’s (2017, p. 460) call to consider “how ‘meaning’ is conceptualized and by whom” – which is especially important, given that “work on encounters has often tended to focus on the perspective of the majority or the powerful” (pp. 460-461). The result is that a “plurality of perspectives” are marginalised, and potentially, “the different ways in which encounters are valued” may be dismissed (p. 461).

Furthermore, the paper contributes to discussions on the specific role of creativity in the lives of young migrants. For refugee youth, collaboratively producing and sharing media in their own voices enables ownership of representations, the opportunity to expand and strengthen social networks, identity work, communication and learning through multimodal literacies, visibility and engagement with audiences (Michalovich, 2021); while also allowing them to engage in activism and, overall, exercise agency (Godin & Doná, 2016) and navigate everyday borders (Pace, 2017). This research offers an example of how this can be done, via specific promotive processes. To explore this potential further, future research could pay greater attention to arts-based initiatives led by refugees themselves – as this remains a considerable gap in the literature – as well as focusing in on the more specific dynamics of refugee-refugee and refugee-solidarian encounters in arts and educational settings. There could also be more attempts to blend the subject and tools of such research – i.e. using social arts as method – by using techniques such as participatory theatre (e.g.

Opfermann, 2020) to foster relations among all involved in the research and commit to “conviviality as both a research practice and a research outcome” (Kaptani et al., 2021, p. 68).

In terms of practice and policy, the findings in this paper emphasise the need to understand young refugees' own goals – i.e. how and why they participate in educational opportunities or other forms of contact – and what to leverage to encourage deeper engagement and interaction. To ensure sustainable future opportunities to build on what has already been achieved, it is clear that longer-term commitment from participants, facilitators, organisations and funders needs to be actively encouraged. In addition, it appears that youth benefit from spaces and opportunities for informal contact (such as social events) around these structured programmes, as well as support for the interests which brought them to the workshops in the first place. On a wider scale, however, advocacy work needs to counteract new Greek legislation as of 2021 which has been said to “hinder civil society organisations' ability to provide services and monitor the treatment of refugees and displaced people” (Choose Love, 2021, p. 3) – which adds more bureaucratic and practical hurdles to the work of 'solidarians'.

8. PAPER 4: ‘LOCKED-DOWN LEARNING AMID COVID-19: REFUGEE YOUTH IN GREECE NAVIGATING YET ANOTHER CRISIS’

Finally, we come to the fourth paper of this thesis, which addresses how young refugees’ educational engagement was impacted by an unexpected third crisis: namely, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the consequent closure of schools and other learning centres during lockdowns. It is presented below in full. An abridged version is currently under review at a peer-reviewed journal in the field of education studies.

8.1. Abstract

Greece, and the hundreds of thousands of refugees currently trapped in the country, are no strangers to the concept of ‘crisis’. The last 15 years have seen economic collapse, with its devastating consequences for employment rates and public sector funding; a vast increase in migrant arrivals, who continue to be held in inhumane conditions; and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. The first two of these crises were already severely impacting refugees’ ability to participate in Greek social and economic life, including in spheres such as education. With the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020 and lockdowns being enforced across the country, this situation became even more dire. Based on interview data from a study on young refugees’ (aged 15-25) engagement with education in Greece – a project which became entangled with the pandemic and its restrictions – this paper explores how exactly lockdowns impacted participants’ learning and compounded pre-existing issues. It details how both formal and non-formal educational opportunities were disrupted or lost; how technological and family-related issues affected their ability to continue learning online; and how wider issues such as uncertainty and immobility came into play. However, the paper also shows how youth tried to navigate these constraints to begin or continue learning with

the support of peers, educators and non-governmental organisation staff and volunteers – highlighting their expressions of relational agency amid overlapping crises. It concludes by arguing for sustained financial and political support for refugee-serving organisations, alongside greater flexibility and accessibility in the public education system.

8.2. Introduction

The accommodation programme, due to the COVID situation, has been suspended. Thousands of people are expected to exit their apartments *and* containers in sites by the end of May. Ten thousand, something like that. And we are talking about school!

Lydia, NFE programme coordinator, 28th April 2020

Refugees arriving in Greece in recent years – following the often deeply traumatising experience of displacement – have entered a country itself dealing with ‘critical times’ (Dalakoglou & Agelopoulos, 2018). Since the early 2000s, the ‘crisis’ narrative has justified exceptionalist state measures such as severe cuts to public funding (Christodoulou et al., 2016), with far-reaching consequences for the refugees who came to be caught up in them. Prior to the global COVID-19 outbreak, refugees were already being held in overcrowded camps far outside cities, for example, and struggled to obtain the documents needed to work legally, which has long limited their ability to participate in Greek social and economic life (Simopoulos & Alexandridis, 2019; Skleparis, 2017). That is if they even reach Greek shores at all, given the increasing incidences of ‘push-backs’ at sea (Schmitz, 2022).

When the pandemic reached the country in March 2020, refugees then faced additional discrimination in the form of prolonged camp lockdowns, based on imagined threats to wider public health (Cossé, 2020; HRW, 2021). Importantly for this paper, such measures also restricted their ability to attend high schools, universities and other places of learning – such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – which made it

even more difficult for displaced youth to either begin or continue along an educational trajectory. Indeed, Fischer (2021) notes that while the government's response to the pandemic has been lauded for swiftly putting strict restrictions into place, the Greek and international mainstream media have failed to recognise the disruption to young refugees' education and its "worrying consequences".

Based on data from an ethnographic project which itself became entangled with the pandemic and its restrictions, this paper discusses these difficulties and how youth themselves took steps to navigate them. Specifically, the paper explores the following questions:

- How did COVID-19 lockdowns in Greece impact young refugees' engagement with post-15 education?
- How did youth navigate these impacts, and which key actors and factors were involved in this process?

By paying attention to young refugees' navigational strategies – using Vigh's (2009, 2010) lens of *social navigation* – the paper aims to re-centre their agency and tactics for dealing with adversity, and the role of relationships in this process. In doing so, it builds on a burgeoning area of research which highlights refugees' individual and collective practices of challenging isolation and marginalisation, including during COVID-19 (e.g. Tsavdaroglou & Kaika, 2022), and their ability to work out "their own agency for survival" alongside essential governmental and institutional support (Okello et al., 2020, p. 3).

In terms of structure, I begin by outlining how the concepts of 'crisis' and 'navigation' are understood in this paper, including for whom exactly recent events constitute a 'crisis'. I then review the literature on how lockdowns have impacted refugees and their education around the world, before summarising available reports on the nature and impacts of lockdowns in Greece (along with the gaps the paper aims to fill). This is followed by a description of the project and how I adapted the

methodology in response to COVID-19 restrictions. In the remainder of the paper, I present and discuss findings on the impacts of lockdowns on young refugees in the study – such as losing out on learning and work opportunities – and how they and the key supportive stakeholders around them attempted to navigate them. I conclude with implications for research, policy and practice.

8.3. Conceptual understandings: ‘navigating’ ‘crisis’

Crises are moments of simplification of social relations and clarification of reality. They reveal the hidden which we usually do not see.
(Antentas, 2020, p. 316)

It could be argued that the last 15 years in Europe have been characterised by a discourse of ‘crisis’. Key critical events have been the financial collapse of 2008, with its long-lasting ramifications (Petropoulos & Tsobanoglou, 2014); the higher numbers of migrants arriving on the continent via irregular means, with figures peaking in 2015 (UNHCR, 2023); and the COVID-19 pandemic, which reached Europe in early 2020 (Spireri et al., 2020). While these phenomena are often presented in political rhetoric and the media as an economic, social or political crisis for European states, there has also been much simultaneous discussion about who, exactly, they impact the most – for whom, in reality, these events truly constitute ‘crises’ (e.g. Rosen et al., 2023).

In Greece, refugees had been experiencing the negative impacts of migration mismanagement and the economic downturn for some years before the pandemic reached the country – which then added a public health crisis to an already incredibly challenging situation. The ‘financial crisis’ had justified harsh austerity measures such as severe and prolonged underfunding and pay freezes in the public sector, which contributed to poverty and inequality – and especially for poor and marginalised groups; while the ‘crisis’ narrative itself stoked fearmongering and blame attribution (Oxfam, 2013; Knight, 2013). Across Europe, living conditions worsened and racism

and nationalism rose, making all migrants targets of abuse and control (Fradejas-García et al., 2021).

In terms of the ‘refugee crisis’, the politics of ‘catastrophization’ (Ophir, 2010) also authorised exceptionalist measures – this time aiming at policing and enforcing borders (Cantat, 2016; De Genova, 2017; De Lauri, 2019). These were based on the idea that migratory movements were “illegitimate and exceptional” and required “emergency measures in order to restore putative order and normality” (Cantat, 2016, p. 11). This politics relies upon a ‘spectacularisation of migration’ led by the media which reasserts a particular image of the national community and enables “blame displacement” by reorienting “the popular discontent and hostility triggered by economic and political difficulties towards those produced as illegitimate” (Cantat, 2020, p. 189). For Topali (2020, p. 321), in the case of Greece, orchestrated images of refugee arrivals “conditioned the national imagination” – meaning that refugees then “essentialized all ‘crises’”. This only became worse as COVID-19 hit the country in March 2020, and refugees and migrants were positioned as conduits of the virus and an even bigger threat to public health than some had declared them to be previously (Fouskas et al., 2022). This more negative public opinion and increased racism and discrimination, Fouskas et al. explain, caused refugees to suffer from even more limited access to services such as healthcare and accommodation, which multiplied the impacts of previous ‘crises’.

This paper thus takes the position that the concept of ‘crisis’ has been misappropriated by states to legitimise long-term, exceptional actions, resulting in enduring conditions of precarity which are most acutely felt by disadvantaged and marginalised social groups such as refugees. I join researchers such as Rajaram (2016) and Ansems de Vries and Guild (2018) in acknowledging that political narratives of the ‘refugee crisis’ have obscured their suffering, when it was in fact a ‘protection’ or indeed ‘reception’ crisis for people on the move (Almustafa, 2021; RSA, 2018). These

people now, amid the pandemic, continue to be the most impacted and controlled by ongoing, overlapping ‘crisis’ mitigation measures.

This is not to say, however, that refugees and other migrants passively accept these conditions of suffering. Rather, this paper highlights how they agentically find ways and means of negotiating them. To conceptualise refugees’ expressions of agency, Vigh’s (2009, 2010) analytical lens of ‘social navigation’ is employed in this paper. Social navigation refers to the ways in which migrants negotiate everyday challenges and long-term planning out of adversity and towards goals they perceive as beneficial, in contexts of ever-changing, adverse socio-political conditions. This ongoing re-adaptation of praxis to ‘get by’, in line with emerging opportunities, is described by Vigh as ‘motion within motion’: a reference to the fact that both migrants’ tactics and social formations are constantly in flux. This motion requires flexibility, a possible manipulation of rules and a constant re-evaluation of barriers and opportunities. The focus on deliberate and calculated decision-making counters the pervasive image of the passive and powerless refugee, and as such has been used in recent research which aims to centre their agency (e.g. Daniel et al., 2020; Denov & Bryan, 2012). It also highlights the influence of economic and political arrangements on decision-making.

Another important influence on young refugees’ strategising is social relations with family, educational stakeholders and other actors in their lives (Daniel et al., 2020); as indeed, navigational actions can be highly relational or even collective. Going further, it can be argued that agency is “acquired in and through social relationships” (Gateley, 2014, p. 6), while being shaped by relational conditions such as power dynamics (Balcioglu, 2018). Importantly for this project, these relations can shape young people’s planning in areas of their lives such as education – making it not an individual project, but what Okkolin and Ramamoorthi (2017, p. 39) describe as “a complex social phenomenon par excellence”.

8.4. The global impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on refugees and their education

Around the world, young refugees' educational projects have faced severe disruption as a result of COVID-19. While refugees have access to schools in 65% of countries, fewer than half offered remote education for refugees at some or all levels (UNHCR, 2022b). This meant that they either went without learning materials as schools and NGO-run learning centres closed (Gjerløw et al., 2022; Mandikiana et al., 2021), or they had to rely on teachers' personal initiatives to offer and adapt to online education (Abu Moghli & Shuayb, 2020; Jawad, 2020; Loganathan et al., 2021). Where distance education was available, the most pressing issue was having no access to a tablet, personal computer or smartphone at home, or a strong enough internet connection (if any) to participate in online learning (Abu Moghli & Shuayb, 2020; Karabey & Altuntas, 2022; Loganathan et al., 2021; Mupenzi et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2021). This is mostly because refugees are more likely to live in rural areas and be of a lower socioeconomic status (Parker & Alfaro, 2022). Beyond these issues, it has also been found that migrant students' sense of belonging has been severely negatively impacted by heightened post-traumatic stress symptoms during school closures (Szelei et al., 2022) – compounded by incidences of xenophobic cyberbullying, as migrants have been blamed for spreading the virus (Parker & Alfaro, 2022). Furthermore, young refugees have also had less contact with teachers, who can be important figures of support: for example, they can "sound the alarm" if they discover that a child has been exposed to violence (World Bank, 2020), or otherwise provide social and emotional support via daily classroom interactions or referrals to other services (Primdahl et al., 2021).

COVID-19 restrictions also exacerbated pre-existing issues for refugee and migrant communities outside their formal and non-formal learning environments. They experienced even greater issues with accessing healthcare, work, social protections and technological devices, alongside unfavourable state policies and violations of

human rights (Badanta et al., 2022; De Jesus et al., 2022). Refugees were disproportionately impacted by food and housing insecurity, alongside xenophobia and pre-existing inequalities which cause poorer health outcomes (De Jesus et al., 2022; Loganathan et al., 2021; Parker & Alfaro, 2022). Many parents were left unable to support or invest in their children's education, as lockdowns impacted families' formal and informal income-generating activities and threatened humanitarian aid (Duclos & Palmer, 2020; Parker & Alfaro, 2022). These financial difficulties contributed to more problems in the home, as young refugees faced increased conflicts, neglect, abuse and a lack of access to child protection services; and when they were girls and women, greater vulnerability to social isolation, restrictions on privacy, digital exclusion, domestic and gender-based violence, early marriage and pregnancy (Baird et al., 2020; Mandikiana et al., 2021; Mednick, 2020; Seguin, 2020; World Bank, 2020).

In general, school closures also contribute to the decreased likelihood of young refugees continuing with their education after schools reopen – meaning that they are left for longer without access to a “(relative) safe haven from violence and other external threats”, and especially in fragile contexts (World Bank, 2020, p. 13). All of the above highlights the fact that as well as causing immediate challenges, educational disruptions can also have much longer-term consequences for refugees – such as widening inequalities and impacting their ability to build their lives and careers (Duclos & Palmer, 2020).

8.5. COVID-19 lockdowns in Greece: compounding refugees' challenges

Lockdowns and other measures implemented to prevent virus transmission in Greece were described as “swift” and “severe” (Giugliano, 2020; Tugwell & Nikas, 2020). The operations of all educational institutions (including NFE providers) were closed nationwide in early March 2020; followed by the closure of food, social, entertainment,

tourism and cultural venues in mid-March, with strict mobility restrictions from late March (Akritidis et al., 2021; Theirworld, 2020b). Authorities banned all unnecessary movement, blocked access to the islands, deployed surveillance drones and – as the only other country apart from China to do so, at the time – required the sending of text messages to obtain state permission to leave one's home (Carassava, 2020). All refugee-hosting structures, including camps and hotel accommodation, were locked down on 21st March 2020, with these measures continually extended until 15th September 2020 – which prompted observers to suggest that the virus was being used as an excuse to keep these structures closed (Amnesty International, 2020; ECRE, 2020). This became more evident when the rest of the country began moving once more from May-July 2020 – going to bars, beaches and markets, and tentatively welcoming tourists – and yet refugees in camps were still in lockdown, despite there being few or no new cases (Akritidis et al., 2021; Cossé, 2020; HRW, 2021; Petsinis, 2021).

Beyond having their mobility reduced for a longer period of time, the conditions refugees were held in (such as in Moria camp, on the island of Lesbos) continued to be critically overcrowded and unsanitary, with direly insufficient resources and facilities (HRW, 2019; Owens, 2017). The substandard living conditions, lack of prevention measures, insufficient water and soap, limited testing and surveillance and restricted movement in Reception and Identification Centers (RICs) and Reception Sites (i.e. camps) – combined with prolonged lockdowns – led to significantly higher levels of COVID-19 transmission among the refugee community than among the general population in Greece (Kondilis et al., 2021; Theirworld, 2020b). Beyond these urgent physical health issues, refugees also had to deal with increased “racial and ethnic inequalities”, hostile and anti-migrant rhetoric and precarity – which amplified their vulnerability by perpetuating exclusion in the employment, housing and social care and protection sectors (Fouskas et al., 2022). This led to negative psychological impacts

(Marchi et al., 2022), which were made worse by the postponement of asylum determination interviews for at least an additional year, after applicants had already been waiting for two years or more in some cases.

However, Fouskas et al. (2022, pp. 15-16) emphasise that despite these challenges, the refugees in their study also demonstrated hope. They found that many

take an active stance against the pandemic threat and the difficult conditions of their lives: they are vaccinated or have scheduled vaccination, adhere to the individual protection measures and, above all, make plans for the future, both for themselves and their children, even in the same country that has not always been hospitable to them.

These plans were hindered by the fact that young refugees' educational participation was heavily impacted by lockdowns – and more so than for children and youth from the wider population. In fact, campaigners have even claimed that the pandemic "normalised the exclusion and ghettoization of underage refugees and asylum seekers" (Fischer, 2021).

8.5.1. Impact of lockdowns on young refugees' education

As of October 2019, there were an estimated 37,000 refugee children in the country; and of those who were of school age, approximately one third (12,800) were enrolled in public schools (UNICEF, 2019b). For all youth, schools in Greece were closed for in-person teaching on 10th March 2020; partially reopened in mid-May for a short period before the summer holidays; and then closed again from November 2020 until the beginning of 2021, when high schools' distance learning provision also ceased (HRW, 2021). As part of these social distancing measures, NFE centres were also closed (Fouskas et al., 2022; Theirworld, 2020b). For young refugees, available reports suggest that this resulted in record levels of educational exclusion during the 2019-2020 academic year (RSA, 2021). This was due to camps being locked down for

prolonged periods; a lack of digital devices and technological infrastructure in the sites, and thus an inability to follow online courses; an even greater lack of transportation; understaffed reception classes; and resistance among both the local and refugee communities to youth attending schools (Caritas Hellas, 2021; Greek Ombudsman, 2021; Theirworld, 2020b).

In terms of digital access, refugee children and youth were apparently left out of the Ministry of Education's initiative to provide schools and students with laptops and tablets (HRW, 2021). Even where organisations used lower-tech resources for learning or to connect learners and teachers – such as podcasts and WhatsApp messages – these initiatives were still hampered by the lack of technology and delays with roll-out, due to the severity of the situation (Theirworld, 2020b). In the formal education sector, it appeared to fall to individual schools to help refugees overcome the challenges of accessing online learning, and some were more prepared and open than others – such as those already participating in refugee student inclusion programmes (see for example EWC, 2023). On top of missing out on learning, the lack of contact with NFE-providing NGOs meant that young refugees also missed out on the other information and psychosocial support they provide – resulting in the amplification of issues such as drug and alcohol use (Theirworld, 2020b).

According to campaigners, all of these factors meant that refugee youth were “disproportionately” unable to participate in formal education (Fischer, 2021). Indeed, the Greek Ombudsman (2021) found that while 62% of school-aged children in mainland camps were enrolled, only 14% could participate, which further widened the gap between enrolment and attendance rates. In addition, for those who had not been able to engage with virtual learning, it meant the challenge of effectively starting in the middle of the school year (Fischer, 2021). Problems persisted throughout the 2020-2021 academic year, with only 1 in 7 young refugees in camps able to attend school. This caused organisations such as Human Rights Watch (2021) to call for an urgent

reform of ‘discriminatory policies’ before the next year began. They argued that it was not necessarily viral infections which stopped young refugees from participating, but virus-related restrictions such as prolonged camp lockdowns – alongside the exacerbation of previous issues such as a lack of teachers and transport (Fischer, 2021; HRW, 2021). For Fischer, “in the name of public health and security, the government was quick to impose disproportionate restrictions on a vulnerable population” – while “not doing enough to ensure their access to basic rights such as continued education”.

The impacts of these policies on the education and wider life experiences of youth aged 15-25 in Greece (and indeed Europe more broadly) are still mostly unknown – despite three years now having passed since the outbreak of COVID-19. In what is available, there are four notable gaps. Firstly, few academic studies focus solely on education (e.g. Palaiologou & Prekate, forthcoming). Rather, education is more often analysed as just one of several sectors, such as employment and housing (e.g. Fouskas et al., 2022). Secondly, much of the grey literature which *is* available refers to children’s public school enrolment and attendance up to the age of 15, rather than *non-formal* educational programmes which also cater for older youth. Thirdly, reports from the grey literature tend to focus on children and youth in camps, and especially those on the Aegean islands, meaning that there is little information about those in different accommodation situations on the mainland. Fourthly, while available reports mainly speak of barriers, little is known about how young refugees tackled these barriers themselves or found alternative ways to continue learning. This paper contributes towards filling these gaps by presenting findings on young refugees’ navigation of the challenges of lockdowns – including the impact on both their formal and non-formal learning – from a doctoral study which itself became entangled with the pandemic and its associated restrictions.

8.6. Researching into an unexpected third 'crisis': an adapted methodology

The data in this paper comes from a doctoral study on educational participation among 15 to 25-year-old asylum-seeking and refugee youth in Greece, with ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Thessaloniki: the country's 'second city' in the north. Young participants were invited to participate if they were attending at least one educational activity per week; if they were 15 to 25 years old; and if they had arrived in Greece during or since the 'peak' of the 'refugee crisis' in 2015. These criteria enabled an understanding of what supported youth to continue participating, amid laws and policies put in place in response to the 'refugee crisis' – while the age range aligned with NGOs' youth programming. Stakeholders were invited to participate if they had first-hand experience of young refugees' (educational) experiences.

The original plan, which was the case for the majority of the fieldwork (between October 2019 and March 2020), was to volunteer as an English as a Foreign Language teacher and teaching assistant at four NGOs in Thessaloniki, while attending other educational activities and holding interviews with youth and stakeholders such as teachers. During this time, I met new and old colleagues, got to know young refugees around the learning centres, taught and helped with lessons and began individual and pair interviews. I held two pair interviews with four youth, involving drawing tasks (namely, sketching out pathways to their future aspirations) and interviewed 17 stakeholders: including teachers, coordinators, social workers, caretakers, cultural mediators and a parent. Ethical approval was granted by the Social Sciences and Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford.

However, around the beginning of 2020, news of the COVID-19 outbreak and its transmission across international borders reached us, causing considerable worry among the refugee community I was working with. When the first case was reported in Greece – indeed, in Thessaloniki – panicked chatter filled the classrooms. By March,

several learners were staying away from lessons, citing fear of the virus as the reason. By 10th March, as schools and other educational institutions closed, the NGO coordinators followed suit and cancelled all in-person activities until further notice. With borders closing, and my family on the other side of one in a neighbouring country, I reluctantly left both the city and Greece. What my colleagues and I imagined would be a 'two-week break' until things 'blew over' became a multi-year pandemic.

As time rolled on, and we realised by the end of March 2020 that COVID-related mobility restrictions had an indefinite end, the NGOs I was volunteering for began online teaching – and after discussions with my institution's ethics committee, I restarted lessons, interviews and conversations with refugee youth, teachers and others virtually. Twenty-one stakeholders took part in these online interviews (totalling 38 altogether), as well as the remaining eight members of the 'core group' of 12 youth. Most of these were individual, with the exception of one pair who wished to be interviewed together. These conversations (whether in-person or online) lasted from 25 minutes to over one hour, with an average duration of 40 minutes. All participants chose to speak in English, despite my insistence that either I or they could invite an interpreter to join us. All interviews followed the same semi-structured question schedule, to try to minimise the impact of the change in methods on the data. This period of adapted fieldwork concluded in June 2020.

Regarding impacts on the data: given that I approached the fieldwork as a piece of critical ethnography – i.e. I critiqued and aimed at changing aspects of society, highlighted the impacts of marginalisation, examined power relations and took a clear position as an advocate for refugee youth (Madison, 2011) – it is especially important here to examine my identity, position and power and their potential influences on the research process. Indeed, while I consider myself an advocate, the fact that I entered the field as a young, white, British woman and doctoral student from the University of Oxford may have impacted how participants and others in the field interacted with me –

particularly given the power and privilege associated with this racialisation and institution. One key action to mitigate such bias was to carry out a pilot study prior to the main period of data generation to build relationships in the field, assure participants that I was not there to judge them or their practice (but rather to learn) and to gain as much understanding of their everyday realities as possible.

8.7. Findings

8.7.1. Lost opportunities and disrupted learning

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ‘core group’ of 12 youth in the study were engaging in various learning activities. One young woman was studying for a bachelor’s degree; others were at senior high school (*λυκείο*), either in reception classes or as part of the ‘mainstream’ cohort; and still others were attending vocational high school (*EPAL*) during either their daytime or evening ‘shifts’. Alongside these formal studies, they participated in non-formal language, arts and sports courses run by national and international NGOs and local volunteer groups in camps, community centres and even directly in shelters for unaccompanied youth. Other initiatives were also beginning to pop up around Thessaloniki and catch young people’s interest – such as an in-person conversation club led by local volunteer university students. This was popular among all involved, who were predominantly youth, and especially among the young refugees. This is because it offered the chance to meet other young people, improve their Greek and talk about everyday topics – in what one NFE teacher, Faidra, called “a more meaningful way than teaching in the classroom”. Because of this, she said that “this is going well, they enjoy the activity”.

The biggest issue, then, as lockdowns began, was that all of these types of in-person learning opportunities were either paused or lost. As mentioned above, schools closed on 10th March, and only partially reopened in May, after this date was pushed

back several times. At the same time, non-formal activities around the city were also suspended – such as the “classes outside” the accommodation centre where Cassie was a social worker, in which youth “learn languages like German … or English or Greek”. This was incredibly disappointing for the young residents, as many were learning Western European languages as part of their plans to apply for family reunification in countries such as Germany. Furthermore, in-house learning at the centre had also been suspended. As Cassie explained, pre-lockdown, there had been “some initiatives from private colleges, [who] were getting in the shelter in order to have private classes with our students, and help them progress”. However, “now it’s stopped, because of Corona”. Similarly, local volunteer activities such as the conversation club were also suspended. As Faidra explained at the end of April: “unfortunately, everything have stopped. But we’re hoping that we can do something in the future, in the near future”. Sadly, as restrictions continued and the scale of the pandemic became apparent, the ‘after Corona’ future became more and more distant.

Other educational offers had not even had the chance to start. As Cassie explained about one new initiative:

It’s from some Greek teachers from schools … They have this small group and they were teaching classes in camps before, and they were willing to come in the shelter to help the boys with the classes. Because they are teaching in schools, so they really know what every class has to deal with. And yeah, we were about to start that, but we will start it hopefully after Corona.

Elsewhere, plans to target traditionally harder-to-reach learners from the refugee community were also suspended. This was the case at a women’s centre, which was coordinated by Melissa:

We wanted to reach teenage girls, from sort of the 13 to early 20s age range, and specifically engage them in some activities. So we had just started piloting … We were just trying to map out a little bit, like, what further support or

conversations we could provide ... Sadly, due to the virus, it was very, sort of, left with a hanging question mark.

This disruption was frustrating for those organising such initiatives, as they had worked hard in the years before the pandemic to gain the trust of both learners and administrators. One such example was Vera, an experienced teacher and Refugee Education Coordinator¹⁸ (REC), who was part of a group of educational volunteers which had just gained access to another centre for unaccompanied youth. As she explained:

For some shelters it was forbidden for any volunteer to go to the shelter, because it was the organisational decision ... But with us, it's easier ... We are on the second year. They hear from all around what we are doing, and it's more easy for us to be trusted to go to the shelter ... We were making progress before, ha, the lockdown. It was good. For a while it was very good.

For youth it was, of course, even more disheartening not knowing for how long the lockdowns would continue. The immediate uncertainty of not knowing for how long educational centres would be closed, and the consequences this had for their studies and well-being, caused anxiety. Hala, for example, a 15-year-old from Syria, told me on the 11th March that if schools had to remain closed for more than a month, a plan was proposed to cut into the students' summer holidays to make up for lost time. She was very unhappy about this, saying that while they had a lot to study if they wanted to pass the university entrance exams, "I need a break too! A longer summer one, not just one right now! One before the new school year. I can't go straight into next year!" Marwa, a 25-year-old from Syria – who had won a prestigious scholarship to study for a bachelor's degree – also had doubts about being able to complete her education in the

¹⁸ 'Refugee Education Coordinators' are teachers from the public system who have been seconded to liaise between schools, refugee families, NGOs and other stakeholders to support and encourage young refugees' public school enrolment (OECD, 2018).

longer term. As she said, “I’m waiting to graduate, hopefully! Ha. If this Corona is finished, next year I will graduate”.

Lockdowns also disrupted youth’s plans to pursue vocational education routes either in Thessaloniki or elsewhere, due to the closure of potential employees’ offices and their own restricted mobility around the country. This was the case for Sayed, a 22-year-old from Iran:

More than three months ago I had an interview thing for a traineeship in Athens – then I was back, and quarantine of course started. But you know as everywhere, everything is locked, and now we can’t go there.

Hamid – a young Kurdish man in his early 20s – had also missed out on such vocational learning opportunities. He told me at the end of April:

I was about to go with [NGO], to working with them. My friend, her name is Eleni, she told me that ‘you will come with us’. I share many project about violence, talking about various things. But quarantine came – then we didn’t ... I was about to be ‘little’ translator ... She told me, ‘you are very good. And you will help us’.

I commiserated with him and he smiled sadly. “Soon”, he said. “After quarantine”.

8.7.2. Broader lockdown challenges

Another issue for youth who had already completed educational programmes was being able to use the skills they had learnt to gain paid employment. Sayed, for example, had already completed one traineeship with an NGO alongside attending high school. However, despite applying for various roles, he told me on the 22nd April that COVID-19 had slowed down this process:

During that traineeship I got many good skills like managing the team, organising, assisting, being smart, being very multi-skilled person ... and now I’m applying for some other jobs in Greece. Because of quarantine, they haven’t responded yet, but after quarantine [we will] see what will happen.

This led to even greater uncertainty about what the future held than they were already accustomed to as refugees in Greece. The youth were used to being held in long waits for documents and asylum interviews, for example, and decisions on their access to formal education – as well as being denied paid work. The present then became even more unsettled, however, by the unpredictability of constantly changing rules and restrictions. As Marwa said at the end of April,

Marwa: It's a little bit difficult, you know? We are kind of, like, locked at home, we're moving only for the supermarket. Yeah.
Lucy: Someone told me things will open at the beginning of May, maybe?
Marwa: I guess in the 4th. Yes, the beginning of May. But the thing is they are giving extensions, every time the period is going to finish ... We were expecting to finish at 27th April, and later on, they just said 'no, you will stay more, until May'.

This uncertainty led youth to share feelings of being thrown off kilter, and losing touch with normal life. For example, when I was talking to Jilwan, a 25-year-old from Kurdistan, on 12th May about his previous education, he suddenly stopped during his answer and said: "I don't know, I didn't remember! Ha! Because of Coronavirus, everything is gone! Ha ha".

Jilwan's 'normal' life in Greece was generally a very social one – meaning that lockdowns had hit him hard. He told me that he missed busy city centre life, and had decided that "maybe after two days, three days I will go outside – maybe, we will see how it's going". All of the youth were naturally frustrated with being 'trapped' at home, and primarily missed social interactions and the routines of daily life – most of which centred around educational activities in school or NGO settings. For example, Hala told me in mid-April that she did not like the lockdowns, because usually

in the morning I had school, then ... going with friends. I don't stay in home. For me it's too hard to sit in the home, it's like, ugh! I want to go out! Ha ... Every

day I tell my mum, 'we need something from supermarket' ... 'Today we don't want anything, you stay here!'

However, lockdowns dragged on, and youth remained confined at home for several more weeks. Hamid described how he was similarly fed up, and had tried to venture out:

I hope it will get end soon. I'm dying at home, I wanna go out! I wanna see human, ha ha! ... I'm getting outside sometimes, but I will go to, for example, Aristotelous [Square] – no one there. What's this? I want to see humans! It sucks, ha.

The loss of social connections did not only refer to friends, but also to other supports such as counsellors from NGOs and other learning settings. Marwa, for example, said that pre-COVID-19, she had been speaking to her university psychologist often – but then struggled to find a counsellor via an NGO to continue this form of support during lockdowns. As she said,

they could arrange me WhatsApp call, arrange me Viber call, any kind of thing you know – that someone's telling me, like, you're going to be well. It's really important sometime that you have someone who's going to say 'everything's going to be well'. Even if it's not true ... it's making you relaxed. When you are stress, you're not able to make a right decision. Sometime you need some advice, you know? It's not always money. Sometime if someone's talking to you, it can be more than money.

Other youth, such as Sayed, shared such anxieties with me about the pandemic:

Sayed: I hope everything will be alright. With this quarantine ... I hope this pandemic ... will go, it will disappear soon. And try not to go out, try to stay safe.
Lucy: *Nai, menoume sto spiti* [Greek: yes, we stay at home]. Ha.
Sayed: *Menoume sto spiti* ... ha ha.

Other youth put on a brave face. Jilwan, for example, shrugged and said: “I don’t afraid. It’s easy, it’s like any kind of virus, it’s okay. And this one also, it’s going. We know that”. However, on 12th May, when some restrictions had been lifted, he seemed more anxious about the conditions. He said that many people were meeting outside again in the city centre and going about their daily lives, and that they “don’t afraid, anyone”, despite the fact that “now also many people dead”. He told me that two days previously,

Jilwan: We went the centre also meet some friends together … It’s okay, but a little bit dangerous … that’s why you must to take care of each other.
Lucy: Do you still need to keep a distance?
Jilwan: Yeah, like that. Er, with mask and gloves, only like that. Because here in Greece now, you must to wear a mask. If you didn’t wear a mask, you will pay 150 euro … But not everywhere. Now if you going to the *paraleia*, the sea, it’s okay.

8.7.3. Navigating lockdown challenges: trying to keep learning

As schools closed in March 2020, the last years of high school were prioritised. Online learning options were created, but there were issues with not only young refugees being unable to access courses, but all students. As Hala explained, several weeks into the first lockdown:

They do for us some programmes and we study in the home. But for me some programme I cannot do, because they didn’t accept me – or they have so many people and they never got signed. But I didn’t do all the lessons. I just do three from my lesson.

This was despite her best efforts to access the course:

I tried so much, and I called the school. They didn’t answer me. There are so many people like me, the children that I have, my friends, they tell me also we cannot go inside the programme. I just say it’s fine – I try but they didn’t accept.

Serkar, a young Kurdish man in his 20s, told me at the end of May that he had also found it difficult to continue with high school online, because of the nature of virtual education:

It's so difficult online, because if you don't speak [in person], and the internet is bad, you don't understand little bit ... If your friend is with you, it's much better! For online study, and to go with outside. Better to learn language.

Another key issue, beyond poor quality internet connections and isolation from friends and teachers, was not having the technology to participate in the first place. In mid-May, Jilwan said that he was still participating in online lessons every day, but that he was reliant upon his phone: "until now we have school by online. Every day ... we speak with teacher, and by phone – because I didn't have a laptop, that's why".

These technological problems compounded other pre-existing issues, such as reception class teachers starting late in the year and learners having to do paid work alongside their studies. Hasan, for example, had been accepted into a vocational high school, but had only just started his lessons before the restrictions were put in place:

Hasan: I start with first year because the language, but we are so unlucky, because our teacher came late. In the end of January the teacher started the language lessons – just February we start the classes, the lessons from Greek – and the Corona outbreak is came. And we stay at home all the three months, ha. And this month from first of the June, the Greek government decided that the school will be closed because it's finished ... for the summer. Like we don't get benefit, the first year that we learn the language.

Lucy: Were there no online lessons or anything?

Hasan: Er, we try to do it, but because this time we don't have good internet – you are living in camps, and – yeah, a little bit difficult.

Young refugees' access to distance education was also hindered by some families' dismissive ideas about the usefulness of online (or indeed any digital) education. As Nadia, a cultural mediator, told me two months into the lockdowns in May:

Nadia: The family does not care. Because from the hotel that I'm working now, the teachers of the children wanted to send some material through emails – through, you know, WhatsApp, so the children, during the lockdown, will be doing some homework. The parents were very negative about that. They said our children do not understand anything in the class. How are they going to do some homework on our mobile? Etc. And I don't believe that any of those children have done anything, because the parents were negative.

Lucy: Sure, okay. And it's just thinking it's a waste of their time, or...?

Nadia: Exactly. Exactly. They believe, you know, if you want to go to school, there should be a book.

When youth were older and had children of their own, there were other issues with learning online at home. As an example, our first lockdown classes at the NGO where I was teaching were somewhat chaotic. Not only did we have to learn together how to access and best use the platform, as both the teacher and learners, but we also struggled with children and other relatives talking, shouting and playing in the background and trying to get learners' attention – as well as coming in and out of the room or frame. This was partly due to the fact that early childhood education programmes were also suspended, and so learners with young children were required to keep them at home, rather than being able to study while they attended activities. Coupled with this were their unstable internet connections, which caused learners to have to leave and re-enter sessions and then need to be brought up to speed on where we were.

Over time, some of these issues were smoothed out – but unfortunately, they also caused several learners to choose not to continue. As Melissa put it, learning online

in and of itself is a new skill to develop. To be able to [use] digital platforms, especially when it involves trying to engage a community that has so much going on in home life – kids running in and out, and then Wi-Fi problems. I mean, it really is impressive to see what people are capable of.

This ability to overcome such technology- and family-related challenges and find ways to keep learning was seen across the ‘core group’ of youth in the study – as most found alternative resources for learning online which were more accessible. Just a few days into lockdowns, for example, those participating in one NGO’s programmes were already sharing resources in their WhatsApp chat while sessions were paused – such as English and Greek lessons on YouTube, Coursera open online courses, websites with advice on writing CVs, and the Europass template (a standardised European CV and cover letter). The trainers at different NGOs, too, sent videos and suggestions for continued online activities, or shared vocabulary exercises in class WhatsApp groups.

By mid-June, the youth had found various other opportunities. For example, Hasan, a 25-year-old from Kurdistan, told me that he had taken part in online activities organised by the Erasmus+ educational programme for young people across Europe:

I joined some European Erasmus [projects]. The people talk about their countries, where they live, and how was the situation there. And I participate the Zoom and I’m very benefit. Like, okay – I know it like from French, now, what happened, and Italy, or Germany, or UK, and Greece – these European Union countries ... We talked, everybody.

In addition, youth such as Jilwan passed their time in lockdown by engaging in autodidactic activities such as reading: “I have read three books until now ... I download by PDF, and I read”.

The stakeholders I interviewed mentioned that when youth were progressing well with their lessons, and were already at a higher level (in language learning, for example), they were more keen to continue studying during lockdowns – and especially if they had a good relationship with their group and teacher. As Alice, a coordinator,

explained, for learners at her organisation, “they have been working together for over a year now. So it’s a group that really works well together, they know each other and I think that helps”. The youth in the study demonstrated such strong motivation, and especially when they were nearing the end of courses and coming up to important exams – like Hala and Marwa.

8.7.4. Supports from stakeholders with educational and wider life challenges

Beyond their own motivation to learn, youth were supported by NGOs who adapted quickly to online or other forms of learning, or suggested other tools if these were inaccessible – despite having their own organisational challenges. Centres which provided services for refugee youth faced difficulties with not only staff shortages, but also changing rules from both their managing organisations and the government. For example, when some in-person activities were eventually permitted, Cassie said that in the shelter for unaccompanied youth where she worked,

there was an instruction that we shouldn't be putting many people together. So the teachers could only make, like, groups of one, two, maximum three people. So that meant that they wouldn't have time to be with all of them, like they used to be before. And we also have some new boys, that they are like, 'I don't know someone here, I want to be alone with the class' – because it's the first classes and he feels embarrassed. So we're trying to keep the classes like that ... and also we try to give them exercises in order to do alone, because that would also help with it not be crowded, in all the places together.

Even with fewer members of staff, they also still found ways to work around pre-existing challenges such as the young people's sleeping patterns:

We also have Ramadan now ... so that really means that the boys sleep all day and stay awake all night. So, that messed the programme up even more. So we're trying – another teacher works later in order to get them to wake up, ha. She works from three o'clock until 11. So, until that time some boys will be up, so she would have some classes. So that's good. We have to be flexible and change our schedules in order to succeed that.

As well as finding flexible arrangements which worked, they also provided youth with donated devices and suggestions for self-learning:

We also suggested them many applications like Duolingo or other useful ones to learn languages, that they use because it's a funny way for them to learn. So they really like that. And then we were donated recently some tablets from UNICEF, and we have slowly started to do the classes from the school.

In general, NGOs had more flexibility than state institutions to adapt their learning offer quickly, and according to learners' needs. The women's centre, for example, established online lessons within two weeks of lockdowns coming into force – but as Melissa, the coordinator, said, "it's been a struggle ... It's a struggle to just constantly reassess the needs, and that kind of thing".

Beyond continued educational support, NGO staff and volunteers also provided other forms of help to their members from the refugee community, which exemplified the wider role of education and educational relationships in their lives. Melissa was just one example of this. As she said: "there's been a few occasions that ... I've been able to deliver some items or do like a pharmacy run, or supermarket run, or something like that". Staff from other NGOs would send youth daily challenges, articles on maintaining well-being during lockdowns and fun activities in their WhatsApp chats, alongside learning materials – in an attempt to keep the young people's spirits up.

It could be suggested that staff and volunteers were even more motivated to help due to sharing in, and thus understanding, some level of the uncertainty of refugees' lives. While the educators and other stakeholders I spoke to already supported youth and their right to pursue an education pre-pandemic, their own experience of being held in indefinite lockdowns amid a health crisis seemed to give them an extra layer of empathy – an understanding of what refugees' inherently uncertain life might just be like. When I spoke to Ali, a cultural mediator, for example,

he told me how youth had been spending their time pre-lockdowns, and how he understood:

Usually what I was observing, was that when they were not participating in ... sports, or education, they were playing with smartphones. You know, playing games, 24 hours. Or they were sleeping the whole day. At night, they were awake, and it's reasonable – because even us in this quarantine time, we also lost the way, and the flow of our life. The regular one.

Similarly, when discussing her refugee students' aspirations, Vera said that:

I think that they are lost in limbo ... It's kind of a situation that we're feeling now, that we're starting experiencing now with a lockdown, I think. That we don't know where are we going, and what happens next. When is the next day, what is the next day? So now I started feeling how they feel, I think. Maybe. It's very difficult for them to think of a future, and to wish things for their future.

Melissa also felt she had gained some understanding of how her centre's members viewed the future:

When you experience something as jarring as forced migration and displacement, your literal physical state is altered to really only be able to focus on ... what's exactly in front of you, in order to survive ... Your stress perception literally tells your brain to be thinking of just the immediate, the near future, and prevents you from generating productivity and motivation from long term things ... On a very small scale I might feel that now, being in my home, ha, because of Coronavirus.

This suggests an increased level of sensitivity among stakeholders to young refugees' educational access and other support needs, as they navigated their way out of lockdowns together.

8.7.5. Looking to the future: uncertainty and possibility

On 29th April, the Greek government announced that some restrictions would begin to be lifted the following week – a promise which had been delayed several times. Finally,

in early May, it happened. As Vasiliki, a public school reception class teacher explained, a few days later:

It's been only three days since they let us 'move'. Ha ... so we don't know yet what it's going to be, how we're going to deal with this. We're going to see ... I don't think that we're going back to primary schools. So it's confusing for children to understand all of these regulations, and so on! So I don't think they are going to follow this so strict.

High school, on the other hand, was prioritised, and especially for final-year students who were preparing for the notorious Panhellenic exam: a requirement for entering university.

By 9th June, learners mentioned that they had started meeting up in groups again outside and going to each others' houses. Some parents were naturally worried about their children's health and had decided not to send their younger children back to school. Other activities at the NGOs were slowly resuming, such as outdoor cultural visits. The educational coordinators I spoke with expressed concerns about both the immediate and longer-term future, in terms of the impact of the health crisis on education and the refugee community's quality of life more generally. In the short term, coordinators such as Melissa were seeking legal advice on how they could continue their programmes, despite not falling into any of the categories given by the government – and struggled with making a longer-term plan, as "nobody really knows what's gonna happen! Ha. It's not very easy to do that".

In terms of public schools, while various interviewees talked about how the pandemic had exposed its insufficiencies, several also noted how it had highlighted possibilities for increased and more equitable access in the future. This was apparent in the fact that teachers managed to shift to an entirely new way of working – i.e. providing online courses – within just a few weeks of lockdowns coming into force. This demonstrates that there could be other possibilities for learning within the traditionally

strict formal education system, and especially for students with varying linguistic and other needs. Beyond this, coming out of lockdowns and the pandemic, interviewees expressed the desire for policy makers and local authorities to focus on *equitable* access, rather than only access: i.e. to not assume that just because everyone can *potentially* use online platforms, everyone has the resources and capacity to do so.

8.8. Discussion and conclusions

This paper has contributed towards filling a gap in the literature on not only how refugee youth over the age of 15 experienced the start of the pandemic and its associated (educational) challenges, but also how they pursued learning themselves during lockdowns. This goes beyond the common focus on what was provided for them, and its accessibility and effectiveness – which is often measured globally, in terms of standardised learning outcomes (or indeed losses).

In terms of challenges, the findings from this study mostly align with the literature from around the world on refugees' education during lockdowns. Participants' in-person learning opportunities were paused or lost; and when online alternatives were made available by the state or NGOs, they then struggled with accessing devices and stable internet connections – and especially in camp settings. While many studies have discussed family- and partner-related challenges such as household members refusing access to technology, restricting privacy or committing more domestic and gender-based violence (Baird et al., 2020; Mandikiana et al., 2021; Mednick, 2020; Seguin, 2020; World Bank, 2020), none have previously mentioned barriers such as parents' dismissive attitudes towards digital (i.e. non-paper based) educational materials. Furthermore, few have noted how disruptions to educational activities – and the loss of opportunities such as foreign language courses, for example in German –

can both literally and symbolically put young refugees' life projects, such as applying for family reunification in Western Europe, on hold.

The findings also provide evidence of the tactics refugee youth used to navigate such lockdown challenges, which prevented them from accessing or making the most of learning opportunities. For example, they used their initiative to try to access online high school courses by repeatedly contacting administrators, sharing information with friends and using any device available to them to participate. In addition, they searched for and shared learning resources among one another, used alternative learning tools to teach themselves, and found and joined activities such as European youth exchanges to develop their language skills and make connections. Many of the youth persevered with learning despite the noise and distractions of family and home life – and even when several of their peers found it too difficult to find the time, space and technology to continue. Beyond these tactics to keep learning, they also drew from connections at NGOs for wider support – such as much-needed counselling services, or everyday help with tasks such as going to the pharmacy.

As such, it also became apparent that learning providers, and particularly when non-formal, could offer considerable support with both navigating access issues and wider life challenges. Refugee-serving NGOs and volunteer groups arguably had a better understanding of young people's everyday realities than public school staff, for example, and the flexibility to be able to adapt their offer to fit those realities. They did so even in the midst of another 'crisis' which impacted their own work both bureaucratically – in not being permitted by the state to continue operating as 'official' learning providers – and in terms of their workforce (in reduced staffing, and staff having their own personal challenges). Relationships with co-learners, educators and other stakeholders brought together in digital non-formal spaces were key for the youth's continued education: they provided suggestions and resources for learning, support for one another's well-being, and importantly, the motivation to continue with

their education despite technological, family-related and other pandemic-associated challenges and concerns.

These findings have various implications for research, policy and practice. In terms of research, they demonstrate the need for further youth-focused enquiry which centres their own views on 'crises' and highlights their capacity to navigate barriers themselves – with the support of key actors and resources in their specific context. This is needed to counteract dehumanising and patronising narratives of the young refugee as only a passive victim of conflict and disaster; and to instead highlight their agentic potential to effect change (Sen, 2018). Such research is also needed to investigate the longer-term impacts of lockdowns and the pandemic more widely, and how refugee youth's own navigational acts can best be supported on the other side of it.

In terms of policy and practice, the paper highlights the need for the public education system to address its key issues of flexibility and equitable access; to not only benefit young refugees, but all learners with additional support needs. Based on the wider grey literature, coming out of the pandemic, young refugees will need specific, tailored inclusion measures to try to mitigate the impacts of the incredibly damaging and discriminatory practice of prolonged camp lockdowns – as well as increased racism and xenophobia among the general public. It is also essential to commit to funding non-formal education and NGOs, and to permit them to work more freely – while currently, attempts are being made to limit humanitarian operations in Greece via legal cases, bureaucratic hurdles and negative press (Euractiv, 2021).

Without such supportive measures, the World Bank (2020) warns that all learners will be at risk of drop-out and more pronounced inequality, exacerbated by economic shocks. Vulnerable children and youth such as refugees and migrants require specific inclusive strategies, programmes and national-level policies which cater to their particular mental health, linguistic, gender- and disability-related needs (Baird et al., 2020; Mupenzi et al., 2020; Okello et al., 2020; Parker & Alfaro, 2022;

Singh et al., 2020). Such psychosocial and occupational support could be incorporated into online learning platforms (Abu Moghli & Shuayb, 2020), or otherwise offered remotely – as has been found to be effective in Turkey for enhancing well-being, intrinsic motivation and quality of life (Belhan Çelik et al., 2022). Beyond this, Okello et al. (2020, p. 3) note that the pandemic has given us the chance to see how “refugees can work out their own agency for survival”, and as such, recommend supporting refugees to take the lead in developing other future initiatives.

In this way, there is a chance to find hopefulness in this additional crisis: to find opportunities for positive, inclusive change post-pandemic. As Moralli and Allegrini (2021) put it: while the ‘crisis society’ produces considerably more uncertainty, it also affords us the possibility of social change, hope and solidarity – of collective action, bottom-up resilience and the emergence of local communities’ creative capacities. How Greece’s strong solidarity movement may continue to evolve and promote change during this third ‘crisis’ in 15 years, and how it may support young refugees’ own navigational capacities to continue their education, remains to be seen.

9. OVERALL DISCUSSION: LEARNING TO NAVIGATE ‘UNSETTLEMENT’

This chapter provides an overall response to the study’s research questions and a discussion of the key findings, themes and argument from across the four papers. It weaves together the threads from each paper to develop an overall picture of ‘unsettlement’ for young refugees in Greece, its impacts, and how they navigate it. It presents a model of the many dimensions of their unsettlement, which I categorise into ‘infrastructural’ and ‘intimate’ conditions; the influence of their personal characteristics and history on their experiences; their different navigational strategies; and the key actors and factors which supported them in executing them. As such, it should be noted that this chapter is not a reprise, but a further analysis, in which I tie together all of the findings and relate their themes back to the literature from youth, migration and education studies and beyond. Following this analysis, I offer some conclusions, summarise the key contributions of the thesis, and suggest the implications of this project’s findings for research, policy and practice.

9.1. Experiences and educational impacts of ‘unsettlement’

To begin with, I will sketch out the findings on what unsettlement looked like for refugee youth in the study, and how it shaped their engagement with education – responding to RQ1.

The uncertain and precarious aspects of their life in Greece can be grouped into what I will call here the ‘infrastructural’ and ‘intimate’ conditions of unsettlement. By ‘infrastructural’ conditions, I mean the instabilities resulting from the Greek state’s direct, macro-level responses towards refugees after their arrival (or indeed lack of them), such as delayed asylum processes, anti-refugee rhetoric and limited integration policies. These actions, in turn, created tensions in young refugees’ social, familial and institutional worlds: causing what I will term here ‘intimate’ conditions of unsettlement.

In grouping their challenges in this way, my aim is to highlight how the difficulties they experienced with their education were, to a large degree, the result of state policies and practices and other factors *outside* of the education system.

Infrastructural conditions of unsettlement		Worsening conditions during the pandemic	
Spatial	Encampment in isolated locations Unstable accommodation		
Legal-temporal	Delayed asylum procedures and document processing Lack of relocation options (out of Greece) Lack of certainty r.e. gaining protection		
Administrative	Lack of/inability to obtain required documents (e.g. academic qualifications) Lack of clarity in law/policy (e.g. concerning age and enrolment) Increase in bureaucratic hurdles for refugee-serving organisations Limited availability of public and NGO services (e.g. health)		
Financial	No right to work (for asylum seekers) Potential sudden termination of cash card Having to use free services with limited availability/effectiveness		
Discursive-political	Anti-refugee rhetoric Lack of inclusion policies/initiatives		
Intimate conditions of unsettlement			
Tensions with the public	Racism/discrimination on the street ('local' and migrant community) Friction and misinformation in camps		
Tensions within the family	Parental fears and mistrust Required to help with childcare/family tasks (e.g. translation) Domestic abuse Transnational family pressures to migrate or remit Symbolic distance: new tastes, interests, language skills		
Tensions within institutions	Racism/discrimination Unwelcoming educators or peers 'Othering' and power imbalances (in both formal education and NFE)		
The (educational) impacts of unsettlement			
Motivation and aspirations	Do not enrol or leave before completing courses Loss of motivation: negative self-image, loss of confidence/self-efficacy Loss of supportive relationships with peers/educators due to dispersal Downgraded aspirations Focused on survival, leaving camp/Greece as soon as possible		
Practical issues	Needing to work to generate an income Lack of physical access: distance, no transport, cost of transport Having to re-enrol after being relocated within Greece		

Social issues	Unwelcoming climate of the learning setting Put off by refugees who arrived previously
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Table 6. The dimensions of unsettlement and their impacts

9.1.1. The infrastructural conditions of ‘unsettlement’ and their impacts

Spatial conditions. In terms of the infrastructural conditions of their ‘unsettlement’, the reception practices youth faced when they first set foot on Greek territory had a severe impact on their everyday lives. Firstly, they had to contend with spatial factors. They were often placed in camps, and this encampment could last for years, leaving them isolated outside of urban centres and the educational, employment and social opportunities within them – with very limited transport options. Moreover, there was a severe lack of non-formal opportunities around the camps for older teenagers and adults. If they did attend some form of education, then youth found it difficult to find quiet spaces to study in their camps (or indeed cramped apartments), due to living in small spaces with their entire family or due to the social tensions and frequent fights which broke out. Furthermore, they lacked the connectivity to be able to study online. Beyond these practicalities, the camps were ultimately unfit for residential purposes. These conditions, as participants said, left them unable to think about anything other than getting out.

On top of this, they could be moved to other sites at short notice, or lived in fear that being granted asylum would mean they would lose this accommodation, as they were considered ready to support themselves. The private housing market was then difficult to navigate, due to local landlords’ unwillingness to rent to refugees and having to secure a stable income. This adds a different, local-level angle to what Banki (2013a; 2013b) refers to as ‘precarity of place’ and what Ilcan et al. (2018) call ‘precarity of space’: by which they mean, more, the risk of detention and deportation *out of the country*, rather than dispersal and other unexpected relocations within it. This

unpredictability with their accommodation – and indeed the ever-present hope of finally being relocated to Northern or Western Europe – meant that many young refugees did not bother enrolling in either formal or non-formal education. When they did, this instability caused other issues: as in combination with the short-term nature of NFE funding and volunteer arrangements, either the teacher or learner could leave abruptly. This meant that trusting relationships built up over weeks, months or years, which encouraged girls in particular to continue attending, could be cut off. This adds evidence to the literature of how dispersal not only creates practical hurdles to accessing and progressing through education – i.e. having to re-register and losing time starting again elsewhere – but also the social and emotional impacts of spatial precarity, and their consequences for young refugees' engagement with learning.

Legal-temporal conditions. Secondly, the youth had to deal with challenges relating to their legal uncertainty and its temporal dimensions. A key issue was that their asylum applications took years to be processed. Despite decreasing numbers of initial registrations in the last few years, there was still – at the time of writing – a multi-year waiting time for initial responses. The resulting 'waithood' (Honwana, 2014) and precarity of status is a key issue for young asylum seekers around the world (Eberle & Holliday, 2011; Janmyr, 2016). In the Greek context, the pressures on the asylum system and refugees' resulting 'stuckedness' can be put down to three key international 'migration management' strategies: the EU's approval of the Dublin III Regulation in 2013; the closure of the 'Balkan route' in 2015; and the implementation of the so-called 'EU-Turkey deal' shortly afterwards, which essentially led to refugees' containment on the Aegean islands. However, the delays are also a consequence of a flawed system which is still suffering from cuts to public sector funding following the financial crisis of 2008. Even after officially gaining asylum, refugees in the study still had to wait years more to receive their documents, in some cases. As mentioned

above, gaining refugee status could then create other issues, such as eviction from camp accommodation.

Beyond the direct psychosocial impacts of this enforced waiting, which are well documented in the existing literature (e.g. Mann, 2010), it is important to recognise the entanglement of legal uncertainty with other aspects of young refugees' lives – and particularly the weight of the impact it has on their ability and willingness to participate in learning opportunities. As Kohli (2011, p. 314) puts it, "for the minority who have indefinite leave to remain, the path towards resettlement is clearer ... For the sojourners, putting roots down, making investments in relationships and working hard are hedged with uncertainty". The issue for youth was not only the delays, but just that – the uncertainty. Their interview dates changed, or were simply not given – and when they asked for information from NGOs' legal advisors, for example, they were told simply that they would hear 'maybe next month' or 'maybe next week'. This went on for years.

As a consequence of being distracted with this legal limbo, they struggled with how to progress with their education and with envisioning their futures. They had come to Europe with a range of aspirations, whether educational or employment-focused, in Greece or abroad – but due to not knowing for long they would be staying, or where, many shifted their goals onto gaining language and vocational skills for an immediate income, and decided against the academic paths they had previously imagined (due to the difficulty of achieving this in Greek, amid other issues). While both refugee and asylum-seeking youth are technically permitted to enrol in formal education in Greece – which is not the case for many forced migrants around the world (Van Esveld, 2023) – this study, as in Homuth et al. (2020), found that young people's *perception* of their precarious status can be just as influential on their educational access and outcomes as the policies themselves.

Administrative conditions. Thirdly, refugee youth in Greece faced issues with accessing schools, healthcare and other public services due to lacking documents. They needed some form of ID to be able to enrol in formal education (even though some schools found ways around these issues), and many had arrived without their diplomas – due to losing them during their flight, or having to flee before finishing their courses. The European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (CoE, 2021) has been piloted in Greece, which is based on an assessment of refugees' prior education, work experience and language proficiency via available documents and an interview. However, the programme's development has been slow – meaning that it was not an option for any of the youth in the study.

Regarding NGOs' administrative conditions: following the outbreak of COVID-19, centres which provided services for refugee youth faced difficulties with not only staff shortages, but also changing rules from both their managing organisations and the government. For example, when some in-person activities were eventually permitted, some NGOs were not allowed to operate, as they did not fit into an 'acceptable' category of learning provider. This latter issue is symptomatic of a government which other researchers have found to be increasingly hostile towards refugee-serving organisations: one which creates bureaucratic hurdles to their work and brings legal cases against volunteers, to name just two restrictive tactics (Choose Love, 2021; Euractiv, 2021). This meant that not only educational provision, but also pastoral and psychosocial healthcare services (both inside and outside the public health system) were severely lacking or inaccessible – while many youth mentioned their need to speak to counsellors for advice or simply 'to have someone to talk to'. This lack of support can, as has been found elsewhere, exacerbate psychosocial issues and cause young refugees to withdraw from social life (Alodat et al., 2021) – including educational settings.

Financial conditions. Fourthly, many youth were living in financial precarity. Without documents, they had no right to work, and their cash card could be stopped immediately if their legal status changed. Some (parents) were unwilling to spend the little money they had on travelling by bus to the city centre for school or other learning offers, or did not attend as they were searching for or engaged in income-generating activities. This is a key issue keeping refugee boys out of education around the world (UNESCO, 2019), and especially since the COVID-19 outbreak and lockdowns (Abu Moghli & Shuayb, 2020; UNESCO, 2020). Having little money also meant not having appropriate devices to study with at home. With language being a key barrier to learning – and with state-provided ‘reception’ class schemes limited – many had to seek out free, non-formal opportunities, but found them frustratingly repetitive and thus, the learning process slow. The only options were to attend these or to pay for private tuition, offered by universities or private schools or tutors – a luxury well beyond their budgets.

Discursive-political conditions. Finally, underpinning these other issues, youth were at the centre of heated debates about their presence in the country. Anti-refugee rhetoric abounded, and particularly when a centre-right government took over in July 2019 and slowly began to replace the word ‘refugees’ with ‘migrants’ or ‘economic migrants’ (e.g. Capital, 2019). This erasure is just one element of what Rozakou (2012) has termed a ‘politics of invisibility’: meaning attempts by the state to either remove refugees, or make it so that they remove themselves. This can be seen today, physically and literally, in the growing number of pushbacks which have been reported at sea (e.g. Rankin & O’Carroll, 2023), and in the fact that state-led inclusion programmes were described by participants in this study as more or less non-existent. Related to this, we can say that the state is guilty of inaction: for example, when youth complained that there was no proper ‘integration system’ into schools, and that it fell on their shoulders

to integrate themselves. Indeed, much of the support for their learning seemed dependent on civil society and volunteers. This put an insurmountable amount of pressure on this overburdened and underfunded sector – as seen in NGOs' free lessons around the city often being over-subscribed and subject to months-long waiting lists. As a result, national and international organisations have urgently demanded an increase in financial support from the Greek government to scale up refugee education initiatives – and particularly on the Aegean islands (Jalbout, 2020).

9.1.2. The intimate conditions of 'unsettlement' and their impacts

The infrastructural conditions described above resulted in various forms of unsettlement in the young refugees' everyday social worlds, which impacted their engagement with education: due to tensions with the public, their families and in institutions.

Tensions with the public. Firstly, it can be said that social relations between refugees and 'locals' have broken down as a result of the rise of anti-refugee political rhetoric – leading to increased instances of racism and discrimination by emboldened members of the 'more established' community. Young refugees in the study spoke of experiencing such hostility in their everyday encounters with the public in Thessaloniki (as well as vicariously, through others), which they believed was due to a lack of education and misinformation spread by politicians. This prejudice could be based on their national, linguistic or religious background, and/or how they were racialised – and the fact that, as Topali (2020, p. 321) has suggested, the media has orchestrated images of their arrival and thus "conditioned the national imagination" and caused refugees to 'essentialise' all crises. During the pandemic, when this general public were faced with their own heightened forms of uncertainty and precarity, this led to amplified anti-refugee sentiment – for example, in the spreading of unfounded racist messages

regarding virus transmission (Tsavdaroglou & Kaika, 2022). It could be argued that this then constitutes a form of informational precarity, as it involves a misrepresentation of refugees (Wall et al., 2017) – with consequences for how they are treated by the public. This meant that youth were fearful of attending learning settings (and their parents were fearful of sending them), or they felt unwelcome when they did; which decreased their motivation to continue.

It is important to note that this public includes other previously arriving migrants and refugees, as well as other minoritised communities, who could be equally hostile and misinformed about the amount of support newcomers were receiving. There were also fights in camps, due to the overcrowding, noise and poor conditions. This made it more difficult for youth to rebuild the support network they had lost as a result of their flight. Even if they did make connections with other refugees, especially in camps, many residents were jaded and warned newcomer youth away from participating in what they told them was Greece's poor education system. Indeed, they told them simply to focus on getting out of the country completely. This reminds us that cities such as Thessaloniki are now sites of 'overlapping displacements', in which the 'hosts' may be other migrants (Fiddian-Qasmiyah, 2015); that the refugee community is heterogeneous, including in terms of their aspirations; and that misinformation and diversions can come from any source. Such refugee-refugee relations are important to explore further, and not least to challenge the assumption in migration studies that having more social connections decreases migrants' vulnerability (Lenette, 2013). Rather, in this case, connections in the camps delayed their start with education and diverted them away from pathways which could, potentially, have been beneficial in their navigation of unsettlement.

Tensions within families. Secondly, young refugees in Greece faced tensions in their family relations. For example, due to their protection fears (resulting from their social

precarity), many parents refused to allow their children to attend learning settings – and especially their daughters. This is because it could have meant travelling alone on public transport to male-dominated environments, which they believed constituted a risk to both their personal safety and their reputation, as it could have departed from their community's cultural norms. This was based on the unfamiliarity of their new context, and a deep mistrust of the Greek state and other educators due to the way they had been treated on arrival. Many of the challenges at the family level impacted young women's engagement with education more than young men's. Other barriers included having caring responsibilities for their own children, their siblings or elderly relatives, or other domestic duties, which limited their ability to attend learning sites and complete homework or coursework. Suitable opportunities for young mothers were particularly limited, even in the non-formal sector. In addition, there were instances of young women engaging in strategic (or indeed forced) marriages which they perceived to be a means of security during their flight, but which could result in abusive situations. Many of these gendered challenges align, sadly, with what has been reported from various contexts around the world (e.g. Akua-Sakyiwah, 2016; Rana et al., 2011; Watkins et al., 2012).

Both young women and men in this study, however, had difficulties with managing transnational relationships with their families, and especially after being held in a country in which they had not planned on staying. Families would request that they find work and save money to join them elsewhere in Europe, for example, rather than studying, or – particularly for boys – request that they send remittances. This is an educational issue which has been highlighted globally among young refugees and other migrants (e.g. Kyereko, 2020). Even if they were of a legal age to work, finding legitimate income-generating activities was challenging in a country with high levels of unemployment and limited working rights for refugees. Transnational family challenges also included a growing distance from their families in terms of their ambitions, the

longer they spent with physical distance between them. Indeed, this was also a considerable issue when they were together in Greece: the symbolic distance caused by youth's changes in their attitudes and dress, as a result of mixing with new peers and finding new role models in their European teachers (and especially for young women). This aligns with previous research, which found such generational distance to be one of the biggest challenges for displaced families (Levi, 2014). Coupled with the general uncertainty and precarity of their situations – and parents' mistrust of educators – this could further threaten families' support for their children's participation in education.

Tensions within institutions. Thirdly, when they did attend learning sites, young refugees' unsettled conditions caused difficulties with feeling sufficiently prepared and welcome. Having limited integration programmes and policies – and especially after the age of 15 – many felt that they lacked the essential skills and knowledge needed to join formal education, and even that their enrolment in the first place was dependent upon the person in charge. Directors could create reasons not to accept refugees in the first place, or otherwise act as 'gatekeepers' – for example, by recommending vocational education instead, as a 'less demanding' route. This adds more evidence, for the European context, of how individual actors in positions of power can personally permit or deny young refugees their desired educational trajectory (building on e.g. Vergou, 2019); and indeed how such actors can function as local-level border guards in public institutions (Yuval-Davis et al., 2018).

If they were accepted, then with reception class teachers starting late in the year (due to delays in the recruitment process), young refugees either received a limited part of their preparatory language, mathematics and ICT tuition or none at all. This meant joining 'normal' classes either immediately or with little preparation, which were taught by teachers who had likely not received training on how to support

newcomers. They could be told to simply sit at the back of the classroom with a textbook they did not understand, or pulled up into the spotlight and used as a learning point for the rest of the class. This perpetuated issues with Greek peers, who made jokes and racist comments, to which the youth did not initially have the language skills to respond. Such peer-related issues have been well reported elsewhere, and can include, for example, 'local' students categorising refugees according to their race, nationality and gender (Hummelstedt et al., 2021). However, this study also found that well-intentioned teachers could also 'other' refugee learners and humiliate them by spotlighting their experiences, which could make their social tensions with peers worse.

Outside of schools, while young refugees found support from local and international 'solidarians' (i.e. NGO and grassroots staff and volunteers) in non-formal learning spaces, the latter could also focus too much on their 'unsettled' refugee experience and their difficulties – neglecting other aspects of their identities. This reflects the larger issue of power imbalances between these groups, which could show themselves in subtle ways: for example, via solidarians' positioning of themselves as the 'hosts' and refugees as 'guests'. Andrikopoulos (2017) has previously noted this uneasy relationship of 'host and guest' which can arise from 'hospitable' practices. However, here, we see how this relationship is further complicated when the 'host' is an educator with, arguably, more authority. Furthermore, the gap between them could be reinforced when cultural barriers were not considered: such as when young refugees had a different base of knowledge, or when certain activities were inappropriate for young women in particular.

9.1.3. Worsening conditions during the pandemic

Young refugees' sense of 'unsettlement' became more acute with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Spatially, for example, they were restricted by controversially prolonged camp lockdowns. This further limited their mobility and prevented youth in

the study from attending not only educational settings, but also job and traineeship interviews, which could have provided some form of income and thus more financial stability. More critically, organisations warned that due to the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions of camps and lack of access to healthcare, residents were at a greater risk of transmission than the general public – and indeed, overall, they saw more cases, and limited options for treatment. These health issues severely disrupted their learning progress, both due to illness and their fears surrounding their own and their families' well-being (in Greece or abroad). This has been well documented in refugee camp contexts around the world (e.g. Wiggins, 2020). Even after camp residents in Greece were permitted to move again, however, they were still less mobile, due to transport to the city centre becoming even more limited. Parents were also fearful of allowing their children to attend schools as they reopened after lockdowns, due to health risks. This fed into their greater isolation from urban social life and various learning settings.

During lockdowns in camps, many youth also lacked a sufficiently stable internet connection for participating in the public education system's online classes or other virtual learning platforms. Even when organisations used lower-tech resources for learning or to connect learners and teachers – such as podcasts and WhatsApp messages – the scale of the operation hampered its roll-out. When youth could participate in online learning, they were disrupted by relatives in their homes talking, shouting and playing in the background and trying to get their attention, as well as coming in and out of the room or frame. This was on top of having to learn how to use unfamiliar platforms such as Zoom. Parents were also said to be disparaging of online learning, due to perceptions about what teaching and learning should look like. While it has been reported that refugee families have struggled with helping their children to use virtual platforms due to linguistic and technological barriers (e.g. Fujii et al., 2020),

this latter finding adds another dimension: namely, how their attitudes towards digital education can influence access, and especially for younger youth.

In terms of young refugees' legal situation, as a result of the pandemic, the asylum system saw even more understaffing and strain – meaning that processes took even longer, and the interviews youth had been aiming for were postponed for at least another year (or outright cancelled). In their general lives, they faced more racism, hostility and inequality – including in employment, housing and social care – which exacerbated their exclusion and the shock of the health crisis. Indeed, other researchers have noted how the pandemic even 'normalised' young refugees' exclusion and 'ghettoization' (Fischer, 2021). This was, in part, due to increased resistance from local communities to them attending schools, and the fact that reception classes became even more understaffed.

All of these factors further limited their engagement with education, and not least because of the lack of learning support from the state and their parents' own fears about them attending after they were able to move again. This left young refugees more heavily impacted by lockdowns than children and youth from the wider population (in line with global reports, e.g. UNESCO, 2021). As they could not attend, they also then lost out on social connections and other supports, such as psychosocial counselling and information services such as housing advice. Many of these impacts, it can be argued, were not necessarily a result of the virus itself, but rather the state's discriminatory, virus-related restrictions such as prolonged camp lockdowns – and later, as institutions tentatively reopened, their decision not to legally permit NGOs to operate as educational providers. Overall, this created more uncertainty, with consequences for young refugees' studies and well-being; especially as for a long period, they could not socialise in person and learn from friends, colleagues, staff and volunteers, as they had been previously. This aligns with findings from various contexts regarding the negative academic and social impacts of COVID-19 lockdowns (e.g.

Loganathan et al., 2021; Seguin, 2020), while also, again, drawing a line between these outcomes and the state's specific treatment of refugees during times of crisis.

9.1.4. The (educational) impacts of 'unsettlement'

As a result of the factors and experiences described above, youth in the study were left in an 'in-between', precarious state: a state of seemingly permanent 'temporariness', in which they were suspended in unfinished procedures, often undocumented, without the knowledge of when or where they may be (sent) in a day or a year's time. As such, they were forced to navigate a liminal condition between acceptance and exclusion, legality and illegality, and formality and informality. It was also marked by uncertainty, as they did not know to what extent they would be legally, politically or socially accepted or excluded from one day to the next, or indeed how much time, in the long term, they would remain in this space. In addition, they wrestled with various aspects of precarity, as outlined above.

The overall impact of living in 'unsettlement' was that they were often unwilling or less motivated to participate in city life, or felt powerless to contest injustices; they began to feel that there was something inherently bad in themselves, as refugees, which made people act in a racist or discriminatory manner towards them; or they placed the burden of developing and sustaining good relations on themselves. For young women, they were even less likely to attend learning sites or to try to socialise outside of their family and friendship circles.

Both the infrastructural and intimate conditions of unsettlement shaped how all young refugees engaged with education, as some were wary of entering majority Greek settings, lost their sense of self-efficacy and/or lacked the motivation to fight administrative barriers and potential hostility. This meant that they downgraded their aspirations onto only finishing high school (rather than aiming for university), or indeed focused on becoming more employable, by gaining language and vocational skills.

They held onto their 'ideal' life goals – due to maintaining hope, despite everything, as Kohli and Kaukko (2018) have also found – while being realistic about their needs for the present. These needs were, namely, getting paid work and re-establishing a support network, in a context where doing so was even more difficult for those of a refugee and non-Greek speaking background, racialised as non-white. In this way, their experiences, outcomes and aspirations can all be said to have been shaped by their (manufactured) conditions of unsettlement.

9.2. Individual differences: the mediating influence of personal characteristics and history

It became very apparent that young refugees' experiences were strongly influenced, or indeed underpinned, by their individual, intersectional differences. For example, those living in apartments outside of camps were more likely to commit to formal education; and those under the age of 18 were more likely to be under the state's protection, and so also had more stable accommodation. This demonstrates how these factors were overlapping and intertwined – highlighting the multidimensional nature of forced migrants' precarity (Ilcan et al., 2018) – and how, in combination, they could contribute to or alleviate young refugees' sense of unsettlement: such as when they 'aged out' of the protection system at 18, and thus lost their accommodation, or when their families refused to allow them to attend for gendered or other reasons.

While RQ2 specifically asked about gender, age, accommodation and legal status – and indeed, these factors were all found to have an influence – there was also evidence that their race, religion, nationality, learning history and personal aspirations shaped their experiences and navigation of unsettlement.

9.2.1. Gender, race and religion

In addition to the tensions in family relationships discussed above in Section 9.1.2, other factors connected with young refugees' gender also came into play. It was found that particularly in camps, young men were more at risk of being drawn into gangs, for example; and that young women could prioritise other goals or activities over attending school, such as taking care of siblings and helping their mothers, and especially when they became the head of a household. When they did participate in education, the fact that girls were entering a new social environment could also create challenges, as it could be their first time in mixed-gender classrooms. For all youth, the ways in which they were racialised (in combination with religious markers such as the hijab, for young women), led to assumptions of their 'refugeeness' and hypervisibility in predominantly white, Orthodox Christian settings. This opened them up to abuse and discrimination, or at least jokes, and naturally made them less willing to attend.

These feelings of hypervisibility also occurred in public spaces, such as the market, where youth reported being stared at and experiencing discomfort. Feelings of hypervisibility could lead to frustration and intense self-consciousness, and ultimately made contact with the wider community, and especially those in educational settings, less likely (as in Bradby et al., 2017). They also suggest how the body – and particularly the gendered and racialised body – is implicated in bordering practices, and how particular bodies can come to represent and essentialise 'refugeeness'; and, by implication, how they can be perceived and treated as 'bodies out of place' (Puwar, 2004).

9.2.2. Age

One extra factor among this group which complicated matters was their age. For those who had wanted to enrol in senior high school – which, on paper, is for 15 to 18-year-

olds – being overage could be a barrier. For those who had arrived before the age of 15, participation was more strongly supported, due to the fact that schooling is mandatory from the age of 6-15 – and indeed, there were also more NFE options for younger children around the camps and the city. For those over 18, the rules regarding formal education enrolment were unclear. Some believed that speaking English or Greek helped, or having previously studied at high school. There seemed to be some flexibility surrounding age – as it was not specifically defined in law or policy, at the time – and so it was dependent upon directors' willingness to accept 'overage' refugee students. Another factor related to age is that being under 18, refugee youth were eligible for protection, including in terms of their accommodation. This offered some form of spatial stability, even if only temporarily.

While researchers from various contexts have documented how being 'overage' (i.e. 18+) – or indeed over primary school age – puts refugees at a far greater risk of dropping out or not enrolling in secondary-level education, this is often related to the fact that youth are otherwise occupied with income generation, helping in the home, pregnancy or childcare (Cha, 2020; Hatoss & Huijser, 2010; UNESCO, 2019). Here, however, the age issue was also down to a lack of clarity in policy, and the unwillingness of administrators to take advantage of this ambiguity.

9.2.3. Accommodation, legal status and nationality

As discussed above, the nature of young refugees' accommodation and legal status were central to their experiences. Being placed in isolated camps (or indeed being homeless, or living in squats) and having to endure long waits for asylum interviews and documents created a great deal of precarity, uncertainty and frustration. Being placed in an apartment or shelter for unaccompanied minors, however, provided some stability, and thus a foundation from which to begin or continue learning. Being under

18, they were given a bed in a dorm, 24/7 support from social workers and caretakers, external motivation to attend school and extra-curricular classes at 'home' taught by volunteers.

Being of certain nationalities could also mean a greater likelihood of being granted refugee status, and thus somewhat more stability. For example, at the time of the study, Syrians were almost guaranteed a positive answer (99.4%) – even if they still had to wait to go through the process – whereas applications submitted by those from Afghanistan or Pakistan, for example, were less likely to be successful (with an acceptance rate of 31.3% and 2.4%, respectively) (AIDA, 2019). This adds nuance to discussions of uncertainty surrounding asylum seekers' legal status, and highlights again the heterogeneity of the refugee community in Greece. Having their application rejected meant, for some, having to go through the appeals process, or it raised questions surrounding deportation, the need to attempt irregular onward movement or simply trying to stay 'under the radar' (i.e. avoiding public places such as schools). Therefore, their presence in the classroom, which could be a positive indicator of their progress, was in fact the opposite for them: as "the blessing of visibility and daylight is also what the police and politics demand" (Derrida, 2000, p. 57, cited in Fiddian-Qasmiyah, 2020, p. 2).

9.2.4. Personal learning history: language and schooling

Another individual-level, mediating factor concerned young refugees' linguistic background and previous educational attainment – both key factors influencing refugees' ability to continue with their education around the world (Capstick & Delaney, 2018; Steiner, 2018). Firstly, the Greek language barrier was a fundamental difficulty, and especially at the level of senior high school. Despite arriving with a wide range of first, second, third or more languages, youth in the study had no Greek proficiency; and especially around 2015, there were no country-wide integration programmes in public

schools at the senior high school level to support non-Greek speakers. Indeed, these were not implemented until 2018 – two years after those in primary and lower-secondary schools – and they remained rare, as senior high school is beyond compulsory schooling. At the time of the study, reception classes were still not running in all of the senior high schools around Thessaloniki, as they required a sufficiently large number of newcomers to justify employing a substitute teacher to deliver the programme. Even when they did have language support, the content at senior high school was intensely academic and university-focused. Indeed, even for native Greek-speaking students, the Panhellenic exams at the end of *lykeio* are notoriously difficult, and require mastery of topics such as physics and Ancient Greek. Some refugee youth in the study, however, had dedicated themselves to self-learning enough Greek to be able to complete this curriculum, and had succeeded in these exams.

Outside of school, language barriers also prevented meaningful interactions and the development of the friendships most of the participants desired – which could have motivated them to attend school or NFE together, or bolstered their self-confidence. It also stopped refugees from being able to tell their stories and correct the misinformation which abounded; i.e. to tackle their social and informational precarity. This social aspect of language competence, outside of schools or universities, is often neglected in refugee (education) research. Knowing enough English or Greek – or German, in some cases – to be able to start conversations with others in the migrant and volunteer community in camps could make all the difference with accessing legal information, healthcare and other services, for example, which all supported their general stability and the likelihood of them attending learning opportunities.

Beyond language, having the concept and some experience of schooling helped with beginning or continuing with high school – or indeed participating in other learning settings. However, this created frustration when their education was disrupted as a result of fleeing their home countries, and having to begin again at the same or a

lower level – delaying their goals by years. This was a particular challenge if they had left before getting their diploma, or did not have a copy with them. While much research focuses on the impacts of educational disruption on young refugees' learning outcomes – and especially those of children (e.g. Kim & Brown, 2022) – this study provides insights into how this disruption can shape older youth's aspirations and progression into further and higher education and employment.

9.2.5. Aspirations and motivation

Young refugees' aspirations and motivation were central to their experiences with education, and to their determination to overcome barriers (at the level of the state or the family). Of course, the poor social and material conditions of camps, for example, and their enforced waiting period for legal answers, meant that even when learning opportunities were available and accessible, many of their minds were elsewhere – and they lacked the motivation to attend. However, if they were interested in the topics, able to participate and/or had their sights set on particular goals, then they would persevere with their education despite language barriers, insensitive teachers or peers, the costs of time and money to get to learning centres, or even their own family's insistence that they stay away from mixed-gender settings or try to find an income instead. If they had a formal education background, and had been close to exams, then this helped – and especially with pushing through the further precarity caused by the pandemic and the government's responses to it. For young women, education was especially appealing if it was the first time they had been able to study (non-)formally in their lives. These motivations align with research from around the world which has found that despite immobilising conditions of precarity, many refugee youth maintain a strong desire to continue with their education – whether to achieve academic, social, psychological or vocational goals for the short or the long term (Dånge, 2013; Kristensen & Christensen, 2021; Pangestu, 2018; Pozzo & Evers, 2016; Shin, 2022).

9.3. Navigating ‘unsettlement’ in/via education

Data from the study provides evidence that refugee youth took matters into their own hands to (re)engage with learning and achieve these aspirations despite, and in response to, the ‘unsettled’ conditions described above (or indeed, they resisted education). These actions were motivated by a desire to achieve valuable social, welfare, academic, professional and/or well-being outcomes, and for the ‘core group’ of youth in the study, resulted in them enrolling in university, general and vocational high school, NFE and other volunteer-run offers. I have organised their (reported and observed) navigational actions into five interconnected thematic strategies (responding to RQ3): namely, *navigating displacement time and space*; *navigating by rebuilding and recrafting one’s image and identity*; *navigating by educating oneself and others*; *navigating (via) relationships and collective actions*; and finally, *navigating by resisting education*.

9.3.1. *Navigating displacement time and space*

For youth who were studying, learning was seen as having benefits both for the short-term and for their imagined future: demonstrating what Vigh (2009, p. 425) refers to as the dialogue between their “movement through both the socially *immediate* and the socially *imagined*” (emphasis original). The immediate benefits of learning included the opportunity for contact with (Greek or international) support staff in non-formal spaces, for example, who could provide assistance with practical tasks; the chance to develop a wider support network for themselves, to replace that which had been lost as a result of flight; having somewhere which was considered a safe, welcoming and ‘legitimate’ space to spend time; and moreover, having a space in the city where they could claim some ownership. In terms of longer-term benefits, these were perceived to be a stronger asylum application (as they believed it demonstrated a willingness to

integrate); the chance to continue along the educational path they had started in their home countries; and the opportunity to develop skills and knowledge to find work in Greece, at 'home' or in their eventual country of resettlement.

For the most part, these findings correspond with previous research (e.g. Ramachandran & Vathi, 2022), which has found that while forced to wait for legal decisions, asylum seekers engage in everyday, agentic tactics such as gaining familiarity in the new context, undertaking meaningful activities and seeking out social connections – including via education. Here, though, the findings also highlight the social-spatial aspects of this educational engagement (i.e. having 'their' space, or a 'safe' space) and the dual nature of their aspirations: having both practical and ideal ambitions, for both 'here' and 'there', and for both 'now' and 'then'. When asked why it was important to continue learning, the young people's responses signalled a deep valuing of education for creating or stabilising their futures: it was a means of 'future-proofing', or avoiding 'wasting' time.

However, these tactics were, to a large degree, shaped by whether youth (and/or their families) had accepted the reality of their prolonged displacement in Greece – and its indefinite nature. Many of the youth said that they and their families had originally planned to travel on to Northern and Western Europe immediately, either to reunite with relatives or due to a belief that they would have more (and higher quality) work and educational opportunities. Yet due to the time taken to process their asylum claims, they had become caught behind legal (and consequently, physical) borders. This had two main consequences. On the one hand, some warmed to the country, and this motivated them to learn the language and seek out other educational opportunities involving longer-term commitments. This aligns with Kohli's (2011, p. 314) finding that when young refugees are allowed to remain,

as time goes by, friendships grow and steady experiences at schools and colleges provide the scaffolding for material and educational success. There is an extensive period, often of years, of absorbing, and being absorbed by, the cultures of the new country.

However, on the other hand, others realised that being held in Greece for at least several years would mean facing many difficulties. Especially when they were towards the upper end of the 15-25 age bracket, they felt that they needed to build their language skills in particular – in Greek, English, or both – to help them navigate their new environment, by finding work, information and a social network. However, most also aimed to continue their disrupted formal educational pathways alongside, or following, these linguistic efforts.

As noted above, temporal and spatial issues were intertwined, as many young refugees were held in isolated camps while waiting for decisions. However, many youth found ways to overcome acts of exclusion such as encampment far from the city, despite the costs of time and money and their or their families' safety concerns. They would spend their cash allowance on bus tickets, and persist with waking up at 4am to take the long journey to the city. Others attended vocational high schools closer to the camp, as an alternative, or attended the non-formal (predominantly language) classes there, if they were available.

9.3.2. Navigating by rebuilding and recrafting one's image and identity

As well as working through issues of temporality and space, youth were also dealing with issues related to their image and identity. In terms of image, as discussed above, they had to deal with racism and being at the centre of highly visual, 24/7, sensationalist media coverage of migrant arrivals – which most often was not favourable. While youth in the study could not address their racial hypervisibility and the negative media attention towards refugees, they engaged in arts-based NFE, such

as drama courses, which permitted them to govern the ways in which they were viewed during public performances. This aligns with the growing literature on how (young) migrants demonstrate their agency by achieving incremental inclusion through everyday actions such as placing claims to certain spaces (Mezzadra, 2011; Hajer & Bröer, 2020).

This question of shaping one's image is very closely related to the question of identity. For example, as most were seen simply as a 'refugee', it was reported that this could cause them to believe that this was the limit of their identity – especially as most also only had a temporary legal identity. However, by attending learning offers, and especially creative activities, they rebuilt their confidence – which in turn rebuilt their self-image and self-efficacy. They also took up the opportunity to try out new identities which they believed would not have been possible in their countries: for example, aiming to become a footballer or programmer, or for young women, having a 'learner' or 'student' identity for the first time. They worked through considerations of who they were and who they wanted to be, in their new European reality – even if it was not what they had previously considered for themselves – with advice from friends and stakeholders around them; and for girls, with the support of female role models such as teachers. This aligns with what Vigh (2009, 2010) observed about young migrants' social navigation: in the fact that they are alert to new opportunities which arise, and indeed grab them as they do.

These changes and negotiations of one's identity can create their own forms of unsettlement, however. They are substantial (and mostly non-linear) psychological transitions which involve the balancing of innovation and tradition, and honouring the past while choosing what to forget (Kohli, 2014). This requires support, which may be lacking at home if parents are concerned about these changes (Levi, 2014). This is not to say that parents' or guardians' own identities and attitudes remained static, however; rather, they were also negotiating their own changing ideas and practice of care

alongside a desire to maintain stability for their children. (Indeed, some children influenced their parents too, by bringing them to lessons, encouraging them to try new things and guiding them into and through the new society.) These changes in parents' identities became apparent as they mentioned enjoying going to school themselves for the first time (even if only a weekly language lesson at a community centre) after not being able to do so in their home countries, while simultaneously organising Arabic lessons or community meetings for their increasingly (symbolically) distant children. Other studies have noted how young refugees must negotiate tensions across generations (for example, due to diverging aspirations) in order to achieve one's own goals while also maintaining consistent care and support from one's family (Soong et al., 2022). Here, too, youth walked a careful line between respecting their family's wishes and trying out their new identities for their new context – by, for example, taking family members to learning sites to prove their 'legitimacy', or tacitly dismissing their transnational families' wishes for them to join them. This could be described as one instance of 'manipulating' rules to meet their goals (Vigh, 2009).

9.3.3. Navigating by educating oneself and others: initiative and resourcefulness

Achieving their goals involved, to a large degree, relying upon their own initiative and resourcefulness. Indeed, some youth mentioned that this was necessary, as with 'integration' programmes severely lacking, the burden of social inclusion rested on their shoulders. For many young women, in particular, finding alternative ways to learn was often necessary. They addressed the inappropriacy of mixed-gender offers by actively seeking out alternative spaces in which they felt comfortable and welcome, which often meant somewhere they could bring their children (either into the classroom, or to simultaneous children's activities) and breastfeed. This, of course, would not be possible in a public school. Others, either alone or collectively, created and shaped

their own learning offers: for example, by requesting female-only spaces, or by adapting opportunities to allow them to share childcare. Young women also requested particular content, or more lessons in general. These tactics allowed them to fulfil their needs and make the best use of their time, rather than joining Second Chance schools or high schools and struggling to catch up – due to starting late, the Greek language barrier or domestic and childcare responsibilities.

For all youth, if the educational opportunity did not fit their needs, they proactively sought out other ways of gaining certificates, language skills and work experience: through volunteering as teaching assistants or interpreters; studying at home or on their mobile phones; refusing to speak anything other than Greek at school; searching for additional support via their school or university; and drawing from social resources such as international volunteers in camps. Beyond help with languages, they also went to colleagues and other connections for assistance with writing scholarship and job applications, for example. Then, as well as seeking out knowledge, they also shared it. They would educate misinformed peers about the reality of their situation, for instance, to stabilise relationships with other students at school or university; and when youth were parents and took courses themselves, they developed their own skills, to also vicariously benefit their children. This adds to the literature on refugees' resourcefulness in accessing and progressing with their education, both at the classroom level and more broadly (e.g. Choi & Najar, 2017; Soong et al., 2022) – as well as the role of self-initiated, informal learning practices in their navigation of precarity. While the Council of Europe (2019) defines informal learning (via friends and family, or self-study) as “exclusively incidental” and “not undertaken with a learning purpose in mind” – meaning, essentially, that it is accidental – I would argue that it can be as intentional and purposeful as both formal and non-formal education, and especially in contexts where such organised opportunities are limited. Furthermore,

there is little mention, as yet, in the literature on refugee education of collective co-learning practices such as those observed in this study.

These self-directed approaches became especially apparent during lockdowns, when both young men and women overcame technological and family-related challenges by seeking out alternative, more accessible resources for learning online. Just a few days into lockdowns, for example, those participating in one NGO's programmes were already sharing resources in their WhatsApp chat while sessions were paused – such as English and Greek lessons on YouTube, Coursera open online courses, websites with advice on writing CVs, and the Europass template (a standardised European CV and cover letter). The trainers at different NGOs, too, sent videos and suggestions for continued online activities, or shared vocabulary exercises in class WhatsApp groups. By mid-June, the youth had found various other learning tools: such as Erasmus+ youth programmes and downloading and reading books.

9.3.4. Navigating (via) relationships and collective actions

One thread throughout young refugees' actions was the way in which they both drew from and provided social supports: whether within the refugee community or outside of it. Within the refugee and migrant community, to address issues of security on public transport, many refugee youth – and especially girls – travelled with siblings, friends or other trusted members of their communities. In doing so, this encouraged others to attend. As a result, friendship groups and family members could often be seen together across the city in non-formal learning spaces, especially, which were not so strictly organised by age and other enrolment criteria. They also taught one another skills such as languages, sewing, cooking and other crafts as a means of mutual support (in co-learning practices, as noted above). Young women also attended mixed-gender settings as a group – bringing siblings, friends or parents for 'strength in numbers', to

'legitimise' the space or simply to enable others to enjoy its benefits. If families supported girls' education but were fearful of risks, some mothers or other family members – including their much younger brothers – would accompany them, at least for the first few sessions. While these collective tactics may not be viable in formal settings, it enables greater participation in NFE, while protecting young women from stigmatisation and harm. A side effect of this tactic is that different generations of women encouraged one another to engage with education.

In terms of connections with the 'local' community, new networks were prominent in the strategies of youth I met. Overall, young refugees drew from the advice, skills, connections and pastoral care of social workers, educators and other staff, volunteers and fellow learners to assist them with various tasks for their education – while also trying to re-establish a wider, more stable and more trusted support network in an unfamiliar setting. Indeed, both Lenette (2013) and Willmann Robleda (2020) note how relationships outside of the refugee or national community can be more trusting and valued. Connections with Greek friends were valuable for helping with issues such as vocabulary and how to navigate the country physically, while connections with educators and international staff in camps were important for informing them about educational opportunities, learning languages, helping with applications and opening up new areas of the city – as they escorted them on excursions or to exhibitions. We recall that as Nadia, a cultural mediator, put it, young women could open up more with their Greek teachers than with their parents, as they felt 'less distance' between them. This corresponds with other research which has proven the benefits for refugees' well-being of having social ties across languages, cultures and backgrounds (Greene, 2019).

However, this is not to say that new relationships were inherently supportive – rather that they *could* be employed as a means of support. Lenette (2013, p. 5) reminds us that while there is an assumption in migration studies that "stronger

networks equate to less vulnerability”, they too involve power relations which can have negative impacts, such as ostracising single mothers or creating “a minority inside a minority”. Similarly, Willmann Robleda (2020) describes how social networks had both positive and negative effects on the refugees she interviewed. One negative example, from this study, was the way in which other refugees in camps could provide misinformation which dissuaded youth from engaging in Greek social life, such as in education. This again highlights both the heterogeneity of refugee and migrant populations, and what Vigh (2010, p. 155) has described as their “diffuse and unclear” dynamics of power.

Throughout my time in different learning spaces, I witnessed how all forms of social connections were valuable, and often for different reasons. With spatial and financial barriers to language courses, refugee youth strategically spent time with international volunteers in camps, tried hard to make Greek friends and offered to volunteer themselves, to build their linguistic skills. They also found value in these relationships for socialising, childcare, providing translations, teaching a particular skill or simply having a friend with whom they could discuss the challenges of displacement in their mother tongue. Overall, this strategy provides further evidence of the social and relational nature of young refugees’ navigational acts.

9.3.5. Navigating by resisting education

It should also be noted, when speaking of how young refugees resist precarity, that resistance can come in various forms – including forgoing organised learning. While the young refugees who participated in interviews were all attending some form of organised education, the data also provides insights on those who were not, via the information which the youth and stakeholders shared on their peers and siblings, for example. It was found that for families who resisted young people’s education –

whether they were with them in Greece or not – education also played into their navigation of displacement ‘time’. In their efforts to keep their children safe for the time that they were in a country they perhaps did not trust, and to preserve their reputation within their community, some parents refused to allow youth to partake in (particularly formal) education. In addition, there was a strong belief that they would eventually be permitted to travel onwards across Europe – perhaps via a relocation scheme – and so they believed that there was no reason to expend the effort it takes to start and commit to an educational programme (and especially in a new foreign language, and when it may incur the cost of required materials). While parental resistance is often put down to their conservative or dismissive views about education – and especially about girls’ education, and especially beyond the primary level (e.g. Hattar-Pollara, 2019) – these findings add more nuance to families’ decisions not to support their children’s enrolment, and the role played by displacement time and legal status.

Importantly, it was also found that many youth themselves resisted education: which itself could be considered a form of ‘navigation’. For example, some young refugee women chose to prioritise family responsibilities over participating in education, and especially after the loss of family members and becoming the head of the family. Many young men and boys, in particular – as young as 12 years old, stakeholders reported – chose to spend their time searching for income-generating activities, as a means of raising the funds for onward travel or remitting cash back to their families in their home countries. Some also stayed away from learning settings to avoid being found by authorities and potentially deported after their asylum applications were unsuccessful (see Section 9.2.3). As such, this resistance of European norms of child- and youthhood, and the international community’s pressures to integrate refugee youth into formal education, could be described as an agentic act of navigation, even if it left them at risk of exploitation and abuse. This resistance, and indeed the alternative learning pathways youth choose, are often neglected in the literature on refugee

education and agency (Chatty, 2009); and yet, they are still an important aspect of young refugees' educational decision-making which needs to be reconciled with the responsibilities of Greek and European humanitarians and policymakers to protect vulnerable young people on the move.

9.4. Supportive actors and other factors

As mentioned above, young refugees' navigational acts – being expressions of their *relational* agency – were propelled by different forms of solidarity around the city, as well as more pedagogical and practical supports. This section discusses these, in response to RQ4.

9.4.1. Solidarity in the grey space: inside and outside of education

While refugee youth were not accepted by everyone they met, neither did everyone outright reject them. They spoke of 'half' the people being good, helpful and welcoming, offering support and assistance – and especially those who were part of the solidarity movement in Thessaloniki. Volunteer organisations and NGOs – run by those I have referred to in this thesis as 'solidarians', following Goździak and Main (2020b) – gave rise to new relationships and forms of resistance. The organisation I call here 'Óli Mazí' had been set up in response to the financial crisis of 2008, for example, and offered employability training and other social support services for anyone in need; whereas others were established later, as a response to the 'refugee crisis', and offered educational, pastoral and more specialised legal and psychosocial support. As such, civil society filled key gaps in the state's response: not only in terms of learning, but also with other services such as legal advice, accommodation and counselling.

Youth in the study often sought out NFE offers such as language lessons, conversation clubs and arts programmes, run by local and international solidarians, as

they knew they were welcoming, safe and inclusive environments in which they could be seen and heard as they wished (and, importantly, they were free to attend). Their wide variety of languages and cultural backgrounds were acknowledged or even employed in different activities, without making their previous experiences or identity a spectacle. Participants talked about the language 'cocktails' they used in these settings, which were marked by laughter and more comfortable self-expression. They enabled youth to meet their aims of developing language skills and confidence, to help them find employment and build friendships with Greeks (as well as others from different countries). However, while they did make connections with some Greeks via such courses, they mostly met other young refugees – though this still allowed them to create a social support system and spaces of familiarity. As they started to attend in groups, with siblings and new friends, this potential for developing a familiar network was further enhanced. While unbalanced power dynamics could still come into play, the young refugees found commonalities with all involved in the NFE programmes – including not only experiences of migration, displacement, language difficulties, racism and discrimination, but also their hopes and interests.

As a result of engaging in learning and social activities in these NFE spaces, refugee youth rebuilt their confidence, rebuilt their social network and, as mentioned above, rebuilt their identity: to not be seen only as a 'refugee'. They could use NFE to achieve recognition, and to contribute to more positive refugee visibility – to shape the image of refugees from the bottom up. This, then, can also disrupt the informational and social borders between themselves and the 'host' community. While they arguably remained peripheral 'micro-publics' (Amin, 2002), mostly consisting of refugees, NFE offers still provided a 'safe' counterspace (Case & Hunter, 2012) for valuable contact in which they could escape some of their daily difficulties for a while and make steps towards rebuilding their futures. This adds to the small but growing area of literature on

the important role of NFE in supporting young people's (re)construction of their educational trajectories (e.g. Wilkinson et al., 2017).

For many young women, these solidarity organisations were the only accessible and 'appropriate' (i.e. single-gender) spaces for learning and rebuilding a network. Young mothers used them as a source of childcare while they studied, or for other pastoral support – from trained staff and fellow learners from a variety of backgrounds – and in women-only spaces, they socialised and shared their culture and skills in cooking, tailoring or crafts. All youth could, and would, come to staff with a variety of requests: regarding everything from their physical and mental health needs to filling out forms and calling schools or doctors' offices to translate messages. As such, these spaces became much more than learning sites: as the posters around one centre attested, it had become a 'family' and a place of 'solidarity', and thus an essential service for youth trying to find a pathway through various forms of precarity. As such, as in Batsleer et al. (2017, p. 306), they became "small spaces close to home" – even if refugees were not, as in Batsleer et al.'s study, the hosts themselves.

Within and outside of these organisations, young refugees were also surrounded by educational advocates who also demonstrated solidarity – such as teachers, RECs and non-governmental organisation (NGO) staff – who often mediated the relationship between the family and the educational provider, through actions such as community meetings and awareness-raising among parents. These advocates also encouraged young women to raise their aspirations. This was further supported by them having parents who wanted their children to enjoy educational opportunities, and who would push their children to attend school, even when the latter were unwilling – and they would ask teachers how they could help their children study at home, even if they did not speak Greek.

9.4.2. Caring, welcoming and informative teachers, staff and peers

A key influence on all young refugees' aspirations and engagement with education was having supportive (and trained) teachers. This is because they could promote positive attitudes towards learning; go 'above and beyond' to provide advice and psychological support, or refer them to appropriate services; or become role models who represented new possible futures. Indeed, several stakeholders themselves referred to teaching as a practice of care, or even pseudo-'mothering'. There was a suggestion from some interviewees that teachers supported refugee learners by demonstrating 'love' – and indeed, this was offered by staff themselves as a description of the foundation underpinning their practice.

This also extends to other supportive staff and volunteers working in both formal and non-formal settings. Having a welcoming school director who 'opened the gates' and accepted them was paramount, and especially if they accepted them into the more academic, general high school route. Other staff (such as youth programme assistants, coordinators, social workers and caretakers) would help with educational and wider life challenges, such as finding accommodation and translating messages from schools; fostering contact between participants, to widen their social network within and beyond the refugee community; and accompanying them to other urban spaces by inviting them to lunches, exhibitions and performances. During the pandemic, they would deliver items, and share learning materials and resources to keep their spirits up via their group chats. Indeed, there was evidence that stakeholders' empathy towards refugee youth increased further during lockdowns, as they were faced with their own uncertainty – and so, as they stated, they felt that they could begin to understand the youth's own precarities.

In this way, it can be said that educators demonstrated what Kaukko et al. (2022) call 'pedagogical love': meaning that they showed support, care and attention

towards refugee learners. However, in this project, such caring acts were also performed outside of the formal school environment, by non-formal educators and other staff – even if, in some cases, there were still incidences of ‘othering’ when they focused too heavily on the ‘refugee’ aspect of young people’s identity (aligning with Lyons et al., 2012; Theodorou, 2011). As a result of their care, young refugees, and especially young women, opened up to their female teachers in particular, and some even more so than with their parents. All youth also gained the confidence and motivation to keep attending physical or virtual learning spaces, and displayed respect for and closeness to such actors. As they continued to attend, they also built relationships with other learners, who would then invite them to social events and other learning opportunities. As such, these staff members and volunteers can be considered ‘cultural brokers’, who play an important role in refugees’ well-being (Greene, 2019).

9.4.3. Inclusive structures and pedagogies

Alternative learning spaces, as mentioned above, were vital when refugee youth could not overcome the spatial, administrative, linguistic, financial and social barriers to formal education or private tuition. However, beyond being more accessible, the other supportive aspect of NFE was its pedagogical flexibility. While at the senior high school level in formal education, it was reported that most teachers followed a ‘strictly traditional’ format, the NFE sites observed had a collaborative and interactive nature. This was done via pair and group work, trust-building exercises and activities which involved (non-verbal) communication and responsiveness to one’s peers. In addition, the programmes allowed for ‘identity work’ such as sharing skills, jokes, interests and stories, on learners’ own terms, which led to pride and confidence in who they were – or who they were becoming, or wanted to become. They could also celebrate and use their own and others’ languages (via cultural mediators); break stereotypes by

determining their own visibility and voice (including in wider urban spaces, in front of an audience of the general public); and reclaim public space via murals. NFE used creative approaches – both in and beyond arts programmes – such as visual prompts which did not require verbal or written language skills in Greek, and which helped to convey information and stimulate discussion. This constitutes a marked difference from formal high school environments. As Andersson and Andersson (2005) previously argued, such non-formal spaces offer considerable possibilities for new forms of learning – which refugees can shape themselves – as well as chances to teach one another and better understand their new society.

This is not to say, however, that *all* formal schools are so rigidly traditional and their pedagogy so dependent on teacher-fronted delivery. It appeared to fall to individual institutions to help refugees overcome barriers: the schools signed up for refugee student inclusion programmes or training, for example, which was offered by local universities or international or national NGOs. Beyond this, as mentioned above, individual teachers found ways to include refugee learners by taking the time to talk to them, share their belief in their abilities, and educate themselves – which all had a strong effect on young refugees' self-efficacy. Discussions and training courses on inclusive pedagogical approaches have been growing around Europe (Florian & Murdoch, 2021) – including in Greece, where master-level university courses are now available specifically on language education for migrants, for example. However, such pedagogies are not routinely taught outside of new teacher training courses, and this subject was not compulsory for current teachers in the study as part of their continuing professional development.

9.4.4. Other non-social supports

There were several other non-social supports which promoted young refugees' participation – mostly by helping them to overcome practical and material issues. Having a stable home, for example, such as an apartment, provided some security – even if the threat of possible eviction hung over their heads. If they were still in camps, having regular buses to urban centres opened up new possibilities for learning, work and socialising. The availability of counselling services and other forms of healthcare, either in their place of learning or NGOs, meant that they could process some of their difficult experiences and start to focus on building a brighter future.

Above all, however, for learning, they benefited from structured opportunities to do so – and being accommodated in a large city like Thessaloniki, even temporarily, helped. Compared to other contexts, and especially where refugees are held in even more remote rural areas and where resources are under even more strain (Koehler & Schneider, 2019), refugees in Thessaloniki had relatively more chances to learn: even if many centres had long waiting lists and most teaching did not take place in camps. Several opportunities were still, theoretically, available, if they had the support to access and benefit from them – including during the pandemic, when online lessons and physical resources were offered by public high schools and local and national NGOs. NFE offers were created and disseminated particularly quickly, and actors who were already working closely with youth – such as social workers and educational volunteers in shelters for unaccompanied minors – were able to respond quickly with flexible approaches which fit around constraints such as a lack of staff.

10. CONCLUSIONS

10.1. Summary of findings and argument

Overall, this study found that young refugees were being held in a state of spatial, legal, temporal, financial, political and social uncertainty, which restricted them from progressing with their educational trajectories. For example, they were often living outside of Thessaloniki in camps, and not considered for jobs or apartments in the centre – meaning that they were kept out of city life, in a practice which some believed was intentional. It rendered them invisible from educational settings and left them with few or no friends, and without role models in public places who were also racialised as non-white. In addition, the issue of language barriers also rendered them silent or silenced in some settings. Even if they did have the language skills, they did not have the opportunity or resources to be able to refute the misinformation which abounded about the refugee community at a wider scale: to share their own perspectives, stories or the truth of their situation. These forms of everyday bordering led to the youth's motivation and academic or other dreams being downgraded or diverted, as they were denied access to education or left without information or social and material support.

It can be argued that the state's practices towards new arrivals were – and continue to be – intentional acts designed to destabilise refugees' social standing and, ultimately, make them feel less welcome and less likely to stay. As such, the data provides evidence for the argument that precarity is, indeed, manufactured; and that the state has the power to eliminate some of the immediate constraints preventing young refugees from achieving their educational and other life goals. It also demonstrates how the poorest and most marginalised in society – such as those forcibly displaced across borders – suffer the most during times of 'crises', and as a result of government responses to them. However, rather than resigning themselves to

a potential state of “frozen transience” (Nagy, 2018, p. 373), refugee youth in the study proactively navigated and negotiated their conditions. While this highlights their impressive ability to navigate conditions of unsettlement, the fact remains that poor arrival conditions at the margins of Europe can severely disrupt the lives youth envision for themselves.

I would like to conclude by summarising the six main points I have argued in this thesis. Firstly, young refugees were living in an unstable social, political and legal environment which was detrimental for their access to, participation in and progression through post-15 education – and this worsened during COVID-19 lockdowns.

Secondly, these conditions appeared to have been manufactured, and thirdly, they exacerbated social tensions at the micro level. Fourthly, the state and everyday social actors (such as teachers, school directors and volunteers) played a key role in inviting youth into society and out of ‘unsettlement’, or indeed denying them access. Fifthly, youth were active and strategic navigators of this environment, who individually and (particularly for young women) collectively constructed trajectories towards their valued outcomes in spite of their constraints. Sixthly, and finally, the solidarity movement and its educational initiatives – which grew as a response to the “strandedness, limbo, and immobility” of displacement in Greece (Dimitriadi & Sarantaki, 2019, p. 1) – were an absolutely vital support for refugees navigating their way through and out of unsettlement.

10.2. Key contributions of the thesis

By using the concepts of ‘unsettlement’ and ‘navigation’, my aim was to emphasise how young refugees’ social environment in Greece was uncertain, precarious and in flux: a constantly shifting seascape (Vigh, 2009) through which they felt they simply had to keep moving. They had to keep on trying to navigate time, space, invisibility, ‘the

in-between' and gendered and racial inequalities because otherwise, as Sayed put it, "what you going to become? When you are in Greece, and you are a brown skin". While Kohli (2011, p. 314) suggests that the longer refugee children spend in their country of asylum, the more they begin to "move more freely, more wilfully, in a planned way in circumstances they are in charge of", here I would argue that especially in a traditionally transitory context such as Greece, the conditions are such that youth cannot necessarily take charge of their circumstances. Rather, they must navigate what is thrown at them – as the shocks come not only on arrival, but also when they are relocated at short notice after years in one place, for example, or when their cash card is terminated without warning. I wanted to provide examples of their acts of negotiation and resistance in the face of such instability and precarity, and how they exercise (relational and collective) agency – to counteract the dominant stereotypes of the passive, academically 'deficient' young refugee. At the same time, I wanted to add nuance (such as how youth might engage in some spaces but resist others), to avoid perpetuating the binary of the idealised/demonised refugee, or indeed the 'super-refugee' (Fiddian-Qasmiyah, 2017) who succeeds without continued institutional support.

While the main strengths and limitations of the project – related to its approach and practicalities – are discussed in the Methodology chapter of this thesis, here I want to outline its key empirical and theoretical contributions. Empirically, the thesis presents the key barriers to young refugees' access and progression through education in Greece after the age of 15 – and particularly formal education – and the key supports which can be leveraged to promote their engagement. It also unpacks the individual factors which come into play, to remind us of the heterogeneity of the refugee community and the need for tailored and holistic responses. In terms of theory, I conceptualised these barriers as the results of living in a context of prolonged 'unsettlement', which they proactively navigate. I applied and built on the concept of

‘unsettlement’ as a way to describe their precarious and uncertain social worlds – drawing a detailed model of what I termed its infrastructural and intimate conditions – and outlined the various actors who played a role in manufacturing and perpetuating their instability. At the same time, the thesis provides evidence of how young refugees chart a path through their unsettled conditions in/via education – in a relational process which is shaped by individual factors such as gender – to build on Vigh’s concept of ‘social navigation’ and its application in migration, youth and education studies. In this way, taking inspiration from scholars such as Malkki (e.g. 1995), I have tried to introduce a different vocabulary and conceptual insights through which to think about young people’s experiences – in a field which is so often full of legal and policy jargon.

The thesis aimed to re-centre young refugees’ agency and power in discussions of their displacement and education. It highlighted how youth are not only ‘thrown’ together in learning spaces, and have activities happen *to* them; rather, it showed how they enthusiastically seek out and *choose* to engage in such opportunities, and play an active role in how processes unravel (see also Christiansen et al., 2017). Beyond their agency, the thesis also contributes to discussions on the specific role of the arts and creativity in their lives for identity work and overcoming exclusion (e.g. Michalovich, 2021; Pace, 2017), and the imperative of ensuring displaced communities have access to appropriate technology and other resources as learning and public services increasingly become virtual.

My hope is that the young lives and decisions behind the low educational participation statistics in Greece have been painted in more colour and detail – giving a sense of who these young refugees are and what they wish for – to promote a better understanding of their realities and of the potential solutions to their unsettlement.

10.3. Implications for research, policy and practice

10.3.1. Implications for research

For future research, more investigation is needed into the educational impacts of the Greek state's responses to irregularly arriving youth (as well as the responses of other European countries, and especially when they are traditionally 'transitory' contexts at the continent's peripheries). This means exploring more deeply the multiple, intersecting forms of exclusion and neglect which impact their life trajectories, along with more overt instances of hostility and abuse, and especially as they are established, maintained and navigated in everyday educational life (Lems, 2020). This study demonstrates the importance of a bottom-up approach to studying these issues which centres refugees' everyday experiences and perspectives. The findings demonstrate the need for further youth-focused enquiry which centres their own views on 'crises' and highlights their capacity to navigate barriers themselves – with the support of key actors and resources in their specific context. This is needed to counteract dehumanising and patronising narratives of the young refugee as only a passive victim of conflict and disaster, and to instead highlight their agentic potential to effect change (Sen, 2018). Such research is also needed to investigate the longer-term impacts of lockdowns and the COVID-19 pandemic more widely, and how refugee youth's own navigational acts can be best supported on the other side of it; and indeed, the longer-term impacts of living with additional forms of precarity. More than this, a clearer understanding of the relational influences which shape young refugees' decision-making in such perpetually unstable contexts would lead to appropriate, holistic, gender-sensitive support tailored for their situations and needs. This is crucial for supporting their existing strategies and enabling them to experience the benefits of education after the age of 15.

In terms of methodology, like Sen and Pace (2018), I propose ethnographic approaches as the most appropriate means of analysing young refugees' negotiations of adversity and opportunity – i.e. how they exercise agency. Future enquiry could also make better use of more participatory and creative methods, to engage in “conviviality as both a research practice and a research outcome” (Kaptani et al., 2021, p. 68) – to recognise the role that the researcher has in the lives of participants during and beyond the research process.

10.3.2. Implications for policy

The findings highlight the key barriers which are a direct result of state policies. As such, in terms of the implications for policy, it is clear to see which elements of the arrival architecture need to be torn down or at least reorganised, to give refugee youth a chance at (re)building their futures. This requires accepting that migration governance should move out of the realm of emergency and exceptionalism, and into ‘ordinary politics’ (De Lauri, 2019). This would mean regularising refugees’ statuses, speeding up determination processes, and ensuring access to public services and stable, long-term accommodation, among other asks. For education policy, it could mean mainstreaming gender in inclusion policies for all youth, from all communities, to promote the participation of young women whose education may have been disrupted by factors such as pregnancy.

At the school level, it was found that administrators also have a key role to play in inviting refugee youth across the threshold of society: acting as ‘gatekeepers’ who manage who is or is not permitted a presence within it. With a clearer policy framework – particularly surrounding age – refugee youth’s access to education would not be so dependent on such social factors. Outside of schools, the availability of NFE – as a welcoming ‘in-between’ offer – needs to be increased and protected from ongoing

financial and political threats, such as new Greek legislation which hinders civil society organisations from providing such services (Choose Love, 2021). Beyond political support, sustained financial support is also needed from donors (also at the international level) to realise the transformative potential of NFE – not only in terms of its own learning offers, but also in terms of its role as a bridge into public schools, a provider of essential pastoral services and as a ‘safe space’ for refugees to build valuable relationships, skills and self-confidence. In contexts where formal education follows a relatively restrictive and teacher-delivered curriculum – as is mostly the case in general senior high schools in Greece – NFE can be a more flexible alternative which is adaptive to individual learners’ needs and aspirations. These needs can include faster and more accessible enrolment procedures (which do not require evidence of previous learning), flexibility with attendance and content, and being able to use one’s known language(s).

10.3.3. Implications for practice

For NGOs themselves, in their practice, the findings reiterate the need to listen to and work more closely with refugee stakeholders when designing and implementing educational provision or other support (Ibesh et al., 2021). Support should aim to centre their strengths, needs and interests, while recognising what they can bring to educational settings and initiatives themselves. It was found that youth benefited from spaces and opportunities for informal contact (such as social events) around structured NFE programmes, for example, and that offers which celebrated multilingualism, mediated languages and cultures, fostered collaboration and interaction and provided space for ‘identity work’ were particularly useful for fostering meaningful (cross-cultural) contact and the educational and social outcomes refugee youth valued.

This raises the question of how to transfer the benefits of NFE over to the formal educational context, for those who wish to continue along a more traditional academic trajectory. To start with, schools should be offered better training programmes and support, with a focus on fostering relationships among the entire school community (Huss et al., 2021). Many such courses and resources are already offered free of charge by (inter)national NGOs across Greece, and could be better utilised. In general, the thesis highlights the need for the state education system to address its key issues of flexibility and equitable access – to not only benefit young refugees, but all learners with additional support needs. Its potential to do so became apparent following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. While various interviewees talked about how the health crisis had exposed its insufficiencies, several also noted how it had highlighted its possibilities for change: demonstrated by its relatively swift shift to online learning, for example (even if this had its technical issues).

Outside of education and pastoral services, the media also play an important role in shaping young refugees' discursive and social environment – as indeed, they have a key responsibility in deciding how new arrivals are viewed. Aesthetic accounts need to be brought back into dialogue with "cultural, geographical, and legalistic discourses" to permit richer, more nuanced representations of refugees' selfhood and backgrounds (Mazzara, 2015, p. 450). This would improve the image of newcomers among the wider public, and filter down into more welcoming educational environments for young refugees.

The combination of these practices with unrelenting advocacy for structural and political change in the treatment of refugees could, I sincerely hope, begin to dismantle young refugees' multiple, overlapping dimensions of 'unsettlement' and support their own navigation towards brighter, more stable futures.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Migration management policies: containment and deterrence

Three key international strategies on migration management have led to the entrapment of refugees and migrants in Greece: the EU's approval of the Dublin III Regulation in 2013; the closure of the 'Balkan route' in 2015; and the turning point of the implementation of the so-called 'EU-Turkey deal' shortly afterwards. Firstly, the Dublin Regulation (EU law No 604/2013) determines that the first Member State that third-country nationals or stateless persons enter in Europe is responsible for processing their application for international protection. This means that refugees must remain in the country until their application has been either approved or denied (unless they decide to leave via irregular means); and in the case of Greece, this may take years, due to a lack of capacity to deal with the overwhelming number of applications it receives (Póczik & Sárik, 2018). Secondly, Northern Macedonia and other states to the north closed their borders in November 2015 (Deardorff Miller, 2017), sealing off the 'Balkan route' and putting an end to Greece's facilitated transit strategy. Thirdly, in 2016, the European Commission made a controversial agreement with Turkey to stem the flow of irregular migration to the EU.

This deal determined that any migrant crossing illegally from Turkey to Greece after 20th March 2016 would be returned if they were deemed 'ineligible' to apply for asylum (Baster & Merminod, 2019; Bjertrup et al., 2018). While vulnerable persons such as unaccompanied children were initially exempted from the new process, pressure from the European Commission led to the controversial decision to subject them to the same procedures (Lovett et al., 2017). This containment policy has been justified by the Minister for Migration as a suitable method of controlling entry to the EU, despite the Union's obligations to the Refugee Convention and the fact that Greece's highest court ruled that it had no justification in either Greek or EU law (HRW, 2018). The resulting

catastrophe on the Aegean islands has been described as “political theatre” to deter further migrants from making the crossing to Greece (Baster & Merminod, 2019).

Appendix B: Young refugees' post-15 education: international rights and policy frameworks

When under 18 years of age, young refugees' and asylum seekers' right to education is protected by Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as Article 22 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights; and further by Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Education (FRA, 2017). Provision of education to all asylum applicants is also a minimum obligation in the proposed recast Dublin Regulation (recital 22) for all EU Member States, in line with the EU Fundamental Rights Charter (FRA, 2017); and similarly, education and training are considered key factors in the integration of third-country nationals by the European Commission (FRA, 2017). In terms of secondary education, the global education community agreed on the common goal of universalising secondary education at the World Economic Forum in 2015 (IIEP-UNESCO, 2019); echoed during the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. In addition, the 2015 Incheon Declaration called for inclusivity and lifelong learning for all (UNESCO, 2016). Ever since, there has been an increasing awareness of the need to ensure access to (quality) education during crises beyond the primary level (Bessler, 2016).

As such, in December 2018, all 193 UN member states endorsed the Global Compact on Refugees (United Nations, 2018), which urges states to support access to education up to the tertiary level in its action plan for educational inclusion. This integration drive for older children and youth is a fairly new endeavour, arguably prompted by the 2012-2016 UNHCR global education strategy (UNESCO, 2019), which recognised that displacement is increasingly protracted and that education cannot wait for stability to return (Dryden-Peterson, 2019). Indeed, it recognises that crises "often affect a significant proportion of the time a child takes to grow, develop and prepare for adult life" (Bessler, 2019, p. 4). As such, there has been a shift in

prioritisation in Education in Emergencies from primary education to lifelong learning (Anselme et al., 2019). Governments are also now recognising the importance of secondary-level schooling, including for those “structurally excluded”, either because of its role in “economic development” or as an opportunity for young people “to consolidate learning and embark on life choices” in higher education or the labour market (IIEP-UNESCO, 2019, p. 2). However, Anselme et al. (2019, p. 22) lament the fact that while this shift can be seen in international frameworks and humanitarian and development actors’ aspirations, “this transition is neither reflected in systematic funding allocation to youth education programmes nor in data and evidence available to describe young people’s situations”.

Appendix C: Fieldwork timeline

The fieldwork took place over eight months, between mid-October 2019 and June 2020. The length of time in the field was originally determined by my commitments to the NGOs for whom I was teaching and the continuation of their educational programmes, as well as my periodic reflections on the extent to which themes were becoming saturated; and later by COVID-19 restrictions.

Sep-Oct 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prior to fieldwork: adjusted RQs and interview/FGD schedules based on learning from pilot study• Continued reading around the topic (literature, news, policy communications)
Oct-Dec 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Start of volunteering with NGO (participant observation)• Unstructured observation to learn about environment, gain knowledge of participants and begin building trusting relationships• Ongoing analysis of observation notes and changes to policy• Adjustment of RQs and interview/FGD schedules as necessary
Jan-March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Start of interviews with stakeholders, parents/guardians and young refugees• Ongoing analysis of observation notes and changes to policy• Adjustment of RQs and interview/FGD schedules as necessary
March-June 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Movement of fieldwork online due to COVID-19 restrictions• Completion of remaining interviews via online platforms• Continuation of teaching and observation activities online• Questioning of conclusions; identification of examples/counter-examples; reflection on saturation of themes and need to extend time in field

Appendix D: Stakeholder interview schedule

Notes

- This schedule was for parents, teachers, NGO/IGO staff (including volunteers), Refugee Education Coordinators (RECs), and representatives of local authorities/the municipality
- It is semi-structured and was adapted to the individual (i.e. their role) and context; for example, by referencing recent government press releases, their child(ren)'s experiences, news articles, or events observed
- Interviews were audio-recorded when participant gave permission; otherwise written notes were taken (where permitted)

Pre-interview

Introduce myself and the project, if not already acquainted through the observation sites. Review information sheet and consent form and how information from the interview will be used, in the presence of an interpreter if preferred by the participant. Inform participant that quotes or information will not be put with their name, and ask if they would like to choose their pseudonym. [Also give the opportunity to speak as an individual, without explicitly mentioning the name of their organisation.] Give a reminder of the project and the interview process by saying:

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. As you know, I'm interested in finding out about young refugees' and asylum seekers' educational experiences in Greece, and all the things which help or stop them learning and reaching their goals. So, the questions will mostly be about that. It will take between 30 minutes and 1 hour – does that work for you? If you want to skip any questions or if you want to stop the interview at any time, it's not a problem – just let me know. You can also ask me anything you like at any time, too.

Warm-up

- 1) Please tell me a bit about yourself. How are you involved in young refugees' education?

Enablers and constraints

- 2) What educational opportunities are available to young refugees (aged 15-25) in and around Thessaloniki?
- 3) In your experience, what form of education do young refugees (and their families) prefer? (e.g. general, vocational, non-formal...)
- 4) What do you think **supports** young refugees to go to school or other educational activities in your region?

- 5) What do you think **stops** young refugees going to school or other educational activities in your region, or makes it **difficult**?
- 6) Do you think their age, gender, accommodation situation, asylum status, nationality, language, religion or being unaccompanied/with family affects their participation in education? How/why?

Youth aspirations

- 7) Imagine the refugees and asylum seekers you have been in contact with aged 15-25. Approximately what percentage do you think wish to continue in their education, and why?
- 8) [*If they do not wish to continue*] What alternative activities do they engage in or imagine?
- 9) Who or what do you think influences their decision-making? (e.g. family, peers, teachers, financial situation, personal motivation...)

Your/your organisation's role

- 10) How do you and/or your organisation support 15 to 25-year-olds' learning?
- 11) What **helps** to support them, and what makes it **difficult**?
- 12) Who do you talk to or work with to support their learning (e.g. RECs, teachers), and how do you help one another?
- 13) What type of support would help them the most, and who could provide it?

Closing

- 14) To conclude: if you were in complete control of the system, what would you change to support their educational participation? (...if you think that should be the goal)
- 15) Is there anything else you would like to add related to this topic, or anything else you think I should know?
- 16) Do you have any questions for me?

[Renegotiate consent and thank participant for their time.]

Appendix E: Youth pair interview schedule

Notes

- Discussions were designed for 2-4 young people per session
- Discussions did not take place at a time which interfered with learning (i.e. during timetabled classes)
- It was stressed that responses were pseudonymous and would not be passed on to their school/parents/authorities (unless it appeared they were at serious risk of harm)
- The discussion was audio-recorded, as all participants gave permission

Pre-discussion

Reintroduce myself and the project. Review information sheets and consent forms and how information from the discussion will be used. Inform participants that quotes or information will not be put with their name, and ask if they would like to choose their pseudonym. Also remind them that they shouldn't share anything anyone else says outside of the room either. Give a reminder of the project and the interview process by saying:

Thank you for coming here today. As you know, I want to learn what you think about education here in Greece, and all the people, places and things which help or stop you learning and reaching your goals. So, we'll mostly talk about that. It will take approximately 1 to 1 and a half hours – does that work for everybody? If you want to skip any part of the conversation, or if you want to leave at any time, it's not a problem – just let me know. You can also ask me anything you like at any time, too.

Discussion

Task 1: Educational present

- 1) Let's think about you at the moment. If you like, draw on this piece of paper.
 - a. Where do you go to learn?
 - b. Who or what helps you to learn?
 - c. What makes it difficult?
 - d. Do you think you will continue? If yes, for how long?
 - e. Where could you go to learn?
 - f. What could you use to learn? (e.g. computers, games, books, ...)
 - g. Where would you like to go to learn?
 - h. What stops you?
 - i. Who or what could help you?
 - j. Do you help anyone with their learning? How? Why?

Task 2: Educational future

- 2) Now let's think about your future, in perhaps 5 or 10 years. Draw your future goals on this second piece of paper.
 - a. What would you like to be or do in the future? Why and where?
 - b. Have you always wanted to be/do [goal]? [If no] Why did it change?

Task 3: Pathway to the future

- 3) Finally, on this third piece of paper, draw the pathway to your future goals.
 - a. What do you need to study or learn to reach your goals?
 - b. Where could you go to learn that?
 - c. Where would you like to go to learn that?
 - d. What could make it difficult?
 - e. Who or what could help you to learn that? (e.g. family, computers, ...)
 - f. Do you think you can help anyone else with their learning? How?

Summing-up

- 4) Tape your three pieces of paper together. [Summarise main ideas shared]
- 5) Is there anything else you would like to add related to this topic, or anything else you think I should know?
- 6) Is there anything I should have asked you, but didn't?
- 7) Do you have any questions for me?

[Renegotiate consent, remind about confidentiality and thank all involved for their time]

Appendix F: Youth individual interview schedule

Notes

- Discussions did not take place at a time which interfered with learning (i.e. during timetabled classes)
- It was stressed that responses were pseudonymous and would not be passed on to their school/parents/authorities (unless it appeared they were at serious risk of harm)
- The discussion was audio-recorded, as all participants gave permission

Pre-discussion

Reintroduce myself and the project. Review information sheet and consent form and how information from the interview will be used. Inform participant that quotes or information will not be put with their name, and ask if they would like to choose their pseudonym. Give a reminder of the project and the interview process by saying:

Thank you for agreeing to this interview. As you know, I want to learn what you think about education here in Greece, and all the people, places and things which help or stop you learning and reaching your goals. So, we'll mostly talk about that. It will take between 30 minutes and 1 hour – does that work for you? If you want to skip any questions or if you want to stop the interview at any time, it's not a problem – just let me know. You can also ask me anything you like at any time, too.

Discussion

Educational present

- 1) Let's think about you at the moment.
 - a. Where do you go to learn?
 - b. Who or what helps you to learn?
 - c. What makes it difficult?
 - d. Do you think you will continue? If yes, for how long?
 - e. Where could you go to learn?
 - f. What could you use to learn? (e.g. computers, games, books, ...)
 - g. Where would you like to go to learn?
 - h. What stops you?
 - i. Who or what could help you?
 - j. Do you help anyone with their learning? How? Why?

Educational future

- 2) Now let's think about your future, in perhaps 5 or 10 years.
 - a. What would you like to be or do in the future? Why and where?

- b. Have you always wanted to be/do [goal]? [If no] Why did it change?

Pathway to the future

- 3) Finally, let's think about your pathway to your future goals.
 - g. What do you need to study or learn to reach your goals?
 - h. Where could you go to learn that?
 - i. Where would you like to go to learn that?
 - j. What could make it difficult?
 - k. Who or what could help you to learn that? (e.g. family, computers, ...)
 - l. Do you think you can help anyone else with their learning? How?

Summing-up

- 4) Is there anything else you would like to add related to this topic, or anything else you think I should know?
- 5) Is there anything I should have asked you, but didn't?
- 6) Do you have any questions for me?

[Renegotiate consent, remind about confidentiality and thank all involved for their time]

Appendix G: Coding excerpt

The below is an example coding frame, showing the data analysis process. This particular frame was used as the basis for Paper 1, and draws from data on the institutional factors shaping the young participants' (re-)engagement with education upon arrival.

	Codes	Categories	Themes
Institutional factors and their impacts	Accommodation terminated Dispersal/accommodation changed at short notice Not enough UASC shelters Struggling to find/pay for accom after eviction	Unstable/uncertain accommodation	Spatial bordering
	Accommodated far from schools/NGO centres Accommodated far from work opportunities Accommodated far from (potential) peers/supports Limited/lacking 15+ education in camps	Isolated/remote accommodation	
	Noise Overcrowding Tensions with neighbours in camps Poor advice and misinformation Discrimination, segregation in local area	Social and material living conditions	
	Accommodation stability promoted engagement Sharing helpful information (e.g. opportunities) Camp affects daily routine	Impacts of accommodation type	
	Severe delays with asylum interviews/decisions Few legal routes out (e.g. relocation) No guarantee of acceptance Lack of information on procedures/timeline Needing ID to register for services	Legal limbo	Temporal bordering
	Enforced waiting Current and future uncertainty	Uncertain futures	
	Focusing on skills for present Lowered/adapted aspirations Stress/anxiety Unsure whether to enrol in formal education Pursuing education to 'stabilise' futures Pursuing education to avoid 'wasting' time 'Warming' to GR/Greek people	Impacts of protracted displacement in GR	
	Left before exams/receiving diploma Cannot provide required documents Translation of documents	Documentation requirements	Administrative bordering
	Limited/lacking Greek proficiency Lack of integration programmes Limited reception classes at 15+ level Limited language NFE at 15+ level High cost of private language tuition	Language requirements	
	Overage students not accepted Lack of legal/policy clarity r.e. age	Age requirements	
	Acceptance dependent upon director/administrator Racism/discrimination Diverted to vocational schools Supportive directors/staff	Subjective admin processes	
	Starting education at same/lower level Disrupted/altered trajectory Own responsibility to find opportunities/support	Impacts of admin factors	

	<p>Lowered aspirations Uncertainty r.e. aspirations Ideal vs practical</p>	Impacts on aspirations	Bordered aspirations
	<p>Motivated to continue learning Self-study/volunteering/using initiative</p>	Personal motivation/ resourcefulness	Navigating borders
	<p>Support from family/friends Drawing from social resources available</p>	Social supports	

Appendix H: Selected presentations

[N.B. Maternity leave April 2022-April 2023]

Conferences and workshops

- '(Co-)creative contact in marginal spaces: young refugees' encounters in solidarity arts workshops in Thessaloniki, Greece'. Migration and Societal Change Conference, Utrecht, Netherlands, 2023
- 'Learning to cross an endless sea: how young forced migrants navigate the Greek social seascape in/through education'. British Educational Research Association (BERA) Conference, online, 2021
- "Make them invisible... and then they actually disappear": the impact of border(ed) visibility on young refugees' post-15 education'. Royal Geographical Society Conference, online, 2021
- 'Learning to dance across borders: the potential of young refugees' non-formal education as a meaningful space of encounter'. VOLPOWER Academic Workshop, online, 2021
- 'Learning to navigate "unsettlement": three stories of how refugee youth in Greece re-imagine and re-make their futures through education'. British Sociological Association (BSA) Conference, online, 2021
- 'Drawing (across) borders: reflections on the use of creative visual communication in ethnographic research with/for young refugees'. Royal Anthropological Institute Film Festival Conference, online, 2021
- 'Arts as process, product and setting: reflections on the role of creativity and visuality in research with/for young refugees'. Nordic Migration Research Conference, online, 2021
- 'Young refugees' perspectives on post-compulsory (15+) education in mainland Greece: learning needs, inclusion challenges and key relationships during "unsettlement"'. MiCreate Conference 'Local dimension of children's migrations and its impact on EU integration policy', online, 2020
- 'The role of motherhood in young female refugees' educational decision-making in precarity'. European Association of Social Anthropologists Conference, online, 2020
- 'Young refugees' post-compulsory educational trajectories: a social-ecological analysis of constraints and enablers in Northern Greece'. Istanbul Policy Center Conference 'Exploring the dimensions of refugee inclusion: social structures, institutions and strategies', Istanbul, Türkiye, 2019
- 'The challenges and opportunities for refugees' educational integration: preliminary findings from a social-ecological investigation in Greece'. University of Gothenburg Conference 'Organizing migration and integration in contemporary societies', Gothenburg, Sweden, 2019
- 'Young refugees' participation in upper-secondary education: mapping macro-level constraints and enablers in Northern Greece'. RESPOND conference

'Unpacking the challenges and possibilities for migration governance',
University of Cambridge, UK, 2019

Student events

- Four-minute thesis at Oxbridge Exchange, 2021
- Three-minute thesis at GUDTP Annual Conference, 2019
- Draft ToS proposal to RTS group, Trinity term 2019
- Literature review to RTS group, Michaelmas term 2018

Appendix I: Publications and exhibitions

Published

- Hunt, L. (2023). Creative (en)counterspaces: Engineering valuable contact for young refugees via solidarity arts workshops in Thessaloniki, Greece. *Migration Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnad016>
- Barry, K., Southern, J., Baxter, T., Blondin, S., Booker, C., et al. (2023). An agenda for creative practice in the new mobilities paradigm. *Mobilities*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2022.2136996> [Contribution: writing, image]
- Hunt, L. (2022). 'Guiding, shaping and resisting: Refugee mothers' educational strategies as they navigate unsettlement'. In M. Lombard (Ed.), *Reclaiming migrant motherhood: Identity, belonging, and displacement in a global context*. Lanham: Lexington Books, pp. 133-148.
- Aleghfeli, Y. K., & Hunt, L. (2022). Education of unaccompanied refugee minors in high-income countries: Risk and resilience factors. *Educational Research Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2022.100433> [Contribution: validation, review, editing]
- Hunt, L. (2021). Bordered trajectories: The impact of institutional bordering practices on young refugees' (re-)engagement with post-15 education in Greece. *Social Sciences*, 10(11), article 421. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10110421>
- Hunt, L. (2021). Allies, access and (collective) action: Young refugee women's navigation of gendered educational constraints in Greece. *DiGeSt: Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, 8(2), 7-21. <https://doi.org/10.21825/digest.v8i2.17557>

Accepted for publication

- Hunt, L. (Forthcoming). Drawing (across) borders: Reflections on the use of creative visual communication in ethnographic research with/for young refugees. *TRAJECTORIA: Anthropology, Museums and Art*.
- Hunt, L., & Amiri, P. (Forthcoming). For me, a border [Comic]. *Girlhood Studies*.
- Hunt, L. (Forthcoming). 'Young refugees' participation in post-compulsory education: Mapping policies, actors and challenges in Northern Greece'. In K. Sobczak-Szelc, M. Pachocka, & J. Szaławska (Eds.), *The integration of refugees in the education and labour market: Between inclusion and exclusion practices*. London: Routledge.
- Hunt, L. (Forthcoming). 'A day in the educational life of a teenage refugee in Thessaloniki, Greece'. In W. Kopisch (Ed.), *Education and integration* [Working title]. London: Bloomsbury.

Under revision/review

- Hunt, L., Aleghfeli, Y. K., McIntyre, J., & Stone, C. Refugees' gendered experiences of education in Europe, 2015-2022: A scoping review.
- Hunt, L. Unsettlement: The manufactured precarity and uncertainty of displacement and its impact on young lives.
- Hunt, L. Being human: Reflections on ethics-in-practice in ethnographic fieldwork with young refugees.
- Hunt, L., Papallas, A., & Wessendorf, S. Urban encounters: Introduction to the Special Issue. *Migration Studies*.

Exhibition of illustrations based on DPhil research

- International Association for the Study of Forced Migration Conference 2022
- Global Borderlands Conference 2021
- Im|mobililities Conference 2021
- Royal Anthropological Institute exhibition *Illustrating Anthropology*, 2020 (online and at the Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool, UK)

Appendix J: Published version of Paper 1



social sciences



Article

Bordered Trajectories: The Impact of Institutional Bordering Practices on Young Refugees' (Re-)Engagement with Post-15 Education in Greece

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Abstract: Greece has been a site of various crises in recent years: firstly, the financial crash of 2008; secondly, the ongoing 'refugee crisis', which peaked in 2015; and thirdly, the current COVID-19 pandemic. This paper addresses the first of these crises, and particularly how state responses to increased migration flows shape young refugees' (aged 15–25) (re-)engagement with post-15 learning opportunities upon arrival in the country. It is based on semi-structured interviews with young refugees living in Thessaloniki, conducted as part of an ethnographic doctoral project on educational decision-making. The findings reveal that three key institutional bordering practices in Greece—namely the bordering of space (via encampment), time (via enforced waiting), and public services (via administrative barriers)—played central roles in young refugees' (re-)engagement with post-15 education; often causing their dreams to be diverted or downgraded. However, with determination and the support of willing gatekeepers, refugee youth found ways to (re)construct adapted learning trajectories despite, and in response to, these arrival challenges.



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1. Introduction

Sayed is a young man from Iran in his early 20s. His is a recognisable face in the various language, arts, and sports courses run by solidarity initiatives around Thessaloniki, which were established in response to the financial and refugee crises in Greece. He is an energetic character who does everything at full speed and with maximum effort: whether it is hammering out old songs on malfunctioning keyboards or excitedly explaining the Farsi roots of English words. During his time in Greece he has tried to get involved in as many learning activities around the city as possible, as both a student and volunteer, to gain friends and work experience. However, especially in the beginning, he said that it had not been easy to find and access these opportunities. He complained that a number of forces worked against him and other refugees¹ in Greece, trying to keep them 'out of society', saying, 'It's as if that they are controlling, to not let them get in society or improve themselves—or there are no chance to do that'. This control could involve asking for particular documents to enrol in schools, which many refugees simply cannot provide, or, as Sayed explained, keeping refugees in isolated spaces and uncertain legal states.

The aim of this article is to explore the impacts of these state responses to newcomers and particularly to show how they impact young refugees' (re-)engagement with post-15 education after arrival in the country. These practices are conceptualised as examples of *institutional bordering*; drawing from the geographical literature which understands that borders are not just static physical entities at the state periphery, but also active processes of exclusion taking place in everyday life and spaces *inside* the state (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Yuval-Davis et al. 2018). The article follows Strasser and Tibet's (2020) proposition that the border crisis at the margins of Europe has resulted in intensified political and legal controls that trickle down into the everyday lives of young migrants. It attempts to expand upon the 'daily, soft, lived, and unspoken realities' of these controls, which the discourse of

overlapping crises often renders invisible (Carastathis et al. 2018, p. 29), with a particular focus on how education is implicated. Furthermore, it explores how youth respond to and navigate these controls, with the support of willing ‘gatekeepers’. In doing so, it aims to add to the limited literature on young refugees’ expressions of agency, particularly as they encounter hosts, school systems, and other forms of education (Guo et al. 2019; Pace 2017).

In terms of structure, the article first sketches out the socio-political landscape of ‘Crisis Greece’ today, young refugees’ educational opportunities within it, and their known challenges and supports. It then lays out the theoretical framework underpinning the discussion and the methodology of the wider study. The article then presents and discusses findings from the study which demonstrate how youth are forced to navigate multiple forms of institutional bordering that impact their post-15 educational trajectories, and the role of non-formal education² (NFE), ‘gatekeepers’, and other everyday social actors in this process. It concludes with implications for research, policy, and practice.

1.1. Refugee Youth in Greece: A Context of Intersecting Crises

To understand young refugees’ challenges and their educational impact, it is first necessary to sketch out the nature of the ‘critical times’ Greece is experiencing (Dalaoglou and Agelopoulos 2018), as well as refugees’ place within them. As a key entry point into the continent, Greece took a central role in what has come to be known as the ‘European refugee crisis’ (Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017); referring to the heightened numbers of arrivals seeking refuge in Europe in recent years. Since 2015, more than one million people have entered the country, with the majority seeking asylum (Clayton and Holland 2015). In the early days of the ‘crisis’, most passed through and continued their journeys to Northern and Western Europe; however, due to the closure of borders and other ‘migration management’ strategies, 177,463 people are now currently trapped (Afxoumenidis et al. 2017; Crawley et al. 2016; Stathopoulou 2019; UNHCR 2021). As of May 2020, an estimated 45,300 of this number were under the age of 18 (UNICEF 2020). While the majority of minors have been arriving with their families and are gender-balanced, around 12% are unaccompanied; being mostly 15 to 17-year-old boys (UNHCR 2020; UNICEF 2019).

The majority of the refugee population is on the mainland, in a somewhat better situation than those left behind in the notorious conditions of the island ‘hotspots’, but many are still in overcrowded camp conditions which the Ministry of Education has previously admitted are ‘horrendous’ (MoERR 2017, p. 14). Camps and Reception and Identification Centres (RICs)—such as those outside Thessaloniki—are often in remote locations, with little infrastructure and insufficient resources (Tsavdaroglou and Lalenis 2020). As of May 2020, 28% of all registered refugee children (under 18) were accommodated in such camps; 24% in RICs; 31% in hotels and apartments for families; and the remainder in shelters, hotels or ‘safe zones’ for unaccompanied youth, or ‘informal arrangements’ (UNICEF 2020).

One of the fundamental issues is that newcomers have entered a country still struggling with the aftershocks of the ‘financial crisis’ of 2008. This has caused high levels of unemployment and severe cuts to public sector funding, meaning that it was a country already experiencing economic instability, social tensions, and an increasingly prominent far-right voice (Christodoulou et al. 2016). While it has been suggested that Greece is ‘accustomed to refugee crises throughout its history’, which have traditionally been met with ‘a stance of hospitality towards the stranger’ (Lazaratou et al. 2017, p. 800), the recent heightened numbers, diminished welfare provision, and enduring nature of both ‘crises’ have led to personal and community insecurity, which has lessened ‘the chance of integration’ (Vergou 2019, p. 3165). Therefore, despite etymologically denoting critical, decisive moments, the current ‘crises’ have instead led to an enduring state of risk and uncertainty (Kowalczyk 2018)—what Veizis (2020, p. 264) calls a situation of ‘chronic emergency’. Before the COVID-19 pandemic added a further crisis, this meant that material, political, and social conditions were already deteriorating, impacting the inclusion of young refugees in Greek schools (Lazaratou et al. 2017).

1.2. Young Refugees' Education in Crisis Greece: Opportunities and Challenges

In theory, young refugees beyond the Greek compulsory schooling age of 6–15 have various educational opportunities. A 'reception class' system (DYEP³), for example, was established by the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs to gradually introduce newcomers into public school settings (Leivaditi et al. 2020). These reception classes, offered from the primary (*δημοτικό σχολείο*) to senior high school (*λύκειο*) levels, cover a 'core curriculum' of language, mathematics, information technology, arts, and sports and are taught by specially appointed substitute teachers. Youth can also opt for vocational high schools and can register at any point during the academic year (Leivaditi et al. 2020; Palaiologou et al. 2019). This process is aided by Refugee Education Coordinators (RECs), i.e., seconded teachers from the public system who have been tasked with liaising between refugee families, schools, camp management, social workers, and other actors to support enrolment (OECD 2018). Alternatively, those over 18 can join a Second Chance school for two years, taught in Greek, to obtain the equivalent of a junior high school (*γυμνάσιο*) certificate (Leivaditi et al. 2020).

Aside from these state-organised opportunities, young refugees can also attend various free NFE offers in camps and urban settings run by intergovernmental organisations such as UNICEF and by civil society, ranging from 'catch-up' courses and homework clubs (supporting formal schooling) to language, employability, arts, and parenting skills training (INEE 2020; OECD 2018). The recent HELIOS project from the International Organization for Migration also ties housing to six months of adult education, covering language, culture, and employability and life skills (IOM 2019). In large metropolitan areas such as Thessaloniki—where the research described below took place—the higher number of refugees, greater presence of international humanitarian actors and solidarity initiatives, and nature of local policy responses have meant that a wide range of such educational opportunities are available (Dicker 2017; IOM 2021; Sabchev 2021a).

However, in practice, participation in these opportunities remains low. Only half of the 15- to 17-year-old age group in managed accommodation⁴ across the country were enrolled in public schools by 2019, and of this number, half were said to eventually stop attending (Tzoraki 2019; UNICEF and REACH 2017; ESWG 2019). Engagement in higher education is also said to be very low (Leivaditi et al. 2020). Even in NFE, which many youth have said they prefer, participation has also been inconsistent (UNICEF and REACH 2017). Various reports have attributed these figures to challenges such as delays with implementing secondary-level reception classes; a lack of support with complicated enrolment procedures; a lack of capacity, coordination, and sustainability; fragmented responses; and insufficient teacher recruitment, skills, training, and working hours (Leivaditi et al. 2020; MoERR 2018; Papapostolou et al. 2020; Tzoraki 2019; Vergou 2019). There have also been reports of local parents' loud objections to young refugees' enrolment, particularly in primary schools, due to unfounded fears of insecurity and health issues—mostly associated with their residence in camps (Nagy 2018; Vergou 2019). This has led to fear and mistrust among refugees and their families, which reduces the likelihood of participation (OECD 2020).

While there is therefore some understanding of how macro-level, structural issues prevent educational access, only rarely are the impacts of state responses *beyond* the education system discussed. Few studies have drawn a line between practices such as encampment (Vergou 2019; Vergou et al. 2021) and legal uncertainty and young refugees' education, especially at the post-compulsory (15+) level. Even less research has explored the 'non-typical' educational routes refugee youth may choose to take instead, such as in non-formal settings (Palaiologou et al. 2019), from the perspective of youth themselves. Moreover, young people's situated experiences of state practices—in specific cities and regions, with their highly varying local-level responses and socio-spatial characteristics (Sabchev 2021a, 2021b)—could also be further explored.

This article aims to contribute towards filling this gap by adding to the literature on how refugee youth experience and navigate state-level bordering practices in the everyday. It aims to answer the questions:

- How does the institutional treatment of young refugees upon arrival in Greece impact their (re-)engagement with post-15 education?
- How do youth navigate (the impacts of) these practices, and what supports them in this process?

In doing so, it is hoped that the paper will enable a better understanding of young refugees' decisions to stop attending learning settings, to not enrol in the first place, or to opt for non-formal offers; as well as identifying resources and relationships that can be leveraged to support them to continue.

It is based on the belief that participating in education after the age of 15 in Greece can offer youth the benefits of more employment opportunities, better health outcomes (for both them and their children), and ownership of a 'safe space' in which they can rebuild their aspirations and grow emotionally and socially; all of which contribute to more positive well-being (Ben Asher et al. 2020; Iraklis 2021; Leivaditi et al. 2020; Rezaian et al. 2019). Beyond this, for the wider community, it can play an important role in creating the conditions in which diversity in social life is accepted (Pastoor 2017).

1.3. Theoretical Framework: Institutional Bordering

This paper is based on an understanding of *bordering* as an active process of social, cultural, political, and economic exclusion, rather than only the delineation of physical or drawn territorial boundaries (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). While bordering can be performed symbolically by everyday social actors—for example, when teachers establish an 'us' and 'them' that excludes newcomers from the 'national community' (Paasi 2013)—this paper focuses primarily on the Greek state's macro-level practices towards new arrivals. Following Dimitriadi and Sarantaki (2019), the paper refers to *institutional bordering* to conceptualise this process. However, while Dimitriadi and Sarantaki's definition of institutionalised bordering ranges from the actions of border guards at the periphery to exclusion in the housing sector, this paper focuses solely on how bordering processes operate *within* the state after newcomers have entered the country. As such, it aims to explore how, institutionally, even after young refugees have crossed the physical border, they continue to be kept 'outside' of society—behind camp walls and legal and administrative borders. As Dimitriadi and Sarantaki (2019, p. 21) put it, 'If borders determine one's mobility, while in the country inclusion and exclusion are managed through administrative processes, legislation, access to employment, health care and living conditions to name a few'.

Regarding administrative processes, there is a growing literature on how everyday bordering operates via public institutions, most of which builds on the seminal work of Yuval-Davis et al. (e.g., 2018). This literature focuses on how everyday social actors such as university and school administrators come to function as local-level border guards—through devolved border controls—in a direct relationship between education and state border governance (Jenkins 2014; Lounasmaa 2020). Rodriguez et al. (2020) refer to schools themselves as a 'borderland': a space in which the humanity of the 'other' may be denied but also in which, drawing on Anzaldúa (1987), processes of domination can be challenged and transgressed. In this space, they argue, school staff have the potential to escort migrant youth across everyday borders. This paper explores how these dynamics of institutional bordering and support operate in Greece, and how refugee youth have navigated them to (re-)engage with post-15 education. In doing so, it responds to calls for more research analysing the subjectivities of those 'on' or 'outside' such borders; and how young refugees in particular experience border regimes both inside and outside of schools, and the impact this has on their learning trajectories (Lafazani 2021; Oliver and Hughes 2018; Strasser and Tibet 2020).

2. Methods

2.1. The Project

This article draws on data from a qualitative doctoral project on young refugees' post-15 educational decision-making in Greece. Ethnographic methods were used to obtain a deeper understanding of young people's relationships with their social context while

avoiding recreating the experience of asylum interviews (Rodgers 2004; Tudge and Hogan 2005). Data were generated via individual and paired semi-structured interviews with refugee and asylum-seeking youth and educational stakeholders in the city of Thessaloniki. In order to triangulate findings, enable ‘thick description’ of the situation, and improve the validity and reliability of the study (Long and Johnson 2000), participant observation was also carried out during the eight months of fieldwork. Having a teaching background, the author volunteered as both a teacher and educational assistant at three NFE sites several times per week, as well as observing one further programme. Ethical approval was granted by the Social Sciences and Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford.

The participants in the interviews were a ‘core group’ of 12 refugee and asylum-seeking youth, aged 15–25, and 38 educational stakeholders with first-hand knowledge of their experiences. This latter group included refugee parents, teachers, educational assistants, RECs, education programme coordinators, social workers, ‘caretakers’, and cultural mediators from both the public and non-state sectors. All were delivering, coordinating, or otherwise supporting educational programmes (for example, by arranging access). All were recruited via purposive and snowball sampling. This meant that initial participants were identified and selected as those with knowledge related to the phenomenon of interest and were then asked for recommendations for further participants—thus facilitating access to the population with target characteristics (Parker et al. 2019; Patton 2002). As this paper focuses on the young participants’ perspectives and specifically their retellings of their learning trajectories from just before and following their arrival in Greece, the remainder of this section details only the youth’s backgrounds and the methods carried out with this group.

2.2. The Young Participants

The criteria for inclusion of the young participants was that they fell within the 15–25 age range, had arrived in Greece during or since the peak of the ‘refugee crisis’ in 2015, and were attending at least one educational activity per week. The 15–25 age parameter was intended to align with that of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other educational initiatives in Greece offering non-formal activities which target youth. However, it should be noted that ‘youth’ can refer to as broad an age range as 15–35 in Greek policies and literature (Perovic 2017). The arrival requirement meant that the study could investigate experiences of laws and policies implemented as a response to the refugee crisis, as well as the impact of the ‘crisis’ discourse among the public and media. The attendance requirement was set as the study sought to better understand young refugees’ experiences of and supports for participating in educational activities.

The 12 young participants who agreed to take part in the interviews identified as Kurdish (4), Iranian (3), Iraqi (2), Syrian (2), and Congolese (Kinshasa) (1). The majority were young men (9 young men, 3 young women), reflecting the fact that the majority of learners attending lessons in the observation sites were indeed young men. All of the young participants had either applied for or received refugee status. They were either living in apartments in Thessaloniki (provided via an accommodation scheme) or in camps one to two hours outside of the city by bus. The majority (9) had travelled with at least one family member or had joined family in Greece, while the remainder (3) were alone. To protect their identities, pseudonyms are used throughout this article.

2.3. Data Generation and Analysis

While in Greece, two in-person pair interviews were conducted with youth aged 15–18. Following the outbreak of COVID-19 and associated restrictions, the remainder of the data generation took place online and involved individual interviews with the remaining eight young participants (all aged over 18). These were carried out using platforms such as Viber, Skype, and WhatsApp, depending on participants’ access and preference. The same semi-structured schedule was used for both the in-person and online interviews to minimise the

effects of the change in approach on the results. The 12 youth participated in one individual or pair interview each. Despite being reminded that the interviews could be carried out in a language of their choice, with an interpreter of their choosing present, all decided to proceed in English. However, pictorial information sheets and consent forms were provided in various languages. The interview schedule was centred around educational aspirations, preferences, challenges, and supports and included prompts such as, 'Does anything make it difficult to go to classes?' and 'What do you enjoy about going to classes?' The interviews ranged in length from 25 min to over one hour, with an average time of 40 min. In total, just under eight hours of audio were recorded with the young participants.

The data from the wider study were analysed according to the principles of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006). In line with these principles, interview transcripts and field notes were immediately entered into NVivo and coded by the author using an open coding technique (based on participants' own words). Following this, a process of axial coding explored the relationship between the initial codes to create categories which were then organised into themes. New codes were compared with the existing ones, to refine the characteristics of each category, in a process of 'constant comparison'. Data were generated and analysed iteratively until theoretical saturation was reached. This paper focuses on the key institutional factors shaping the young participants' (re-)engagement with education upon arrival in Greece, as identified in their responses. Due to the nature of the study design, these findings are not generalisable to other contexts or populations but offer themes for further investigation. These themes, which are detailed below, are *spatial bordering*, *temporal bordering*, *administrative bordering*, *bordered aspirations*, and *navigating borders*.

3. Results

For youth in the study, the treatment they received upon arrival in Greece had a substantially disruptive and diverting effect on their (re-)engagement with post-15 education. The key factors shaping this process are conceptualised here as the institutional bordering of space, time and public services, with a mediating role played by 'gatekeepers' and other everyday social actors. These bordering practices and actors, and their impacts on young refugees' aspirations and consequent learning practices are detailed below.

3.1. Spatial Bordering: Encampment and Accommodation Instability

The lack of legal routes for asylum seekers to safe countries in Europe meant that youth in the study had had to leave their home countries via irregular means, arriving in Greece either via the land border with Turkey in the north-eastern region of Evros, or via the stretch of sea from the Turkish coast to the Aegean islands. After doing so, they faced the Greek state's practice of encampment of newcomers, which, in some of their cases, had lasted for several years. Depending on when and via which border they had arrived, the youth were held in camps on the Aegean islands (and later transferred to the mainland); in isolated locations in the north west; near the Idomeni crossing to North Macedonia in the north; or in one of the camps outside Thessaloniki. Some of these sites have since either been closed down due to safety concerns (Owens 2017), or, in the case of Moria camp on the island of Lesvos, burnt down (BBC News 2020). Those around Thessaloniki have been described as not meeting international standards and being 'located at significant distances from urban centres, within industrial zones where residential use is not permitted' (Tsavdaroglou and Lalenis 2020, p. 163). For youth in the study, being placed in such camps—and the social and material conditions of the specific sites—played a large part in shaping their (re-)engagement with education after arrival.

Firstly, the camps were described as overcrowded, noisy, and tense spaces. This is how Jilwan, a 25-year-old from Kurdistan, recalled the conditions in a camp he had been in on arrival, in which he lived in a tent with the other eight members of his family. He grimaced and said that 'Life in camps terrible. Many times have fighting ... Maybe because it's more louder'. Youth said that they could also be moved at short notice, causing them to

experience greater instability and uncertainty and adding to this tension. Before being moved to camps and apartments in Thessaloniki, Jilwan said that he and his family had already spent a year in a camp in Alexandria; Reza, a 16-year-old from Iran, had been in an isolated camp near an unwelcoming village; and Karvan, a 19-year-old from Iran, had spent time on Samos and near Idomeni. Most had stayed in more than one city or village in their short time in the country, meaning that they did not know whether they should try to enrol in local schools or NFE programmes or to bide their time until being given more stable accommodation or, indeed, being resettled in another country. This uncertainty left them unwilling to invest time and energy into starting programmes if they were to be moved after only a few short weeks or months.

The poor social and material conditions meant that even when learning opportunities were available in and around the camps, many of the young people's minds were elsewhere. Karvan expressed how he had found it difficult to engage in learning in his early days in the camp, saying, 'The only thing you're thinking is just to leave from that island... just to go. So I don't think you can focus on the Greek, or learning'. Hamid, from Kurdistan, agreed, noting that his family's move into an apartment in Thessaloniki was a definitive turning point in his trajectory. He groaned and said, 'You know, camp—it sucks. A lot of people, and all are refugees... I didn't do nothing, first six months. But then they give us a home—*spiti* [home], ha—and then I start... school, a lot of organisation... I forget some!'

The other aspect of life in the camp is that in a situation in which newcomers have little access to information (in a language they understand), they follow the lead of others around them, with both positive and negative consequences for their education. Hasan, a 25-year-old from Kurdistan, said of his co-residents in his first camp:

Generally, they follow each other... Because the community, someone is from 2017 is here. He said, 'no, is Greece very bad, and Greece very not good educated', and he don't know it's truth—he have to follow this. So he said again this words, and this word will spread: 'not good education, not good', like that. 'No have classes, no one helping you', that stuff. And then—he will listen like that. He know it like that. But after that he said, 'oh my god'—like from my side, I'm saying, 'oh my god'... I spend some time is for the sleeping! I am very regretful this time.

Beyond the fact that his co-residents were dissuading him from learning, he recalled how 'Everyone say, "oh, Greece is very hard life, you cannot stay there"—and who is trying to find good money kind of left'. He had listened, in the beginning, and decided not to spend his energy seeking out unbeneficial learning opportunities, especially if he was going to leave the country. Marwa, a 25-year-old from Syria, admitted to being one of those people in the camp who had influenced others, saying that she had told people not to bother learning Greek and to focus on English instead. However, she regretted this deeply, after realising that many people would not be able to leave:

I used to work with women protection. But usually I was like, 'no no, learn English, English is more international'. And now I am like, oh my god, you are staying in Greece, how did I say this? Ha. They need their country language! Why did I said them English and not learn Greek!

On the other hand, others in the camp could also be an important source of information on the learning opportunities available, particularly in the non-formal sector. Hasan slowly made friends with other young people who had arrived previously and who then encouraged him to join the youth programmes being offered: 'They told me that a organisation [did] theatre, music, arts... and we try to meet with someone there, and we doing that project'.

However, on the whole, the young participants reported that opportunities—especially for language education—were severely lacking in and around the camps. Hasan described his disappointment at the limited offering from NGOs, who struggle to sustain long-term funding and volunteers. As he put it, 'They have education, like small... Greek language,

and English, but there is not enough—because three times per week and half hour'. As a result, he felt that 'School—you know, inside the camp—it's very, very not good enough for the learning languages'. One of the issues was the young people's age on arrival and the lack of offers for adults. As Jilwan explained, there were language classes 'only for people under 18, and for over ... it was only one time on week—for Greek one hours, and for English one hours'.

3.2. Temporal Bordering: Legal Limbo and Uncertain Futures

Another aspect of life in Greece was that it became, unexpectedly, just that: a life in Greece. Many of the youth said that they and their families had initially aimed to travel on to Northern and Western Europe, either to reunite with relatives or due to a belief that they would have more (and higher-quality) work and educational opportunities. However, due to the time taken to process their asylum claims, they had become caught behind legal (and consequently, physical) borders. As Hasan recounted:

When we are come in Greece ... we don't, like, to make a plan for living here forever. Everyone's said okay, maybe the European Union, they will decide to take it immigration from Greece, to other European country ... Then, day by day, our time is free time ... Now it's two year passed and I'm still in Greece!

Three key, international 'migration management' strategies have led to refugees becoming stranded in legal limbo in Greece: the EU's approval of the Dublin III Regulation in 2013; the closure of the 'Balkan route' in 2015; and the turning point of the implementation of the so-called 'EU-Turkey deal' shortly afterwards. Firstly, the Dublin Regulation (EU law No 604/2013) determines that the first Member State that third-country nationals or stateless persons enter in Europe is responsible for processing their application for international protection. This means that refugees must remain in the country until their application has been either approved or denied (unless they decide to leave via irregular means), and in the case of Greece, this may take years, due to a lack of capacity to deal with the overwhelming number of applications it receives (Póczik and Sárik 2018). Secondly, Northern Macedonia and other states to the north closed their borders from November 2015 (Deardorff Miller 2017), sealing off the 'Balkan route' and putting an end to Greece's facilitated transit strategy. This left refugees with few legal routes out of the country (Tramoutanis 2021). Thirdly, in 2016, the European Commission made a controversial agreement with Turkey to stem the flow of irregular migration to the European Union. The deal essentially contained migrants on the Aegean Islands and drastically reduced movements (Baster and Merminod 2019). Now, in order to remain in Greece, many refugees have applied for asylum in the country, but due to the additional pressure on an already flawed system—due, for the large part, to the economic crisis of 2008—the process is taking several years to complete (Tramoutanis 2021). In addition, gaining refugee status (and its associated protections) is not guaranteed; particularly for youth in the study such as Serkar, who travelled from Kurdistan.

Like Hasan, Serkar had also struggled with how to progress with his education while distracted with being in legal limbo; a state that continued to the time of the study. When he had asked for information from NGO-provided legal services, he was constantly told 'next month, maybe next week'. He said that due to this, he was still waiting before considering his formal education path in Greece, because 'if I can't do it my interview, I can't do anything ... we need ID'.

This legal uncertainty—and, consequently, protracted displacement and enforced waiting—had had various impacts on the young people's visions of their futures. They had come to Europe with a range of aspirations, whether educational or employment-focused, in Greece or abroad. However, with ongoing uncertainty surrounding their legal status, some youth realised that they might be in Greece for some time, facing a number of difficulties. Especially when they were towards the upper end of the age bracket, they felt they needed to build their language skills—in Greek, English, or both—to help them navigate their new environment, by finding work, information, and a social network. This

was evident in Marwa's self-described stress at not being able to communicate with staff and volunteers in the camp, which became her initial motivation to learn English:

it was not easy in the beginning. I mean, when I arrived I didn't spoke any English, I was kind of stress, not being able to communicate with no one. And if someone is going to tell me anything, I'm kind of person, I'm very anxious about things—I keep in my mind what they told me, and if the interpreter has told me in correct manner . . . This was the first step that I decided I need to learn the language.

Hasan, too, said, 'Just being, okay, we are still here, we can learn it English—but more because 'It would be more benefit, if I left this country', rather than for the present.

However, he and most of the others also aimed to continue their disrupted formal educational pathways alongside, or following, these linguistic efforts. When asked why it had been important for them to continue learning, the young people's responses signalled a deep valuing of education for creating or stabilising their futures. Hamid, for example, and Hala, a 15-year-old from Syria, described educational activities—whether formal, non-formal, or informal—as a way to 'make my life' and 'do my future', respectively. Karvan had the same attitude, saying, 'You should put some things first, and some things second, and some things in a third side of your life. So I think, I believe that education is the first one—because with education, you can achieve whatever you want'.

Marwa had the same attitude to education, but saw it as being more preventative of bad outcomes than promotive of the good. She reflected, 'Education, it really makes sense . . . because I know I will find job later on, because I have experience. But for a person who's not doing nothing . . . he's going always be under risk of being homeless, you know. This sort of things'. Jilwan, too, sought various skills to cover various bases, 'because we don't know how it's going in the future. We don't know after two days how it's going in the world . . . maybe it will help me one day, we don't know'. Besides this 'future-proofing', youth also wanted to engage in learning to avoid 'wasting' time and to spend this period of waiting for asylum decisions 'improving' themselves. Hasan, for example, was determined to 'find the good thing for these migrations' and 'be benefit from this time—not just spend the time for free . . . just sleeping'.

However, while stranded and forced to wait, other changes came into play that diverted their educational plans. Particularly after being moved into more stable apartment accommodation, some youth and their families had warmed to the country and, after a few months, decided to stay. Karvan, for example, said that

In the beginning—this is the truth—I didn't want to stay in Greece. *No one* didn't want to stay in Greece. But after some months, let's say, or after year, I say Greece is a country that I want to live . . . I really like the culture that they have here. The character that they have here, it's near to my character.

Hamid said that his family, too, had changed their minds: 'In the beginning we decided to go 'up'—in first weeks, or month. But change, everything. We didn't know that Greek people will be, like, a very kind people'. This commitment had motivated Hamid and Karvan to learn the Greek language and attempt to gain access to public high schools—with mixed success.

3.3. Administrative Bordering: Accessing Formal Education via Gatekeepers

I was very good student in my country. It was my last year in high school, but we came here. (Hamid)

It is important to emphasise, at this juncture, that the young refugees in the study did not arrive in Greece as a *tabula rasa*; rather, they had diverse learning histories that were disrupted as a result of their flight. Hala, for example, explained that she was supposed to have only one year of high school remaining before she could continue to university, but 'When I come here I lose one year. For that, I have two years more'. Sayed also found himself at the same stage as he had been some time ago: 'About four years ago, at same

level that I am now—in 11th grade of high school—I had to escape Iran . . . I studied psychology, and literature, philology... then we had to leave our country'. This meant that if they wished to continue along a formal educational route, they had no choice but to enter the system at either the same or a lower level than they had already completed.

For some, this disruption came at a critical moment. Hasan, for example, explained that 'When I was in Iraq, I took my high school exams. For graduate. But I don't get result, because I left the country'. This timing meant that Hasan did not have proof of his prior learning and could only apply for the first year of senior high school in Greece, rather than university. Sayed explained these rules regarding documentation:

If you studied in your country, the 10th grade of high school, you will be able to get in the high school . . . So if a newcomer come here . . . if he has his previous documents, which is related with his previous education in his country, then he will be able to carry on his studying.

He found this requirement to produce a diploma particularly frustrating, as

One of the other problem that the refugee has, is the word of 'refugee'. 'Refugee' is absolutely different than 'migrant'. The refugee is not able to have connection from his country back. That's unreasonable to ask from a refugee for provide his document. It doesn't make sense for most of us. So that's different. If a person is migrant . . . he can provide the document. For the refugees, it's different.

Marwa had been more fortunate in this regard: 'I had my diploma from Syrian high school . . . and I had another diploma from Iraq. So for me, it was okay. I had like two diplomas—I just had to translate one of those'. This meant that she had been able to apply for a university scholarship directly and bypass the need to repeat high school. While a European Qualifications Passport for Refugees has been piloted in Greece, which is based on an assessment of refugees' prior education, work experience, and language proficiency via 'available documentation and a structured interview' (CoE 2021), the programme's development has been slow, meaning that it had not been an option for any of the youth in the study.

Even when the youth could produce some evidence of their prior learning, however, language was still a barrier to accessing education at the same level they had reached in their home country. As Hasan explained:

We study our country, our language, and we left the country and we came here. What we learned, what's going here, is totally different. Like I'm 12 years I'm study, and just going to pass the exam to go to university—I came here, they said 'no . . . you have to first the language, and then you're going to apply for the high school, and then you're going to university'.

As Hasan mentioned, language was a key issue. Despite arriving with a wide range of first, second, third, and more languages, youth in the study had no Greek proficiency; and especially around 2015, there were no country-wide integration programmes in public schools at the senior high school level to support non-Greek speakers. Part of the reason is that post-15 education is not compulsory for either Greek citizens or newcomers. Therefore, while afternoon shift reception classes were established in primary and lower-secondary schools in Zones of Educational Priority by the 2016–2017 academic year, this was not extended to the upper-secondary level until 2018 (MoERR 2018). At the time of the study, reception classes were still not running in all of the senior high schools around Thessaloniki, as they required a sufficiently large number of newcomers to justify employing a substitute teacher to deliver the programme.

Most of the youth lamented that the key thing they had needed was this form of language support for accessing school and work, but that this had not been provided. According to Sayed, there is still not 'Any proper system to integrate a newcomer who doesn't speak Greek or English. So there is no system how to do integration a new student, in the school, or in the civilisation'.

For those who had wanted to enrol in school but had limited Greek or English skills, the only options were to attend non-formal language lessons or to pay for private tuition. Marwa complained that the lack of accessible and free tuition, especially after the age of 18, was holding refugees back:

I have my family in Germany. My siblings are going to proper language school ... Here, I understand, because the economy is very weak, and Greece are not able to open language school for refugees. So people are stuck, you know, with the language. You have two option, you either go to the Greek university and you pay 2000 euro for the language school. This is what happened to me. And I was like, no, not because I'm not willing to pay, because I don't have this amount to pay. So the people ... they just wait, you know, to learn slowly, very slowly.

One option was to travel to NGO offices and community centres in the nearest city to their camps, if they were close to one at all, meaning a considerable investment of both time and money. Zainab and Hussein, aged 17 and 19, respectively, and both from Iraq, said their parents had stopped them from taking the journey to Thessaloniki to attend lessons at one popular NGO for precisely this reason. However, even if youth had the time, money, motivation, and permission to take the journey, the lessons in the city were often over-subscribed and subject to long waiting lists. Hasan recalled that from the point of registering for language lessons at one centre, it had taken four months for them to call and offer him a place on a Greek course. He said in disbelief, 'After four months, they told me, "okay, you can start now from the Greek classes". Ha ha ... I start already! I learned by myself already!'

One extra factor among this group that complicated matters was, again, their age. For those who had wanted to enrol in senior high school—which, on paper, is for 15 to 18-year-olds—being overage could be a barrier. Sayed explained that for

Single people, older than 18, there are difficult process to get in the high schools ... If you are older than 18, you should have either your previous school from your country, or be able, very good level of Greek, to get in the high school situation.

Reaching 18, according to Sayed, could be a cut-off point in terms of access to upper-secondary education. He explained that 'You have to arrive here before age of 18, and then you can carry on'; to arrive at 16 or 17 and start from junior high school (for ages 12–15). For him, he said, 'This is the way that I got inside the high school'. For those who had arrived before the age of 15, participation was more strongly supported, due to the fact that schooling is mandatory from the age of 6–15. There are more lessons and support systems in place for this age group, which meant that 'Most of the teenagers, most of the minors are at school' (Sayed).

The young people in the study did not seem to be clear about the specific rules surrounding age, however. As Jilwan summarised it, 'The systems in Greece, I don't know how is. They don't tell us'. Karvan believed it was possible to enter high school even if you are over 18, saying, 'There's no problem ... If you know English, you can start from *lykeio*, and you should have studied before'. There was evidently some flexibility surrounding the age requirement, but this had not been clarified in law and policy, meaning that often, the young participants' acceptance in upper-secondary education had been dependent upon the willingness of the school director to enrol them. Sayed confirmed this explicitly, saying that their access to schools

depends the person. I mean sometimes, some responsible are very personal, they don't help you ... They have to clarify this one [the access procedures], because the system is very complicated ... Management—they do whatever they like, there are judge just like ... the colour of your skin, and language. So this situation is very bad ... In this country, which is the 'mother of democracy' as they say, it depend to many things.

This aligns with previous research, which found that some schools in Greece have invented 'hindrances' to try to discourage refugees' enrolment (Vergou 2019).

Other directors diverted youth in the study away from general high schools, despite them having completed the same level of studies in their home country (albeit with a distinctly different curriculum). Several of the youth over the age of 18 reported being encouraged to apply for the evening 'shift' of technical senior high schools instead, with many other refugees, rather than the morning shift of general high schools—which offer an academic route towards university. This had happened to Hasan:

When I came to Greece, and I'm trying to apply for somewhere—like the college or high school in Greece—because of age they don't accept me. And they told me, you have a chance to go into, I don't know, it's like high school but it's for different things—engineering, with mechanic, any. And I applied for there, and accepted.

Similar reports from Germany have suggested that refugee pupils as young as 10 may be directed towards what are perceived as 'less demanding tracks', which are often vocational routes (UNESCO 2019, p. xviii).

According to Sayed, however, in the high school he had recently joined, 'Fortunately, they have a good manager who is really good, has really good connection with us'. Hala, too, had been fortunate with the school in which she had first enrolled. Her mother had gone straight to the school director—taking their social worker along to translate—and had requested that they accept Hala, even without a reception programme in place. Fortunately, the director had agreed and had permitted Hala to begin attending even before the registration process was complete. As such, high school directors functioned as 'gatekeepers' of public services for youth in the study, either escorting them across administrative borders or limiting their ability to pursue the academic routes they had previously imagined for themselves.

3.4. Bordered Aspirations: Diverted Paths and Downgraded Dreams

As a result of the disruption and uncertainty caused by these bordering practices—and with a lack of confidence in their language abilities—most of the youth had lowered their aspirations in response to their perception of their opportunities in the new country. Sayed, for example, mentioned having 'too many friends who wants to study in Greek university system, but there are many, many obstacle in front of them'. This fact meant that he, and others in the study, had shifted their ambitions onto only finishing high school, rather than the higher degrees they had been aiming for in their home countries. One such case was Hamid, who described how he had been planning to study engineering at university, but in Greece, 'I can't'. When asked if he would like to go to university to study another subject, he responded, 'I don't think I will. Just if I finish high school. I don't know, ha ... not never'.

Most of the youth had two responses to the question of aspirations: the ideal and the more practical. The latter was shaped by the necessity of securing an income, especially for those over 18 and without the support of a family. Sayed exemplified how many youth had had to adjust their ambitions to follow a more 'practical' route. While he had enjoyed his studies in literature and philology in Iran, his priority in Greece was to gain vocational skills. When asked if his goal was to find work, he responded:

That's the point. Because what you going to become? What you are going to get money from? ... It's difficult to study what you like but not getting money from it—when you are in Greece, and you are a brown skin. Ha.

Similarly, Reza mentioned that 'you have to be two ways, and two plans'—especially when you set yourself an ambitious first target.

3.5. Navigating Borders: (Re-)Engaging with Post-15 Education

Amid these various institutional and social influences, all of the youth in the study had decided to get themselves back into learning. As they did so, despite having support from family and friends, they found that a lot of the responsibility for overcoming the borders surrounding education rested on their shoulders. As Sayed put it, 'They don't know how to integrate us, so they put all the pressure on the student, and tell them 'you have to deal with the situation'. Hasan echoed Sayed's sentiment that the pressure was on him to find his own way, including with finding learning opportunities in the first place. He said that in the end, after struggling to find information and support, 'I tried to improve myself by my own ... to enjoy, what I can find it, and participate on it'. He said that one day he had made a resolution: 'Let's go out from the camp. Go to this town, in Thessaloniki. What they have inside? Like, maybe find a opportunity. And I try to go into some NGO organisation ... I register my name for the English classes, and Greek classes'.

Karvan, for his part, was steadfast in his belief that a lack of access to structured education does not mean you cannot learn, saying, 'If you want, you can learn. *All* the time'. While searching and waiting for formal and non-formal opportunities, he and most of the other youth had made do with what was at hand. As mentioned above, they believed that language skills would provide a foundation for everything else to follow, whether it was enrolling in Greek high school, accessing information and services from the state or NGOs, or finding work. With a lack of in-person educational offers and unstable mobile internet connections to learn online, youth had drawn from a key physical resource available to them: international humanitarian staff and volunteers. They had picked up language skills either through volunteering themselves and actively trying to build their proficiency or more passively through friendships and everyday encounters.

Marwa was one such case. She explained that after she had decided she needed to learn English, 'It was kind of very fast for me. I learned it, like, two months. Not very good English but okay, I could communicate, I could write little bit'. Her learning mainly came through volunteering and speaking with staff in her camp; a difficult process that she pushed herself through for the sake of gaining valuable skills:

I volunteer with ... this NGO... and I was keeping asking people 'what is this? What is this?' I was trying to talk with someone, with some English speakers, this what I was trying to do. And for sure it was not professional English ... When I start talking English, I was looking super funny. Because I was telling very stupid stuff, very wrongly, you know? Like, in a different meaning sometime!

Hasan also spoke of drawing from this key social resource, saying, 'I don't spend my time by playing the game too much ... First for the language, from the organisation who they working there—I try to spend my time with them. Even I find a half hour with a teacher.'

Karvan, too, had drawn from friendships with Greek students and teachers he had met to develop his language skills. He recalled how he had learnt the alphabet

in 40 minutes on the bus ... I told my friend, you know, she was Greek. And I told her, 'could you help me with that?' She said 'of course, let's see' ... When we get out of the bus—I read all the places that it was written by Greek. I didn't know what they mean, but I just read it, and I asked my friend, 'what does this mean? What does that mean?' And you know, I learned like that ... this was my start.

In this way, youth took their first steps with Greek, and developed the varying levels of English they already had. Hamid, for example, proudly explained that 'when I came to Greece, I start even English from zero. I didn't know'. Despite a lack of support and bordered access to opportunities, two years later, he smiled and noted his ability to converse 'with someone who's from UK, America'. The youth in the study had persisted in this manner, and at the time of the study, Marwa had sufficient skills to pursue a degree taught in English at a private university in Thessaloniki; Hasan had secured a paid role as a translator; and Karvan had passed the notorious Panhellenic exams at the end of general

senior high school. All of the others were engaged in high school, NFE and/or other work or voluntary activities, with most still engaging in more than one form of learning concurrently.

4. Discussion

The findings from this study suggest that upon arrival in Greece, young refugees are subject to multiple forms of institutional bordering that make it challenging to (re-)engage with an educational trajectory—especially in public high schools. Through the practice of bordering space—predominantly via encampment—youth were placed at long distances from opportunities, faced tense and cramped environments in locations that were often unfit for human life, and were moved at short notice, causing feelings of instability. These factors left them unable and unwilling to engage in learning, even when offers were available. At the same time, social and material influences around the camps left them uncertain about their futures and unable to make firm plans in the country. The effects of this spatial bordering were exacerbated by the prolonged uncertainty surrounding their legal status. As [Dimitriadi and Sarantaki \(2019, p. 1\)](#) put it, since 2015, Greece has become 'A place of strandedness, limbo, and immobility'. This relationship between time and immobility, as also experienced by youth in the study, supports [Leutloff-Grandits's \(2019, p. 2\)](#) claim that 'borders are created through ... not only spatial and social but also temporal dimensions'. If and when youth sought out formal educational opportunities, they then faced administrative borders; specifically, in the requirement to produce documents proving their prior learning, and in unclear policies surrounding the age limit for enrolment. Their ability to bypass these restrictions was heavily dependent on the support of willing 'gatekeepers', such as school directors and administrators.

Overall, the institutional bordering of space, time, and services led to the youth's motivation and academic or other dreams being downgraded or diverted, as they were denied access or left without information or social and material support. However, rather than resigning themselves to a state of 'frozen transience' ([Nagy 2018](#)), they actively navigated and negotiated these conditions. As [Fiddian-Qasmiyah \(2020, p. 3\)](#) reminds us, 'People who have been displaced do not merely "experience" displacement, but also actively respond'. The youth drew from any available resource (whether human or technological) to keep learning, as a means of simultaneously 'future-proofing' and navigating their new, everyday lives in Greece. However, due to shifting social, legal, and accommodation conditions, the educational trajectories they began to construct for themselves were far from linear. Most engaged in parallel trajectories—learning languages and/or vocational skills alongside high school—and some strategically decided to jump from one path to another, when more beneficial opportunities arose.

These findings raise a number of considerations for future research, policy, and practice. In terms of research, more investigation is needed into the educational impacts of the Greek state's responses to irregularly arriving youth. This means exploring more deeply the multiple, intersecting forms of exclusion and neglect that impact their life trajectories, along with more overt instances of hostility and abuse, and especially as they are established, maintained, and navigated in everyday educational life ([Lems 2020](#)). The study demonstrates the importance of a bottom-up approach to studying these issues, which centres refugees' everyday experiences and perspectives.

In terms of policy and practice, the findings suggest that school-level administrators have a key role to play in inviting refugee youth across the threshold of society: acting as 'gatekeepers' who manage who is or is not permitted a presence within it. With a clearer policy framework—particularly surrounding age—refugee youth's access to education will not be so dependent on such social factors. Outside of schools, the availability of NFE—as a welcoming 'in-between' offer—needs to be increased and protected from ongoing financial and political threats.

5. Conclusions

This article has explored the question of how institutional responses to young refugees' arrival in Greece impacts their (re-)engagement with post-15 learning. Drawing on data from an ethnographic doctoral study, it found that their trajectories were strongly influenced by practices of encampment, delays with asylum decisions, and administrative barriers to accessing formal education. Borrowing from the geographical literature, and particularly from border studies, this was framed as the 'institutional bordering' of time, space, and public services. These practices were found to reiterate borders in the everyday and to prevent youth from (re)constructing the educational trajectories they had begun or imagined for themselves in their home countries. Alongside these practices, the findings revealed the important role of other social actors whom young refugees encounter—particularly in camps—who either encouraged or discouraged youth from pursuing education during their prolonged period of uncertainty.

To conclude, for youth in the study, (re)constructing their learning trajectories had taken extraordinary personal motivation and strongly supportive social influences to overcome bordered space, time, and access. A large part of their ability to continue learning—which they primarily valued for finding work, contacts, and further study opportunities—seemed left to chance. It was dependent on meeting willing 'gatekeepers' or other refugees with beneficial information, or being in the right place at the right time to learn of funding and other opportunities. There was an understanding that it was their own responsibility to bring about their success—whether they felt this was correct or not—due to limited support measures put in place by the Greek state. While this highlights their impressive ability to navigate institutional bordering practices, the fact remains that poor arrival conditions at the margins of Europe—which were becoming increasingly poor at the time of writing—can severely disrupt the lives youth envision for themselves when fleeing conflict and poverty.

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Data Availability Statement: The data are not publicly available due to the stipulations of ethical approval.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

Notes

- 1 Here, for brevity, the term 'refugee' refers to both those who have been granted protection under the 1951 Convention and those who have applied for protection (i.e., asylum seekers).
- 2 The Council of Europe ([CoE 2019](#)) defines *formal education* as that which takes place in educational systems, follows a syllabus and involves assessments, while *non-formal education* (NFE)—despite also being organised and intentional—mostly takes place outside of the formal system and does not result in accreditation. It may be more focused on particular activities, skills, or areas of knowledge and take place in community settings such as NGOs.
- 3 Δομές Υποδοχής και Εκπαίδευσης Προσφύγων.
- 4 'Managed' accommodation refers to Reception and Identification Centers (RICS), 'open sites' (i.e., camps), apartments, hotels, shelters, 'safe zones', and supported independent living (SIL) schemes managed by the state or partners such as UNHCR, as opposed to being private or 'informal' ([UNICEF 2020](#)).

Appendix K: Published version of Paper 2

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Allies, access and (collective) action: Young refugee women's navigation of gendered educational constraints in Greece

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Abstract

Contrary to popular media tropes of the 'young, lone, male refugee' arriving at Europe's borders, Greece has in fact seen a steady flow of young refugee women arriving since 2015. While many wish to engage in post-compulsory (15+) education, in order to gain valuable skills and enjoy new freedoms, various factors make it difficult to do so. Based on eight months of ethnographic fieldwork – involving semi-structured interviews with refugee youth (aged 15-25) and other stakeholders – this paper details young refugee women's expressions of collective and relational agency as they navigate educational constraints. These constraints primarily stem from tensions in micro-level relationships with family, peers and teachers which result from, or are exacerbated by, the conditions of 'unsettlement'. Young refugee women's navigational tactics involved finding and shaping alternative learning opportunities, educating peers and leveraging collective strength. The paper concludes with implications and recommendations for gender-sensitive educational initiatives.

Keywords

Refugees, Youth, Gender, Women, Agency, Education, Greece

Introduction

More than one million refugees¹ have entered Greece since 2015; the majority of whom, in the early days of the 'crisis', passed through on their way to Northern and Western Europe (Afouzenidis et al., 2017; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2020a). However, with border closures and other controversial 'migration management' strategies implemented from the end of 2015 – as well as severe delays in processing asylum applications – 168,737 have become trapped in the country (Asylum Information Database, 2020; Stathopoulou, 2019; UNHCR, 2021). Therefore, while often referred to as a 'transit' country (Tsitselikis & Agelopoulos, 2019), it may be better described as a country of 'unsettlement' given that refugees are now staying for years with unsettled asylum cases, limited inclusion policies and an overriding lack of planning and stability. One third of those experiencing this 'unsettlement' are under 18 and one third are women; many of whom are single, pregnant and/or taking care of the elderly (AIDA, 2021; Fernandes, 2019; UNHCR et al., 2016; Women's Refugee Commission, 2016). Most recent arrivals have travelled from Afghanistan, Syria and Pakistan (AIDA, 2021; UNHCR, 2021).

The majority of the literature on their experiences discusses their vulnerabilities during their journeys and in camps after arrival, such as exposure to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and a lack of access to healthcare and psychosocial support (Freedman, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2019; International Women's Initiative, 2021; Papadimos et al., 2021). It also describes how after being relocated from camps, they may face homelessness, harmful living conditions and discrimination, including in the asylum and family reunification process (Bastaki, 2019; IWI, 2021; Tastsoglou et al., 2021). Such findings have led to calls for more initiatives which support refugee women and girls' security – such as those which promote 'skill acquisition, and methods to assess and mitigate economic vulnerability' (Papadimos et al., 2021, p. 115). As Papadimos and colleagues suggest, supporting them to build skills – via education – is one means of enabling empowerment. Indeed, on paper, young refugee women have access to various post-compulsory (15+) educational opportunities: they are legally entitled to enrol in senior high school (*lύκειο*) on the same basis as Greek youth; including in evening 'shifts' when they are beyond the standard age of 15-18 (AIDA, 2020; UNHCR, 2020b). However, in a 2017 report on refugee children's educational integration, the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs noted that girls' participation was a 'special issue' due to vague 'obstacles of a cultural nature' (p. 92). While some recent research has begun to explore the stories behind these low enrolment and attendance rates (Rezaian et al., 2019), there has been little focused inquiry into gendered barriers among youth.

Literature from around the world suggests that young refugee women are less likely than men to participate in (post-)secondary education for myriad gendered reasons: including early and forced marriage, pregnancy, care and domestic work, the increased risk of trafficking and SGBV, and 'cultural barriers' such as stigma, 'othering' and families' views on girls' education (Akua-Sakyiwah, 2015; Bajwa et al., 2018; Hatoss & Huijser, 2010; Rana et al., 2011; Ruzibiza, 2021; Wagner et al., 2018; Watkins et al., 2012). This paper aims to contribute towards filling two distinct gaps in this scholarship. Firstly, it addresses the European context and the contextualised impacts of protracted displacement amid the ongoing 'refugee crisis', while the majority of the available literature tends to focus on women in low- and middle-income contexts in the Global South (followed by North America and Australia). Secondly, the paper contributes much-needed stories of how and why young refugee women either resist education or navigate constraints themselves, to build on conversations around refugee women's agency (Asaf, 2017; Dahya et al., 2019; Greene, 2020; Ibesh et al., 2021; Rezaian et al., 2019). Their expressions of agency are conceptualised here as forms of 'social navigation' (Vigh, 2009; 2010): an analytical lens which illuminates

¹ In this article, for brevity, the term 'refugee' refers to both those who have been granted protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention and those who have applied for it.

how migrants constantly re-adapt their praxis to ‘get by’ in contexts of ever-shifting insecurity. In line with this framing, it is understood here that young refugee women’s ‘tactics’ are shaped by emerging opportunities, barriers and constant (re-)evaluations of the social-political environment. In addition, however, this paper views family and other everyday social relations as fundamental influences on these tactics; and as such, it follows Daniel and colleagues (2020) in understanding social navigation as both a highly relational and potentially collective feat.

In terms of structure, firstly the background, literature and concepts framing the paper are presented. Following this, the methodology of the wider doctoral project is detailed, before the findings are discussed: namely, the key educational constraints for young refugee women identified during the study. The paper then discusses examples of how those who wish to participate navigate these constraints. It concludes with recommendations for gender-sensitive initiatives which can support young refugee women to continue their education. Overall, it responds to calls for greater, more contextualised understandings of refugee women’s needs when developing ‘durable solutions’ to displacement (Diamond, 2019; Hatoss & Huijser, 2010). Such solutions are direly needed to help refugee women enjoy the benefits of post-compulsory learning²: such as more employment opportunities, better health outcomes, new support networks, ‘safe spaces’ to rebuild aspirations and renegotiate hierarchies, increased mobility and the chance to claim ownership of otherwise male-dominated space (El Jack, 2010; Iraklis, 2021; Rezaian et al., 2019; UNHCR, 2016; 2020c).

Methodology

The data on which this paper is based was generated between October 2019 and June 2020 during ethnographic fieldwork with refugees in Thessaloniki, Northern Greece. This involved participant observation as a volunteer English teacher (including at a women’s centre), and individual and pair semi-structured interviews with 38 educational ‘stakeholders’ (such as parents, educators, coordinators and assistants) and 12 refugee and asylum-seeking youth aged 15-25 (9 young men, 3 young women). The participants – who identified as Greek, Afghan, Syrian, Iraqi, Iranian, British, Albanian, Palestinian, Kurdish, Congolese (Kinshasa) and American – were recruited via convenience and snowball sampling. This meant that initial participants were identified in non-formal education³ (NFE) settings and selected as those with knowledge related to the phenomenon of interest, and were then asked for recommendations for further participants – thus facilitating access to the population with target characteristics (Parker et al., 2019; Patton, 2002). The criteria for inclusion of youth participants was that they had a refugee- or asylum-seeking background; were aged 15-25; had arrived in Greece during or since the ‘peak’ of the ‘refugee crisis’ in 2015; and were attending at least one educational activity per week (to explore what supported them to attend). The criteria for stakeholders was that they had first-hand knowledge of young refugees’ (educational) experiences and were delivering, coordinating or otherwise supporting educational programmes (for example, by arranging access). This group included teachers, educational assistants and coordinators, social workers and cultural mediators from both the public and non-state sectors. Ethical approval was granted by the Social Sciences and Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford. To protect participants’ identities, all names used here are pseudonyms, and the names of organisations are omitted.

² The term ‘learning’ throughout this article refers to the development of knowledge and skills in either formal contexts, such as schools, or non-formal contexts, such as free educational provision in community centres.

³ The Council of Europe (2019) defines formal education as that which takes place in educational systems, follows a syllabus and involves assessments; while non-formal education (NFE) – despite also being organised and intentional – mostly takes place outside of the formal system and does not result in accreditation. It may be more focused on particular activities, skills or areas of knowledge and take place in community settings such as NGOs.

Despite being reminded that interviews could be carried out in the language of their choosing with their own choice of interpreter assisting, all participants decided to proceed in English. Interviews focused on educational aspirations after the age of 15 and constraints and enablers among both young men and women, with particular attention to the role of micro-level⁴ social relationships. Due to restrictions following the outbreak of COVID-19, all teaching and research activities moved online (to Skype, Zoom, Viber and WhatsApp) from March to June 2020. In order to minimise the effects of this change in approach on the results, the same semi-structured schedule was used for both in-person and online interviews.

After being entered into NVivo, interview transcripts and field notes were analysed according to the principles of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). As such, the data was immediately coded by the author using an open coding technique, followed by axial coding to explore the relationship between the initial codes and to create categories which were then organised into themes. Data was generated and analysed iteratively until theoretical saturation was reached; meaning that both interviews and analysis were ongoing. This paper focuses primarily on participants' references to gendered constraints and supports. Due to the sample size and design, the findings are not generalisable; however, they contribute a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of the realities of one group in one local context and offer themes for further exploration.

The social constructivist foundations of the study necessitated an examination of the values which led the author to this research and the influence of identity on the research process (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; May & Perry, 2014). Having a background in teaching highly aspirational refugee youth in different contexts undoubtedly led the author to advocate for educational opportunities for displaced populations; thus providing the impetus for the study. However, being a young, white, British, female doctoral student from Oxford meant holding a privileged, outsider position which may have affected the answers participants gave. To mitigate these factors, the author engaged in constant, critical acknowledgement of the inevitable political positions brought to the research process (Griffiths, 1998; Itani, 2019); conducted a pilot study to gain as much understanding of the participants and context as possible (Gateley, 2014); and sought to reciprocate their participation and build trusting relationships by volunteering as a language teacher and assistant throughout the fieldwork.

Findings and discussion

Educational constraints for young refugee women

There is an agreement in research from around the world that parents – and especially their socioeconomic background, level of support, beliefs about education and priorities – can play a key role in refugee girls' attendance and learning (e.g. Boit et al., 2020; Ndijuye & Rawat, 2019; Watkins et al., 2012; Sieverding et al., 2018). This study also found that many young women did not attend educational activities because their parents – and fathers in particular – would not allow it, due to the family's religious and/or cultural beliefs about girls' education, gender roles and what constitutes youth and adulthood. Girls and young women could, for example, be responsible for tasks such as cooking, shopping, cleaning and childcare, which increased with age. This meant that even if they had completed lower levels of education, they were less likely to make the transition to senior high school at the age of 15. Teachers reported that fathers would tell them: 'she's a girl. I don't want her to go to the secondary reception classes ... I want her to have this good marriage and succeed in her private life'. With both non-formal education (NFE) and senior high school being optional in Greece, there are no legal frameworks compelling parents to enrol their children. Social workers interviewed also reported cases of girls themselves prioritising other goals or activities over attending school.

⁴ In this article, 'micro-level' refers to close, everyday relationships with family, teachers, peers and other educational actors in young people's immediate environment (following Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Beyond questions of priorities, it was reported that some families also refused to allow their daughters to attend due to issues of protection and trust. Attending school or NFE could mean travelling on several public buses alone, for example, or entering male-dominated spaces in the city – such as one programme in Thessaloniki which took place in a ‘traditionally’ male-dominated community kitchen. This, the teachers suggested, made young women fearful of participating. In addition, there was mistrust of unknown organisations and educators. In a country which treats arrivals in increasingly inhumane ways (Amnesty International, 2018) – with particularly acute threats for young women (Freedman, 2016; Kofman, 2018; UNHCR et al., 2016) – it is understandable that the refugee community would be reluctant to send their daughters alone to state-run activities (or indeed, any activities run by Greek or other international staff). This issue of mistrust has also been reported by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2020) as a factor limiting all young refugees’ access to education in Greece.

Various participants reported the related issue that formal education – and most NFE – was mixed-gender. One public school teacher, Maria, noted how on several occasions, ‘when the father realised that there were boys at school, he didn’t want her to continue’. Nadia, a cultural mediator, explained that families may have ‘no gender problem in learning’ but simply prefer separate classes for boys and girls. In addition, they may find activities such as drama and certain sports inappropriate. Alex, a coordinator of NFE programmes for youth, recalled an incident in which a young woman – who ‘wasn’t a minor’, he noted – had been coming to their theatre club without telling her father. After finding out that she had played the part of another participant’s wife, he had immediately stopped her continuing. This aligns with other recent research from Greece which documents parents’ concerns about sending their daughters to mixed settings (Sarikoudi & Apostolidou, 2020). Other participants in this study reported mixed classes as the reason why girls themselves were refusing to come to school.

As well as protecting them from harm, this resistance could also be an attempt to protect young women from stigma. Particularly when they were living in camps, in close proximity to many people of the same background, departing from community expectations could result in young women being ostracised. As Katerina, a teacher, explained: ‘if the community sees that you send your child to the school, then they’re gonna think that this kid is not appropriate for their boys, or ... for her to make a family’. However, very few appropriate, single-gender opportunities existed. Women-only spaces were limited and often reliant upon financial donations and volunteer support; meaning that programmes may not have been consistent or long-term. In Thessaloniki, the one dedicated women’s centre had to cap its number of registrations due to its popularity.

As well as being daughters, many young women in the 15-25 age group were wives and/or mothers with caring responsibilities. Having children was reported as a significant factor determining young women’s attendance. With responsibilities in the home and husbands typically out working or looking for work, they had little free time and no support network to help care for their child(ren); and therefore, even if they had completed primary education elsewhere, they could not continue participating. Older mothers could also delegate childcare responsibilities to their daughters, meaning that their daughters could not attend either. This is not to say that these young women were forced to stay at home, however; as Melina, a teacher, noted, many girls she had met ‘wanted to be inside the house ... they thought that they have a role to the family’. Others could be the head of their household, due to male partners and fathers travelling separately to Northern or Western Europe. Others felt the weight of responsibility after losing family members, and prioritised caring for the remaining family over all else. Melissa, the coordinator of the women’s centre, recalled one such incident when a young woman gave up a scholarship: ‘she was a very, very talented student, but after a loss of an additional family member and feeling the weight of responsibility in the home, she dropped out’.

For the many young mothers who *did* register for NFE and regularly participated in educational activities, their roles and responsibilities could still affect their ability to continue attending, to attend consistently or to otherwise benefit fully from the experience. Those with babies could feel uncomfortable breastfeeding in a public place; and when childcare facilities were not available, having their own or others' small children in classrooms could be disruptive. Community centres were not often able to offer childcare and tailored, alternative education for women consistently throughout the week; especially if this did not fit their donor-dictated remit. Mothers could also find it difficult keeping to centres' schedules – especially when having to take children to nurseries, schools or medical appointments – and struggled to spare the time for homework or further study alongside domestic tasks and childcare. This 'second shift' – also known as women's 'double burden' – has been reported as a challenge for refugee women's inclusion in education and the workforce around the world; especially when they are single mothers or the head of a household (European Parliament, 2016; Holloway et al., 2019).

Beyond childcare challenges, some participants reported instances of domestic abuse and husbands forbidding young women to attend work or education. Girls and young women who were engaged in forced or 'strategic' marriages at a young age – for what they perceived as security – were at an especially significant risk. Melissa, for example, reported that she had seen a number of such cases at her centre. While recent research has suggested that refugee women's decisions to marry are agentic and empowering acts (Taha, 2020), there is also a body of research which documents how early marriage, as a coping mechanism, can result in abuse and the limiting of freedoms such as attending school (e.g. DeJong et al., 2017; Hattar-Pollara, 2019; UNHCR, 2016).

When young women participated, the fact that they were entering a new social environment could also create challenges. As well as being initially uncomfortable with mixed-gender classrooms, for example, they could also face gendered issues in their interactions with – or isolation from – Greek peers. This was especially true in Greek public high schools. While it is often reported that refugee women and girls are made invisible or silent (e.g. El Jack, 2010), the opposite issue was found during fieldwork: that of being 'hypervisible'. For hijabi girls, their 'hypervisibility' as a female, Muslim, racialised 'other' in predominantly white, Orthodox Christian schools could draw unwanted attention and racist remarks. Hala, a 15-year-old from Syria, had faced such issues. She said that at school, she was asked 'why you are here if you like to wear hijab? ... Just take it off, you don't have to have it'. She said that in the beginning, 'they was looking ... They think that we don't go to school'. Other research has also described how peers at school can limit refugees' agency and positioning by categorising them according to their race, nationality and gender (Hummelstedt et al., 2021). For Hala, this had reduced her sense of belonging and desire to participate, and put her at risk of dropping out.

On the other hand, challenges could also arise when young women *did* form new relationships with peers and teachers from Greece and elsewhere. For example, due to the instability of refugees' accommodation – and the short-term nature of funding and volunteer arrangements in NFE in particular – either the teacher or learner could leave abruptly. This meant that trusting relationships built up over weeks, months or years, which encouraged girls to continue attending, could be cut off. The other issue was that when these peers and teachers came from different linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds, they could influence young women's appearance, behaviour and attitudes; which, while not necessarily an issue in itself, could lead to 'symbolic distance' between themselves and their family. Irina, an NFE teacher, explained that many teenage girls 'integrate fast', adopting 'this different style, this European style ... and the parents are a little bit stressful about that!' Establishing relationships in educational settings – from both within and outside their national or cultural community – was found to be crucial for girls' motivation to continue attending. However, if they led to tensions within the family, they could potentially

destabilise their home life and threaten the family's support for their participation in education.

Navigating constraints: (collective) action, allies and alternative spaces

Despite these constraints, many young refugee women participated in post-compulsory education; whether for work opportunities or the chance for further study, independence, friendships or having 'something different' to do during a period of enforced waiting. To achieve their educational goals, they often took matters into their own hands to eliminate or navigate constraints. To address social issues in public high schools, for example, they took steps to 'fit in' by proactively building their Greek proficiency and educating their new peers. Vera, a Refugee Education Coordinator⁵ (REC), mentioned one girl who had refused to speak anything other than Greek with her fellow high school students, and consequently had progressed easily through the system. Similarly, Hala – who, as mentioned above, had had to deal with racist remarks at school – recalled how she had requested assistance from English speakers to correct peers' and teachers' misconceptions about what it means to be Syrian, Muslim and/or a refugee. As such, she had directly tackled their exclusionary 'othering' practices. Others addressed the inappropriacy of mixed-gender offers by actively seeking out alternative spaces⁶ in which they felt comfortable and welcome. This often meant somewhere they could bring their children (either into the classroom, or to simultaneous children's activities) and breastfeed. This, of course, would not be possible in a public school.

If the learning opportunity did not fit their needs, some young women sought out other ways of gaining certificates, language skills and work experience; such as through volunteering as teaching assistants or interpreters. Others, either alone or collectively, created and shaped their own learning offers; for example, by requesting female-only spaces or adapting opportunities to allow them to share childcare. Alexandra, an NFE teacher, recalled one such example in a camp setting:

What happened after one or two months ... is that the youth zone, let's say, was like a women's zone, and the adults' zone was like a men's zone ... They made it in a way that it was gender... 'slots', and not age slots ... because also a lot of these couples, they have younger children, so one of them should stay at home.

Young women also attended mixed-gender settings as a group – bringing siblings, friends or parents for 'strength in numbers', to 'legitimise' the space or simply to enable others to enjoy its benefits. Beyond negotiating access, young women also requested particular content – or more lessons in general – and taught one another skills such as languages, cooking, sewing and crafts. This allowed them to fulfil their needs and make the best use of their time, rather than joining Second Chance schools or high schools and struggling to catch up – due to starting late, or because of the Greek language barrier.

Several key, micro-level actors and factors supported young women in this navigation of their constraints. In terms of actors, girls benefited from having (primarily female) advocates and allies around them who enabled and promoted their participation in education. Some parents, for example, wanted their children to enjoy opportunities they had never had, and as such encouraged all of their children to attend; with some fathers claiming that 'all children must finish school, and this is a law in our family!' Such parents often had an educational background themselves, as has been found elsewhere (e.g. Beydoun et al.,

⁵ 'Refugee Education Coordinators' are teachers from the public system who have been seconded to liaise between schools, refugee families, NGOs and other stakeholders to support and encourage public school enrolment (OECD, 2018).

⁶ 'Alternative learning spaces' refers to community centres and other non-state-run sites in which non-formal educational offers are provided by intergovernmental organisations (such as UNICEF), (international) non-governmental organisations (such as IsraAID) and local volunteer networks.

2021). Some supported their daughters' education more than their sons', due to believing that boys are more 'useful' for earning an income. In some families, as one teacher put it, there could be a 'really strong mother figure' who advocated for her daughter(s) to attend. If families supported girls' education but were fearful of risks, these mothers or other family members – including their much younger brothers – could accompany them. Young women also often chose to attend in pairs or groups, in acts of what one teacher called 'female solidarity'. While these collective tactics may not be viable in formal settings, it enables greater participation in NFE, while protecting young women from stigmatisation and harm. A side effect of this tactic is that different generations of women encouraged one another to engage with education. Melissa, for example, spoke of how young women would bring their mothers to her centre (and vice versa) or other family members would come along out of curiosity; thus multiplying women's engagement.

Outside of families, every educational actor interviewed communicated their strong support for girls' education. As such, young women were surrounded by educational advocates – such as teachers, RECs and non-governmental organisation (NGO) staff – who often mediated the relationship between the family and the educational provider. This was done through community meetings and awareness raising among parents, or through what one teacher called 'fighting by words': to 'explain, and explain, and again explain ... to find ... some way to *press* them'. These advocates also encouraged young women themselves to value education and raise their aspirations. One teacher, Charissa, recalled one such incident while working on the verb 'I can': 'one girl says, "we can only cook" ... and she was so upset about it ... And I was like, "no, this is what you know, this is not what you *can* do ... Right now, you think you can only cook, but this is what you know"'. This exchange demonstrates the direct impact teachers can have on refugee learners' aspirations. Charissa was explicitly trying to inspire the young women to pursue academic or employment routes they may not have previously considered, or which they may not have considered suitable.

Most participants emphasised such supportive relationships with teachers as a key factor determining whether young women chose to continue attending. In both formal and non-formal settings, teachers were said to often go 'above and beyond', providing advice and psychological support. It was also reported that girls tended to open up more with their female teachers than their parents, due to feeling 'less distance' between them. As one teacher put it, 'you are not just a teacher to them ... you're needed so much more'. Marmaridou (2019, p. 50) also found that teachers in Greece 'crossed the limits they would otherwise set' by discussing 'personal matters' with refugee girls and generally being 'friendlier'. Several participants described them as becoming role models, as they represented new forms of female authority and possibility; what one participant called 'a vision of what their life could be'.

Alternative learning spaces were also vital for young refugee women, as they provided both an accessible and 'appropriate' place to learn and the chance to rebuild a support network. They were more accessible for young mothers, in particular, as childcare or simultaneous children's activities were often provided; and in addition, the timetable could be more flexible and short-term than in formal education. Women-only spaces were also considered more 'appropriate', as they were single-gender, and thus avoided the concerns associated with mixed-gender settings. Melissa described her centre as a 'legitimate' place to spend time; as both a female-only space, and somewhere where women could learn valuable language skills for employment. As such, according to Melissa, participating 'might be considered something productive that could bring something back to the family'. This was especially true for young women caught in abusive situations, or in a family which had other priorities. When girls and their mothers or other family members attended together, this gave it even more weight, as they legitimised the space for one another.

The other advantages of attending lessons in alternative spaces such as women's centres were that learners could establish relationships with others from different backgrounds, with shared experiences, and benefit from the further social and pastoral

support available. Beyond community building, members could access other services (such as legal advice and accommodation assistance) from both staff and other members, as well as help with communicating with healthcare services and their children's schools. Therefore, attending women-only activities and spaces was, according to Melissa, much more than 'the final result of taking a diploma'. They provided a familiar, safe place of ownership and belonging in which young women could immediately continue learning, while also addressing wider social constraints. Other studies in Greece have also noted the many benefits of community-led, women-friendly initiatives for not only enabling learning, but also for accessing information, feeling safe and contesting power by reclaiming and shaping space (Amnesty International, 2018; Arahova, 2017; Rezaian et al., 2019).

Conclusion: promoting young refugee women's educational participation

This paper has described the (predominantly micro-level, social) constraints which limited young refugee women's participation in post-compulsory education in Greece and the actions, actors and other factors involved in their navigation of these constraints. The constraints mostly related to tensions and responsibilities in their relationships with family, peers and teachers; all of which were exacerbated by, or resulted from, the conditions of 'unsettlement'. For the most part, these findings align with research from other contexts. What this paper adds is how – due to a desire for independence, an income or a more fruitful way to spend time during a period of enforced waiting – young women found ways to navigate these constraints. For example, they made efforts to fit in with and educate their peers; they requested and shaped learning offers to fit their needs; they engaged in 'appropriate', alternative learning opportunities which mitigated their family's protection concerns and/or better suited their situation; and they drew upon the support of advocates and allies to build strong, encouraging relationships and continue learning.

The findings reiterate the need to listen to and work with (young) refugee women when designing and implementing educational provision or other support (Ibesh et al., 2021). Their needs, as seen in Greece, often included having childcare provided (either in the centre itself, or elsewhere in the city), private spaces for breastfeeding or simultaneous provision for young children. Beyond this, having safe spaces – where they feel welcome, part of the community and comfortable to express themselves – is crucial. As women request such places, and often become engaged in shaping them themselves, it is a natural point of departure for encouraging more women to learn. Starting with low-stakes offers based around their hobbies increases the likelihood of them continuing to attend; and, perhaps, later building enough confidence to continue down other (formal) educational paths. To envision and start making steps down these paths, having role models who can discuss and advise on possibilities is key. As seen above, when these role models are 'new' female figures of authority and possibility – from different cultural and religious backgrounds – this guidance should be provided with tact and sensitivity to avoid deepening rifts between young women and their families.

The findings also demonstrate not only refugee women's individual educational agency, but also align with other accounts of how they have collectively 'created and actioned opportunities for resistance or change' to overcome 'social, political, gendered and familial constraints' (McPherson, 2015, p. 128). The paper contributes examples of such collective acts, and the importance of relationships in shaping individual agency. For example, it demonstrates that when young refugee women are enabled and supported to participate in education, their friends and family members are also encouraged to attend; multiplying the benefits across their networks. A clear understanding of these relational influences would lead to appropriate, holistic, gender-sensitive support tailored for young women's situations and needs. This is crucial for supporting their existing strategies and enabling them to experience the benefits of education after the age of 15.

Overall, support should aim to centre these strengths, needs and interests, while recognising what young women can bring to educational settings and initiatives themselves.

At the same time, NGOs and governments must appreciate their parents' viewpoints and not try to override or disqualify their decisions. This means recognising, as one Greek participant put it:

the other realities, like how good parents they are, how strong the bonds of family are, more than the European ones ... It's very, very difficult to just get rid of the stereotypes, and the fear, all these things, and just explore what's different. Behind those borders. The linguistic ones, the geographical ones.

Thinking beyond borders, to better understand new populations, is the basis of successfully welcoming more young refugee women in educational spaces.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Appendix L: Published version of Paper 3

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1

Creative (en)counterspaces: Engineering valuable contact for young refugees via solidarity arts workshops in Thessaloniki, Greece

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Abstract

This article explores the role of non-formal arts education in Thessaloniki, Greece for fostering contact considered valuable by the young refugee community. Drawing on accounts of their daily life, gathered over eight months of ethnographic fieldwork for a project on their post-15 educational participation, the article details how around the city, young refugees (aged 15–25 years) experience conflicted encounters involving both hostility and solidarity. While this hostility impacts their aspirations, self-image, and feelings of inclusion, a large solidarity movement attempts to counteract these challenges by offering educational activities for 'inclusion' such as arts workshops in temporary spaces. These offers were popular among youth in the study, as they constituted a welcoming opportunity for building social connections, language skills, and self-confidence—outcomes that extended beyond the physical space of the workshops. As such, they functioned as valuable, creative '(en)counterspaces'. Based on observations from one case study site, this article unpacks the key processes that promoted these valued outcomes—including collaboration, mediation, and informal contact—as well as the role played by arts materials and arts-making practices in these processes. This article also offers key considerations for designing similar activities, such as being sensitive to inclusivity and power relations. It aims to build on the literature on both 'counterspaces' and 'encounters' by documenting the outcomes young refugees value from contact in these sites of solidarity, and how and why they proactively seek them out; as well as analysing the other actors and specific activities involved in them.

Keywords: forced migration, youth, arts, encounters, counterspace, Greece

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1. Introduction

One winter's day in Thessaloniki, a young woman from Afghanistan—who had sought refuge in Greece alone—was curled up on the floor of a drama studio pretending to be an egg. She was not the only egg: a young British volunteer was similarly hunched over next to her, trying to make herself as ovate as possible. They gradually opened up, attempting a painstakingly accurate portrayal of the life course of a chicken, and cracked out of their imaginary shells. They breathed fresh air for the first time, eased their necks from side to side, slowly tried out their wings—and then caught one another's eye, and keeled over once again in fits of laughter. They looked up at their small audience, consisting mostly of fellow refugee¹ youth, non-governmental organisation (NGO) staff, and volunteers, who then joined them in laughing. It would be their turn next.

The youth had been attending this workshop for some weeks, in a city-centre basement studio lent to the organising NGO by a local cultural association. Many also participated in the NGO's other frequent arts programmes, held in other borrowed spaces around Thessaloniki, to promote—as the organisers stated—young refugees' inclusion in social life in the city (meaning, predominantly, gaining friendships and employability skills). Based on my observations and interviews with the youth and educational stakeholders involved in such workshops, and using the concept of 'creative (en)counterspace', this article contributes insights on the nature of young refugees' encounters in these 'safe' spaces of solidarity; the outcomes they valued; the key principles and processes which promoted these desired outcomes; and key considerations for designing and running similar arts-based, non-formal education² (NFE) initiatives for young refugees. I argue that these spaces can foster cross-cultural friendships, language skills, and self-confidence, in processes catalysed by arts materials and practices—thus providing young refugees with the tools they need to navigate some of the social challenges they face in their everyday lives. However, certain issues can persist, such as refugee–solidarian power imbalances and the homogenising of the refugee identity and experience. Furthermore, while such initiatives may create meaningful 'micro-publics' (Amin 2002) which hold value for refugee youth, they remain for the most part at the margins of society—with their bottom-up efforts inevitably limited by entrenched structural and social exclusion. As such, this article offers a much-needed discussion of the value and limitations of arts NFE as not only a safe and supportive counterspace for refugee youth, but also as a bridge into their new society. Before embarking on this analysis, however, I shall situate this research conceptually, empirically, and geographically.

1.1 Conceptual framework: Arts workshops as a creative (en)counterspace

This article brings migration studies into dialogue with youth, leisure, and critical race studies by drawing on the concepts of 'encounters' and 'counterspace'—and then weaving an arts thread through them.

First, the case study arts programme analysed below is framed here as a form of 'counterspace'. Counterspaces—a term stemming from critical race theory and applied in youth and leisure studies—are defined as safe and supportive community settings for

minoritised youth of similar backgrounds in which they can affirm their identities and challenge deficit-focused narratives (Case and Hunter 2012; Margherio et al. 2020). They may be physical school spaces where youth meet and socialise, study groups, student organisations, or study programmes for under-represented scholars (Muñoz and Maldonado 2012; Margherio et al. 2020; Sanchez Medina 2022). They are often created by youth themselves as same-race peer networks to mitigate the psychological, emotional, and physical stress caused by racism, and in which they support one another's success; in a positive resistance strategy which strengthens their aspirational, social, and navigational capital (Carter 2007; Margherio et al. 2020; Sanchez Medina 2022). While other concepts such as 'safe spaces' and 'sites of resistance' are similar, the Counterspace Framework encapsulates the specific functions of such settings for self-enhancement and self-protection, and thus for adaptive responding to marginalisation and the promotion of well-being (Case and Hunter 2012).

Application of the Counterspace Framework is very limited in refugee and migration studies, despite the fact that forms of oppression are relational and interlocked—such as how a migrant's undocumented status can compound the exclusion they face due to racialisation (Yosso et al. 2009). The research that exists, however, has found that in education, dedicated counterspaces can facilitate new skills and other learning outcomes, which may not be possible to achieve elsewhere—due to learners' immigration status—while also creating solidarity networks (Villegas and Aberman 2020). They can also function as spaces of 'epistemic possibility', in which migrants' non-mainstream identities and forms of belonging can become viable and exclusionary discourses can be reworked (Shirazi 2019: 480). Outside of learning settings, activities run by civil society can also function as counterspace for refugees, Bendixsen and Wyller (2019: 4) claim, by providing 'spaces of hospitality' which oppose restrictions, crisis discourse and populism. An example from the world of arts is the cultural festival: a counterspace that can validate refugees' experiences of rejection and marginalisation, celebrate their achievements, foster feelings of acceptance, permit expression in culturally meaningful ways, promote self-concept, and allow the building of social capital (via mentoring and volunteering schemes) (Hassanli, Walter and Friedmann 2020). They also offer marginalised groups the chance to move both psychologically and physically from the periphery to the centre: permitting them to safely engage in urban areas they might otherwise avoid, due to the likelihood of stigmatisation. As such, they fulfil a function as not only a counterspace or 'refuge', but also a safe site of possibility for interactions with 'dominant' groups (Hassanli, Walter and Friedmann 2020).

This article picks up on and develops this last point: on the potential of solidarity arts initiatives to function as a counterspace for young refugees, while also offering the chance for positive encounters with the wider community. As such, here I term them a 'creative (en)counterspace': i.e. a safe space at the margins which can provide support and identity affirmation for refugees, while also fostering interactions with the 'majority' public and potentially offering a bridge into 'mainstream' urban social life. As in Hassanli, Walter and Friedmann (2020), this counters the notion that counterspaces are inherently separatist settings, and suggests that they can also act as sites for cross-cultural contact leading to outcomes valued by refugees.

1.2 Engineering valuable contact via the arts

This takes us to the specific role of arts (programming) in fostering positive interactions between groups—and especially between migrant and 'local' youth.

This has been attempted via activities such as dance workshops, mask-making, and festivals, which have resulted in not only language skills and increased self-esteem, self-worth, and creativity among migrant participants, but also trans-ethnic and interfaith solidarities, trust, intercultural exchange, feelings of 'togetherness', and belonging and participation in society more broadly (Hickey-Moody 2017; Pace, 2017; Korjonen-Kuusipuro and Kuusisto 2019; Wood and Homolja 2021). This is because, it is argued, artistic creation not only provides hospitable spaces for intercultural learning and amplifying marginalised communities' voices and identities—opening up possibilities for solidarity (Harvey 2018; Harvey, Tordzro and Bradley 2022)—but, fundamentally, it enables the *materialisation* of young people's identities in relation to their communities (Hickey-Moody and Harrison 2018). Beyond their benefits for the individual, these embodied and situated acts of making can then create new community sentiments towards young people and materially disrupt dominant discourses, via an 'affective pedagogy' that encourages mutual understanding and connects feelings to places and images (Hickey-Moody 2013, 2017).

With this said, cultural and creative practices have their limits in overcoming unequal power relations and ensuring long-term change amid anti-migrant discourse and policies (Jeffery et al. 2019). Moreover, it should be noted that encounters that are 'engineered' in this way may not lead to any behavioural or attitudinal transformation at all, or indeed the result may be negative (Wilson 2017)—as encounters can also generate anxiety, fear, and violence, and even exacerbate existing prejudices, boundaries, power differences, and conflicts (Valentine 2000; Amin 2002; Kraftl 2013; Listerborn 2015; Boersma 2020). Overall, the particular conditions and participants matter: contact and its potential for positive outcomes may be shaped by the historical, economic, and social processes at play in particular cities (Al Helali 2021); political and legal factors such as the results of participants' asylum applications (Whyte 2017); young people's motivation to attend and openness to meeting 'Others' (Mayblin, Valentine and Andersson 2016); and in general, the 'situated social dynamic' of the space (Amin 2002: 969).

With these issues taken into account, the question thus arises: which particular principles and processes, then, can promote successful interactions in creative '(en)counterspaces' and lead to the outcomes refugee youth value? To explore this question, this article analyses one case study arts programme—which had the explicit intention of bringing young people from different backgrounds together, while acting as a form of 'sanctuary' for refugees—and whether and how any positive effects were achieved from this engineered contact, according to participants themselves. In doing so, it also aims to contribute to scholarship which centres young refugees' agency, and the role of arts education, practices, and spaces in their navigation of precarity and belonging (e.g. Askins and Pain 2011; Pace 2017; Whyte 2017; Korjonen-Kuusipuro and Kuusisto 2019). This particular case comes from an urban context which is under-represented in the international literature on refugeehood, encounters and counterspace, and which is coming to terms with its new forms of diversity.

1.3 Thessaloniki: A landscape of crisis and solidarity

As a key entry point into the European Union, Greek borders have become a particularly contested site over the last decade. The heightened numbers of refugees and other migrants arriving, peaking in 2015, resulted in what came to be described as a 'crisis'—and more broadly, part of the 'European refugee crisis' (Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017). However, Greece is also still suffering from the impact of the financial crisis of 2008, which saw severe cuts to public sector funding and high levels of unemployment (Dalakoglou and Agelopoulos 2018). Therefore, before the COVID-19 pandemic brought a further crisis, the country's hospitality towards refugees was already becoming strained. Now, according to statistics from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), almost 170,000 refugees, asylum-seekers, and other 'persons of concern' are currently trapped in a country in which welfare provisions for displaced communities are slowly—and often quite discreetly—being dismantled (Mobile Info Team (MIT) 2021; UNHCR 2021; Smith 2022). Even after being granted asylum, recognised refugees risk losing financial and other support, and can still wait years before receiving travel documents (Andrea 2022). In addition, the political discourse has become increasingly anti-refugee, to the extent that the word 'refugees' is often replaced by 'migrants' or 'economic migrants' (e.g. Capital 2019), which erases the imperative of hospitality.

However, alongside this hostility, a substantial solidarity movement involving both Greek and international support has also mobilised in response to the 'crisis', which continues to fill state gaps by providing various forms of assistance to refugees today (Schmitz 2022). This is especially true in Thessaloniki—Greece's 'second city'—where since the beginning of the 'crisis', a number of (inter)national humanitarian organisations have gathered and established initiatives (Dicker 2017; International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2021). For the most part, this has been due to necessity: Thessaloniki constitutes the largest metropolitan area before the country's northern borders, which were infamously and decisively closed in late 2015 and 2016 (Deardorff Miller 2017). This resulted in many refugees congregating in the city, having been placed in camps and apartments in and around it. Today, as a consequence, Thessaloniki is a site of varied and increased forms of cross-cultural contact: both among refugees themselves, and between refugees and the wider community. As such, it provides a relevant and somewhat under-researched field site for analysing such contact.

2. Methodology

This article draws on fieldwork conducted between October 2019 and June 2020 with young refugees and asylum-seekers (aged 15–25 years) and educational stakeholders in Thessaloniki. This involved semi-structured interviews with both groups in individual and pair formats. In total, a 'core group' of 12 young refugees were interviewed, along with 38 stakeholders such as teachers, parents, social workers, and educational programme coordinators. Alongside this, I engaged in participant observation as a volunteer educator and assistant for four NGOs in the city, given my professional background in teaching. This approach to being actively involved in arts workshops and joining youth in

activities offered the chance to build relationships and overcome communication issues (Jiménez Sedano 2019)—which is especially important for a volunteer coming from a different linguistic and migratory background. While including the voices of only 12 of the participants could have left the study at risk of bias, due to the issue of them eagerly ‘self-selecting’ to take part, the value of the programme was also evident in the fact that not only were the other participants consistently attending (across different programmes), but they also brought friends and relatives along who often ended up committing to the programme themselves. Following the outbreak of COVID-19, all interviews and teaching activities moved online, to platforms such as Zoom, Viber, and Skype. Ethical approval was granted by the Social Sciences and Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford.

The young participants were invited to take part via purposive and snowball sampling. Criteria included being 15–25 years of age; having arrived during or since the ‘peak’ of current flows in 2015; having applied for or received refugee status; and being a participant in at least one educational activity per week. The ‘core group’ who participated in interviews identified as Kurdish, Iranian, Iraqi, Syrian, and Congolese (Kinshasa), with nine being young men and three young women. This reflects the fact that the observation sites were mostly attended by young men—which is why they are primarily quoted in this article. For stakeholders, criteria included having first-hand knowledge of young refugees’ education, from the classroom to the policy level. In this article, the focus is on one particular NGO—here named Hearts & Minds—and one key member of staff: the coordinator of their youth programmes, Alex. As someone who had been working with displaced youth in various settings in Greece for many years, Alex was able to provide valuable insight into not only their educational experiences in the case study workshops, but also how their lives outside the spaces impacted them. All names have been pseudonymised in this article.

Hearts & Minds’ work with youth is based on the principle that exclusion from education, employment and other activities in the local community leaves them at risk of isolation, with severely negative consequences for their mental health. Their conceptualisation of ‘inclusion’ is two-way (i.e. involving steps from both refugees and the ‘local’ community), and is tied up with empowerment: being based in youth’s own needs, as determined via needs assessments. These needs include being able to relax in safe spaces; get work experience and skills; process traumatic experiences via creative therapies; connect to their own and others’ cultures and identities; make communities; and share experiences. Hearts & Minds’ programmes thus aim to make links to the community and foster the development of skills and friendships, while offering a form of ‘sanctuary’ from their everyday, displacement-related difficulties. Arts and sports are considered a productive way of achieving this, as they promote collaboration around what are intended to be therapeutic activities. The observed programmes had 10–15 participants each week, and some youth participated more than once per week (e.g. in both painting and drama workshops).

Interviews were conducted in English, in line with participants’ preferences—having been given the option to invite an interpreter of their choosing. Information sheets and consent forms for youth were still, however, provided in a pictorial format. Interview transcripts were entered into NVivo and analysed according to the principles of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006): being coded using an open coding technique

(based on participants' own words), followed by axial coding to identify the relationships between the open codes and to create categories which became themes. This was completed in an ongoing, iterative process until theoretical saturation was reached. This article focuses on young participants' responses regarding their everyday lives around the city, and their experiences in Hearts & Minds' arts workshops in particular.

3. Findings

3.1 Young refugees' everyday urban encounters in Thessaloniki

Young refugees in the study spoke of experiencing racism and discrimination in their everyday encounters with the public in Thessaloniki, while also finding support and assistance. Sayed, from Iran and in his early 20s, said that 'still now there is discrimination here. According the nationality, your colour, your religion.' Youth suggested that this is often connected to their identity as refugees, or assumptions are made that they are refugees, based on the languages they (do not) speak and the ways in which they are racialised. For example, Serkar, a young Kurdish man in his early 20s, said that

some people help me ... Like, I tell them something about my paper, I need something, it's help me. Yeah. Good people ... Other ones don't like refugee ... Because they tell me, 'you're coming to my country, you are bad, you are so bad.'

Augustin, a 16-year-old from the DRC, also said that he met 'haters' like this on the street: 'When, for example, I got out to go to school, maybe I found some guys said to me ... "Oh, you go to school? You think one day you will be somebody important in your life?" Yeah.' Hasan, 25, from Kurdistan, put these issues down to a lack of education:

They have a kind of racism here, about the different skin and, like, where did you come from. But really it's not all of them ... they have really, like, some very good people. They know equality, humanity. But I think these people they have educated—very good educated ... He know ... even you are black skin, you are white skin, or you are poor or wealthy, like European or Asian, you are a human.

However, young refugees could also experience hostility *within* the very heterogeneous refugee and migrant community. Other participants mentioned avoiding spaces such as certain language centres which they felt were 'for Syrians,' for example, and the tensions which arose in camps due to living in close proximity and challenging conditions. As well as this, it was reported by several interviewees that migrant populations who had arrived previously (such as Albanians, notably in the 1990s) and other minoritised communities (such as Roma) held grievances against newly arriving refugees, as they felt that they were being supported more generously by Greek and European authorities.

Beyond this gulf of misunderstanding, even when the youth did encounter Greeks and other city residents, the language barrier still prevented substantial interactions and the development of the friendships most of the participants desired. This could be due to either or both of the parties lacking skills or confidence in English, Greek, or any of the various other languages refugees knew. For example, Serkar still felt that his English level was holding him back, despite being able to hold a conversation. When asked if he had friends

from Greece or elsewhere, he replied, 'no, I have just from my country before. In Greece I have a little bit friend. I don't so much ... because my English.' Aside from preventing the development of relationships, this linguistic barrier also stopped refugees from being able to tell their stories and correct the misinformation which abounded.

All of these factors and experiences began to shape the young refugees' self-image and self-efficacy, causing them to believe the negative stereotypes about themselves and limit their aspirations. As Augustin put it, 'when you listen ... it really affects your life.' They contributed to their feelings of uncertainty, 'permanent temporariness' and 'inbetweenness'—being caught between acceptance and exclusion, and between legality and illegality, in what *Yiftachel* (2009) calls the 'gray space'. While this condition left many with feelings of disappointment, hopelessness, and apathy, it also became clear that this 'gray space' could be one of resistance—giving rise to new relationships and solidarity initiatives organised by both refugees and their allies.

3.2 Encountering solidarity in Hearts & Minds' arts workshops

Despite these considerable social challenges and their impacts, refugee youth were quick to mention the 'good ones' who helped them: the people who were often considered more educated and more open to understanding refugees' realities. Many of these people can be described as 'solidarians' (*αλληλέγγυοι*). While in Greece, this term is used more for the grassroots activists and pro-refugee protestors who mobilised during the 'peak' of the crisis (Rozakou 2016), here—following Goździak and Main (2020)—I also subsume within it the staff and volunteers from NGOs who became involved in the response. It is all of these actors, and their solidarity initiatives, which have given rise to non-formal educational offers for refugees in Thessaloniki: ranging from homework clubs and language courses to arts and parenting workshops (Greece Education Sector Working Group (GESWG) 2018; Hunt 2021a). Youth in the study often sought out such initiatives, knowing that they were intended as welcoming, safe, and inclusive environments in which they could meet others of a similar age and acquire skills (see also Hunt 2021a,b). Building language competence was a key motivating factor for those who attended—and indeed it was the top priority for most, as they believed it would help them to gain employment. After this, youth noted that it was useful for meeting and making Greek friends.

One offer which was popular, and is thus analysed here as a case study, was the series of arts programmes run by the international NGO Hearts & Minds. Hearts & Minds' programmes were mostly reliant on financial donations and volunteer support, and were run in 'borrowed spaces' around the city—such as dance studios, repurposed factories, and NGO offices—which were lent to them by cultural or humanitarian organisations. In terms of their purpose, like other NGOs around the city, they aimed to facilitate positive contact and meaningful communication between young refugees, their Greek peers, and other young migrants. However, each NGO also had its own 'flavour'—or, indeed, its own funder-dictated remit. As Alex, for example, who coordinated Hearts & Minds' youth programmes, explained:

We provide psychosocial support and skill development through the use of arts and sports, so until now we have run several projects around theatre, film

making, painting, photography, music, football, basketball ... It focus more on refugee populations, refugee and migrant population. At the same time, we try to engage locals as well ... to create learning environments for both local and refugee youth.

For Alex, building language skills was another important part of their programmes, as he felt it constituted the 'first step towards achieving your goals': 'It gives you access to a lot of things ... It goes with understanding of how things are operating, and how they are, in order for you to be a part of it.' These principles, and the ways in which they were put into practice, led to overwhelmingly positive outcomes for youth in the study—as described below.

3.3 Creative encounters: New connections, language skills, and confidence

As a result of their participation in Hearts & Minds' workshops, young people reported that they met their goals of building confidence and language skills; and, importantly, making friends with other young refugees, migrants, and Greeks and establishing relationships with facilitators and coordinators. In the workshops, they predominantly met other young people—some of whom were Greek, but most of whom were also from refugee backgrounds. In fact, many participants came together with one or more of their siblings or friends, meaning that the same faces could often be seen across workshops. As well as other youth, they also met staff and volunteers—who, during fieldwork, were mostly Greek, with the exception of those from across Europe and North America. They included students, artists, psychologists, cultural mediators, youth workers, dancers, and others, mostly volunteering their time to teach or assist with courses which typically lasted for a few months. Most of these 'solidarians' were below the age of 30 years, and often students or practitioners looking to gain experience in teaching and youth work. As such, young refugees encountered a relatively diverse mix of people, who may also have had their own experiences of racism, discrimination, displacement, or other commonalities.

Hearts & Minds' workshops were deemed particularly valuable, however, for offering the chance to develop relationships with Greeks. As Hamid, a young Kurdish man in his early 20s, explained:

Most important thing, they make us like, share with Greek people. That's good. Because the other organisations, just we were, for example, 20 refugees, one Greek. I didn't like. But in Hearts & Minds, we were [with] Greek people ... That's important, for Hearts & Minds especially—like people come near, close each other ... Because of Hearts & Minds, I have a lot of friend right now.

For Sayed, too, 'maybe the most important things' he had gained from his involvement in Hearts & Minds had been

coming to the society, coming to the experiences, coming to the arts ... because this is one of the way that you integrate in society. If you don't have too many friends, you will make friends, will take many experiences. I improved in this way, like my social skills ... I met so many good friends there, that are really good person, and they really help me. I took good advice from them.

Hasan had had a similar experience, saying that through Hearts & Minds, he had the opportunity to not only mix with Greeks but also to 'meet with the volunteer from different countries'. As such, he had made

many friends, from many different nationalities. And sometime you are get outside, we talk about our culture, and her culture, or his culture. And we practise our language and we talking each other. Yeah. From Hearts & Minds we are very different—okay, we are immigration, and Greek people mixed.

Just as Hasan said that their conversations continued when they 'get outside', indeed, it seemed that the relationships they developed during the courses (with Greeks and others) extended beyond the physical spaces of the studios or NGO offices. They would follow one another on social media and share resources for learning in their group chat—such as YouTube videos and CV templates—and particularly when in-person workshops were suspended due to COVID-19. Therefore, the relationships which grew from these encounters could lead to other opportunities and forms of social support. As Hamid explained:

I have just one friend, her name is Eleni. Once, before one year, we joined a project *How to make a movie* ... So I met her there, she like me ... So we finished this project, and she's told me once, that she's doing another about education, about politic. Like, present speech to people. I was [there] once, just to listen and to get something.

As well as this, participants met outside of the workshops for social events such as walks on the seafront and coffee. The staff and volunteers, for their part, also invited them to their performances and exhibitions around the city, or out for group lunches, and arranged for transport to help them get there—thus accompanying them to further urban spaces.

Another important outcome of their encounters in Hearts & Minds' workshops was the ability to practise desired languages and grow in confidence with using them. This was the case for Hasan:

Hasan: We meet many different people ... The theatre [workshop] make me to brave and talk. Even you are right, even you are wrong! Ha. Just like, say your thinking, your opinion, okay. Even if accepted or not, and making me brave to speaking ... I'm very shy boy, I don't speak. If I saw someone I say, 'oh my god, if I say her or he, 'hi,' he will be respond or not?' ... But after that, I see it's not like that ... But before I very shy, I said no. If I say 'hi,' and he say me 'yeia sou [hello],' what can I ...?

Lucy: Agh! Ha ha. Run away!

Hasan: Ha ha. Yes!

This growing confidence was observed over the course of different programmes, and particularly among young women. After sitting out of some drama games at the beginning of a course, for example, after some time they would join in and use more English in front of the group—if still nervously giggling throughout. Alex, too, said that he had seen a particularly positive change in the confidence of the young women who attended:

The difference that I can see that's huge, like how they interact with people that they don't know ... I think all those projects ... participating in the creative things, just makes you more comfortable with your identity, who you are.

These arts-based educational encounters can therefore be described as valuable in young refugees' own terms, as they enabled them to meet their social goals of gaining cross-cultural connections, language skills, and confidence: the ingredients they felt they needed to overcome some of their everyday, local-level social challenges around the city. The following sections take a deeper look at how this was achieved. The first details the key promotional processes observed, before the next discusses some key issues to consider.

3.4 (Co-)creating valuable outcomes: Key processes

The range of nationalities in the arts workshops among youth, staff, and volunteers made for multilingual settings. The young refugees themselves spoke many different languages—whether from their home countries or picked up en route to Greece—and mostly these linguistic differences were welcomed and celebrated, including by being incorporated into activities. One key supportive element in this regard was the presence of multinational mediators, who could support youth in expressing themselves across linguistic barriers. As Hamid explained, regarding a drama workshop: 'For me, I had no problems. I prepared myself, with help [from] the others ... They had a translator ... He know Arabic ... and he speaks English *very well*.' The help of mediators enabled youth to participate more fully and share their ideas—as in one drama session, when a young Greek man was excitedly telling his group his idea in Greek and a volunteer assistant was translating it into English, with another translating that into French for two of his peers. With such mediation, informal conversations were also supported.

As well as via translation, interactions were also mediated via arts materials and activities which did not require language (or indeed literacy) skills in Greek or English. This principle was often actively employed, such as when facilitators used visual prompts to help explain tasks and give information. However, it also arose more naturally, when objects organically helped to start conversations. In one example from a painting workshop, a new participant was initially very hesitant to use the English she knew with the group—but after some time moving around a table drawing a collaborative story, and helping others to label pictures in Greek and Arabic, she gradually built up the courage to engage in conversations. Other researchers have also noted the significance of the materiality of arts-based encounters, and specifically the role of objects in inviting movement around a space, enabling and prompting conversations and new relations (across language and cultural divides), and overall effecting playful and embodied interactions (Askins and Pain 2011; Heckmann Erekson 2018; Korjonen-Kuusipuro and Kuusisto 2019).

The activities mentioned above give an idea of the collaborative and interactive nature of the setting. Participants would frequently engage in pair and group work: including tasks such as performing songs, creating stop-motion animations, or making shapes using their bodies. Many activities, especially in the drama workshops, were based on trust and

being attentive and responsive to other participants—such as leading one another blindfolded around the studio, responding to subtle eye movements, or performing improvised scenes together. In addition, as also found by [Mayblin, Valentine and Andersson \(2016\)](#), ‘natural’, banal interactions were found to be equally important for developing relationships. During breaks and the wait for other participants to arrive, some refugee youth would take advantage of the chance to practise their Greek or other languages with the staff and volunteers. Others sat alone with their phones or crowded around someone else’s as they played games or shared videos, while their peers joked, smoked and chatted about everything from relationships to their countries’ geographies. In other words, they had a space to exercise a range of young adult interactions which helped them to develop friendships, outside of the structured activities which were designed to engineer them. This provides further evidence that unstructured leisure activities, based around hobbies and sports, can offer important opportunities for youth to develop their identities and initiative ([Abbott and Barber 2007](#)).

It also points to another important aspect of young refugees’ encounters in these arts education spaces: what [Case and Hunter \(2012\)](#) and [Michalovich \(2021\)](#) call ‘identity work’. Here, I use this term to specifically mean the opportunity to share skills, jokes, interests, and stories, on their own terms, while also working to break down stereotypes and determine their own visibility. Whereas in asylum interviews, the young refugees’ stories had to follow strict conventions in order to convey ‘deservingness’ and secure their legality, in these arts spaces, they could share their personal information in ways they preferred. They joked about the refugee experience during drama games, for example—such as in this example from my field notes, when a facilitator asked each group to form the shape of a boat:

The first group made a large, 2D ship, and the second a smaller one complete with deck, two sides and two people rowing. The first group teased the second for having a little boat. However, one of the young participants in the second group—who was standing and pretending to row furiously—said, ‘it’s a small boat, for refugees! Coming from Turkey?’ They all laughed.

This moment exemplified their ability to process and make light of their experiences during these arts sessions in a ‘safe’ space, alongside allies who would not misinterpret their jokes as them being undeserving of protection. As Alex put it, ‘making fun’ in this way ‘breaks the whole stereotype and the whole idea of, you know, “I’m a refugee and I can do only this” … For three hours it’s like a respite—I can have a break of my whole refugee thing.’ This means not only ‘breaking stereotypes’ for themselves, but also among the wider community—while also permitting them some ownership of city space and greater, more desirable visibility. This was the case with the outcome of one drama workshop, in which Hasan participated: ‘For three months we done the theatre project. And then … we doing very good, nice event, and the people came watching us in the city centre.’

Crucially, facilitators such as Alex worked to transform these temporary urban spaces into safe and supportive places of contact, allowing youth to step (or dance) out of their comfort zones. The youth, for their part, responded by showing him considerable respect. Hasan held him in particularly high regard, saying, ‘we don’t [have] a word for him. He’s very, very good.’ [Mayblin, Valentine and Andersson \(2016\)](#) also note the importance of

the facilitator in engineering meaningful contact, as they can mediate young people's conflicting views, give youth the confidence to share their opinions and emotions, and find ways forward. However, this facilitation—especially of arts projects that can cause difficult memories to surface—should be done with tact, care, and appropriate training (Wilson 2017; Korjonen-Kuusipuro and Kuusisto 2019).

3.5 Power, inclusivity, and motivation: Key considerations

This note about facilitation leads us to considerations of the refugee–solidarian relationship, and particularly the ways in which staff and volunteers mediated, or engaged in, interactions. Certainly, power relations between young refugees and Greek and other international staff and volunteers were ever unequal. Europeans and North Americans tended to be the donors, making financial contributions or bringing in-kind resources such as arts and crafts supplies. They were considered representatives of well-off populations who could afford to take months—or even years—off work to volunteer, while also having the legal rights to travel and stay. For both 'local' and international staff and volunteers, their relationship with young refugees was also didactic and one-way, putting them in the authoritative position of being holders and imparters of 'valuable' knowledge. In their practice, some would then engage in 'othering' by focusing too heavily on the refugee experience, instead of allowing youth to fully explore and share other facets of their identities. These issues exemplify what Askins and Pain (2011) refer to as the tense meeting of power, privilege, and otherness in the 'contact zone', and the fact that initiatives that rely on people's desire to 'help' can create an uneasy relationship of host and guest (Rast and Ghorashi, 2018)—something which is further complicated when contact zones are educational.

Another more specifically pedagogical point to consider relates to the nature of the tasks involved and the extent to which all members of the group felt able and willing to participate in them—in other words, their inclusivity. One issue observed in this particular site was cultural barriers. Despite using non-verbal and object-mediated approaches, some activities were easier to understand if the participants had played similar games at school, for example. Several assumed a specific base of knowledge—such as what university involves—which some youth, due to never having been in formal education, did not have. This caused them to lose motivation and confidence. Also of note were the divisions in participation according to gender. Some of the young women in the group would complain of aches or not attend at all if they knew that there would be intense physical exercise involved; while most of the young men, for their part, thrived on these activities. This compounded other gendered obstacles which affected their participation—such as being asked by their parents to take care of their much younger siblings, and having to bring them along. This limited their engagement in activities and ability to socialise freely with other attendees. All of the above illustrates the importance of taking intra-youth, intersectional issues into account when designing and running such programmes.

The final consideration, beyond young people's ability to participate in workshops, is their interest in the topic. If they were interested in painting and illustration, for example, then even if there was some confusion around instructions, the youth would still be motivated to attend and fully take part. This therefore increased the amount and quality of

interactions they engaged in, as they got to know the group, facilitators and volunteers over repeated sessions. This need for sustained interactions in arts education to routinise contact and foster transformative change has also been cited by other researchers (Askins and Pain 2011). In this way, young refugees can be guaranteed continued support—so long as the funding and their interest remain constant.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Research has shown that arts can be used as a means of protest and resistance, challenging common stereotypes and misrepresentations of refugees (e.g. Bhimji 2016). However, there is limited scholarship on the specific role of arts (education) as a means of refugees' social inclusion, or indeed, as a space for potentially positive interactions with the 'majority' public.

Drawing on young refugees' experiences in Thessaloniki, this article has demonstrated how arts workshops run by solidarians—and, potentially, NFE more generally—can function as an important creative (en)counterspace. This means a 'safe' space in which youth can meet and learn about one another, rebuild their confidence and navigate the everyday difficulties of their lives in Greece. Arts education gave them the tools to disrupt discriminatory practices at the everyday, local level: specifically, in gaining the language and confidence to speak back to misinformation and harmful narratives about refugees, and the opportunity to build long-term, trusting relationships within and beyond the (young) refugee community. The observed workshops involved several key promotive processes, which were catalysed by arts objects and practices: namely, the celebration of multilingualism; linguistic and cultural mediation; collaboration and interaction; 'identity work'; and facilitation by a leader who created a space of safety and support. These collective, creative methods enabled trust-building and self-expression via various forms of verbal and non-verbal communication. As well as these social benefits, this 'in-between' place also functioned as an effective counterspace: offering youth somewhere of their own and allowing them to reclaim physical space in the city (Case and Hunter 2012). Within it, they could be the host; they could joke with their friends and escape their daily challenges for a while; they could practise their old and new identities; and they could be at once invited into 'Greek' society (as multi-layered as it is) while having their own 'mini-society' at the margins. As such, they became sites of potentiality and re-creation, which—through use of the arts—facilitated what Hickey-Moody and Harrison (2018) refer to as the 'materialisation' of young participants' identities and connections to place.

The question which remains, however, for NGOs such as Hearts & Minds—which have the self-proclaimed aim of fostering inclusion—is 'inclusion into what?' While the youth praised the fact that they could meet people from Greece and beyond, often the volunteers working in these 'solidarity' spaces were young and Northern or Western European. As such, besides the few Greeks who led or took part in the courses, refugee youth were mostly meeting other refugees and migrants who were potentially only staying for short and/or indeterminate periods. The most stable relationships were those with other young refugees—and as mentioned above, familiar faces could be seen across programmes, which created something of a consistent learning community. While such opportunities for

refugee–refugee encounters and co-learning are very important, the lack of ‘cross-cultural’ contact with others beyond the refugee community could suggest that the programmes were falling short of their potential for wider social inclusion. Such arts workshops, then, could do more to build relationships between refugees and Greeks who share the city in the longer term—to extend the benefits further out of the confines of their physical spaces and project timelines. In this way, alongside efforts to advocate for structural and political change in the treatment of refugees, such bottom-up initiatives could begin to escort the communities created within these temporary settings out of the margins of city life.

With this said, it should also be recognised that the encounters in this study *did* result in a valuable experience for this particular group. While they may still have been a small community or ‘micro-public’ (Amin 2002) in a counterspace of their own, which gathered and remained at the margins of society, this does not necessarily depreciate what the space and contact within it signified for this particular group. As Closs Stephens and Squire (2012) note, you do not always need to make wider claims in order to demonstrate the value or meaningfulness of encounters, as they can also have value in and of themselves. Overall, these arts workshops had considerable potential as a constructive and creative place to spend time, and as a way to bring various social actors together. They served four important functions: first, they enabled communication, especially via non-verbal means, which provided the basis for meaningful encounters; secondly, they fostered a sense of belonging to a local community (even if only the local refugee and ‘solidarian’ community); thirdly, they permitted youth to reclaim aspects of urban space while hostile social actors tried to exclude them from others, such as public schools; and fourthly, they permitted youth to (re)present themselves and their backgrounds and stories as they wished—to govern their own visibility, even if only within this new mini-society. As such, arts workshops were found to be a productive space which enabled valuable encounters, connections and potentially—as a consequence—the disruption of everyday forms of exclusion.

In focusing on how refugee youth themselves felt about these encounters, this article has attempted to re-centre their agency and power in discussions of (engineered) encounters. It highlighted how youth are not only ‘thrown’ together in urban spaces, and have activities happen *to* them; rather, they enthusiastically seek out and *choose* to engage in such opportunities, and play an active role in how processes unravel (see also Christiansen, Galal and Hvenegard-Lassen 2017). Furthermore, the article contributes to discussions on the specific role of creativity in the lives of young migrants. For refugee youth, collaboratively producing and sharing media in their own voices enables ownership of representations, the opportunity to expand and strengthen social networks, identity work, communication and learning through multimodal literacies, and visibility and engagement with audiences (Michalovich 2021); while also allowing them to engage in activism and, overall, exercise agency (Godin and Doná 2016) and navigate everyday borders (Pace 2017). This research offers an example of how this can be done, via specific promotive processes. To explore this potential further, future research could pay greater attention to arts-based initiatives led by refugees themselves—as this remains a considerable gap in the literature—as well as focusing in on the more specific dynamics of refugee–refugee and refugee–solidarian encounters in arts and educational settings. There could also be more attempts to blend the subject and tools of such research—i.e. using social arts as method—by using techniques such as participatory theatre

(e.g. Opfermann 2020) to foster relations among all involved in the research and commit to ‘conviviality as both a research practice and a research outcome’ (Kaptani et al. 2021: 68).

In terms of practice and policy, the findings in this article emphasise the need to understand young refugees’ own goals—i.e. how and why they participate in educational offers or other forms of contact—and what to leverage to encourage deeper engagement. To ensure sustainable future opportunities to build on what has already been achieved, it is clear that longer term commitment from participants, facilitators, organisations, and funders needs to be actively encouraged. In addition, it appears that youth benefit from spaces and opportunities for informal contact (such as social events) around these structured programmes, as well as support for the interests which brought them to the workshops in the first place. On a wider scale, however, advocacy work needs to counteract new Greek legislation as of 2021 which has been said to ‘hinder civil society organisations’ ability to provide services and monitor the treatment of refugees and displaced people’ (Choose Love 2021: 3)—which adds more bureaucratic and practical hurdles to the work of ‘solidarians’.

Notes

1. In this article, for brevity, the term ‘refugee’ refers to both those who have been granted protection under the 1951 Convention and those who have applied for protection (i.e. asylum ‘seekers’ or ‘applicants’).
2. *Formal* education is that taking place in educational systems, which follows a syllabus and involves assessments; whereas *non-formal* education is that organised outside of the formal system in community settings such as NGOs, which focuses more on particular skills and does not lead to accreditation (Council of Europe (CoE) 2019).

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